

one reason



THE MAN IN THE RED UNDERPANTS

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Chapter 1

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

I'm pretty sure you're not going to like this. Probably not one bit. It talks about all sorts of things that a lot of us spend a lot of time trying to avoid. Like death! Yes, that's right, death. Death, judgement, hellfire and paradise (or is it all pie in the sky?), the meaning of life and of course, the big one - is there really a God, or is it all a delusion? Just the sort of things you'd try your utmost to avoid thinking about. And what has this got to do with the man in the red underpants anyway?

I'd like you to come with me on a journey. It's not a long one, but on the way we are going to encounter some very interesting and probably scary things; things that you might not want to believe even though they make sense. Some of you are chickening out already; some of you will put this down and not even finish it, and some of you will turn your noses up in disgust, and that is very, very sad because you'll miss out on the most important thing in your life, ever!

There are some of you who will read the whole thing and perhaps even agree with it, but never get around to doing anything about it, and that is both really sad and really bad. Well, I told you this is going to have stuff you won't like! But somewhere, some of you will see it all through. You'll think a little, or a lot, and then you'll do something truly amazing with your life, you'll accept the inevitable conclusions of reason, take a deep breath (at least mentally) and decide to make a commitment that will transform you in wonderful ways. As scary as it seems, once you do that, things will make even more sense.

OK, enough of the hype, let's get down to the nitty gritty. Let's begin the journey and step aboard our vehicle; reason and common sense.

What would you do if a man in a pair of red underpants came knocking on your door saying that he'd come to read the gas meter?

Yes, I am serious, what would you do? Actually, what you would do is not so important here as compared with what process you would use and what faculties you would employ to come to a decision about this man and his claim. Would you believe him without thinking and let him into your house? Just 'have faith?' Or would you think about the situation, ask some questions and apply reason? I'm pretty sure it's the last one. Even if you told him to "Get lost you weirdo!", you'd use reason, logic and common sense to make sense of the man in red underpants, just as we do for most things that happen in our lives.

Now, before we go any further I need you to agree with me on one thing. If not, there isn't much point in going any further. We need to agree that the world we live in is real, and you, me and everything around us really does exist and is not the product of a computer generated illusory world, or some dream that you happen to be in. Now I know that I can't actually prove this, and that it really is possible that all we see around us is a dream or an illusion, but how does that help us? If we think THAT, then we could never make sense of anything, and even if we did accept that, we'd still use our reason to try and make sense of it and would still inevitably have to accept what we see as being real in some sense.

So, if you're with me on this; that the world is real and that what we see, smell, touch, hear, and taste is real, that our senses send information to our brain and we use our mind to make sense of what is going on, then let's use this process to make sense of this life, world, universe and everything else.

Now, there are some things we might call 'universals' because just about everybody as far as we know would agree on them. In fact, these ideas are so basic they are part of what makes us human, and if someone didn't agree to it we'd probably think they were mad. For example, the statement "part of something is less than the whole" is a universal idea. It's common to all humans, that's why we call it

‘common’ sense. It’s so obvious it doesn’t need explaining. Agree with me so far? OK. Here is another...’something doesn’t come from nothing’. And how about ‘order doesn’t spontaneously arise from chaos’?

What is there in the totality of human experience that would lead us to believe that something comes from nothing or that order just spontaneously arises from chaos?

Well that’s right! Nothing. Actually what we consistently experience is that where there is order, form and systems, something has imposed the order, the form and systems. The more complex and ordered the systems, the more functional the form, the greater the level of intelligence behind it.

So here are two truths we can use to make sense of the world, the universe and life. Universal human experience tells us that when we find things working according to systems, laws and patterns, something has made those systems, laws and patterns. That is why an archaeologist can find a piece of pottery in the earth and be sure and certain that some people, whom he has never seen, made this piece of pottery. In fact, he might be able to tell us a whole range of things about those people, their culture and state of technology from this one piece of pottery. He knows that this was designed, not as a product of some random movements of the earth, sun and natural forest fire that somehow came together to produce this piece of baked clay. Perhaps it is possible this might have happened, but it’s not likely. In fact, the more that person can see of this pottery, the more unlikely this possibility seems and the more certain he or she would be of its being designed on purpose (if they even had any doubt in the first place!)

Let’s take another example of something most of us have and use on a regular basis: a mobile phone. Your mobile phone is composed of a few basic elements. Plastic, glass, silicon for the chip, and some precious metals. Plastic comes from oil, and glass and silicon from sand. So basically, what you are holding in your hand is oil and sand.

Now, what if I told you that I was walking along in the desert of Arabia (where there is lots of oil and sand) and picked up a mobile phone which I found just lying there... a product of billions of years of random events? The wind blew, the sun shone, the rain fell, lightning struck, the oil bubbled, the camel trod and after millions and millions of years the mobile phone formed itself. And naturally I pick it up, push the call button... "Hi, Mom!"

Is there a chance that this could have randomly formed itself through natural processes? However remotely possible, most of us would simply not accept this as a reasonable explanation.

Why then, would we accept such an explanation for our universe and the life within it? Even if we accept evolution as a process, the idea that life evolved merely as a series of random events is difficult to accept as a reasonable explanation. Even the most basic human cell is much more complicated than a mobile phone! At least the theory of evolution attempts to offer some explanation of how this might have happened, but the idea that the universe is a product of some random events has no comparable explanation, and the laws, systems and forms that shape the universe are actually much more complex than those that govern biological life!

Let's take the example of our earth and solar system. The earth rotates on its axis once every twenty-four hours. Imagine the earth was spinning really slowly. A day or night is say 30 or 40 years long instead of 24 hours. One part of the earth's surface would be exposed to sunlight for that time, and the other in darkness. So the earth's surface would be both super heated and super cooled. Or, if we were fractionally (in cosmological terms) closer to the sun or further away, it would be too hot or too cold. Or, if the composition of the gases in the atmosphere was not exactly the right blend of oxygen, carbon dioxide and nitrogen, or if there was no ozone to filter out the harmful effects of the sun's radiation, it is difficult to see how life could exist without these optimal conditions.

When we look at the Big Bang theory that explains the origins of the universe, one might fairly ask “since when do explosions form intricate and balanced systems and complex life forms?” Yet, that is what some people propose happened with the universe and the Big Bang! One might respond that this is a very simplistic approach but it just so happens that science too is suggesting that the laws that govern the universe are so fine tuned that life could not exist without this degree of fine tuning.

This can be observed in what are called the constants of nature, of which there are quite a few. However, let's concentrate on four of the most well known forces: the strong nuclear force, the weak nuclear force, the electromagnetic force, and gravity. Two of these, the strong and weak electromagnetic forces, are responsible for the production of carbon, the element upon which all known life is based. The forces cooperate in such a way as to create an equilibrium of energy levels, which enables the production of carbon from the fusing of three helium atoms. It is very unlikely for three helium atoms to collide and create carbon under normal circumstances, as the energies would not match up and the three helium atoms would come apart before they had time to fuse into carbon. But if there is a statistically unusual match of the energies, then the process is much faster. The slightest change to either the strong or weak electromagnetic forces would alter the energy levels, resulting in greatly reduced production of carbon and an ultimately uninhabitable universe.

Consider also the strength of gravity. After the Big Bang billions of years ago, the matter in the universe was randomly distributed. There were no planets, galaxies or stars, just atoms floating around in the dark void of space. As the universe began to expand, gravity pulled ever so gently on the atoms, gathering them into clumps that eventually became stars and galaxies. What is important is that the force of gravity had to be just right. If gravity was a bit weaker, the atoms would have been so widely distributed that they would never have been gathered into galaxies, stars and planets. If the force of

gravity was a bit stronger, the atoms would have been pulled together into one single mass and then the Big Bang would have simply become the Big Crunch. The strength of gravity has to be just right for stars to form. So what is 'just right'? Well, imagine your weight was heavier or lighter by one billionth of a gram! That's the sort of fraction of difference we are talking about for the universe to be so different that there would be no galaxies, stars, planets or life. Makes shedding a few kilos seem simple, doesn't it? It's strange how intelligent, educated humans can't seem to shed a bit of weight in order to live longer but the universe can seem to organise itself into the optimal conditions for life through coincidence!

And that's not all! Let's take a closer look at the universe's rate of expansion after the Big Bang. If the rate of expansion was greater and the early universe expanded faster, the matter in the universe would have become so diffused that gravity could never have gathered it into stars and galaxies. If the rate of expansion was slower, gravity would have overwhelmed the expansion and pulled all the matter back into a black hole. If the rate of expansion, one second after the Big Bang had been slower by even one part in a hundred thousand million, the universe would have re-collapsed before it ever reached its present size! In fact, the expansion rate was just right, so that stars could exist in the universe.

Another example of this fine tuning is the density of the universe. In order for it to grow in a life-sustaining manner, the universe must have maintained an extremely precise overall density. The precision of density must have been so great that a change of one part in 1015 (i.e. 0.0000000000001%) would have resulted in a collapse, or big crunch, occurring far too early for life to have developed, or there would have been an expansion so rapid that no stars, galaxies or life could have formed.

Remember our mobile phone in the desert?

Isn't it much more reasonable to conclude that the universe and life

are a result of wilful intelligent design?

After all, what are the options?

Could it really have just come from nothing? And if that is the case, then why not apply that to everything else in life?

Perhaps the man in the red underpants just spontaneously appeared! Could it have created itself? Well we just don't attribute to the collection of stars and galaxies that we call the universe the ability to design and systemise. Surely that needs intelligence and will?

So if common sense and reason point so conclusively towards the existence of intelligent and wilful design, what other conclusions can we come to through the use of reason?

Well, one conclusion one might certainly reach is that the nature of the source of this intelligence and will must be different in nature from the universe it created.

Why is that? Because if it was the same, then all we would have is more of the same i.e. more creation, and then one might rightly ask, so what created that? Surely something more intelligent and wilful, and then of course we would ask the same question about that...what created it? And we would go on and on forever looking for the intelligence and will behind the intelligence and will, a creator creating a creator creating a creator ad infinitum! There is a good reason why things can't be that way, and this is best explained through an example.

Imagine a sniper who has acquired his designated target and radios through to HQ to get permission to shoot. HQ however, tells the sniper to hold on while they seek permission from higher up. So the guy higher up seeks permission from the guy even higher up and so on and so on.

If this keeps going on, will the sniper ever get to shoot the target?

Of course not!

He'll keep on waiting while someone is waiting for a person higher up to give the order. There has to be a place or person from where the command is issued, a place where there is no higher up.

So our example illustrates why there is a rational flaw in the idea that there might be creators creating creators ad infinitum... We can't have creators creating creators forever, or else, just as the sniper will never shoot, the creation will never get created. But the creation is here. It exists. So we can dismiss the idea of an infinite regression of causes as being an irrational proposition.

So what is the alternative?

The alternative is a first cause. An uncaused cause!

We could conclude that the nature of the intelligent and wilful force behind the universe, life and everything must have a different nature from the creation, and as we have seen, there are compelling reasons to do so.

So...if the creation is needy, the Creator should be self-sufficient.
And if the creation is temporary, the Creator should be eternal.
And if the creation is confined by space and time, the Creator should be free of space and time.

And if the creation is common, the Creator should be unique.
And it follows reasonably that there could only be one unique, eternal, self-sufficient being unconfined by space and time, for if there were more than one then these attributes could not apply. How could there be two or three eternal beings, or two beings unconstrained by space or time?

This is why it makes so much sense to believe in One Unique Eternal and Self-Sufficient Creator.

Common sense and reason lead easily or perhaps even inevitably, to the conclusion that the universe has been created by a transcendent being, unlike in essence to anything that we know.

This, of course, makes it difficult to understand much more about this Creator through reason, and that's why some people stop right there.

But our journey doesn't end here, in fact in many ways it only begins. We still have so many questions unanswered, so many issues unresolved.

Chapter 2

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Why is there suffering in the world?

If there is a Creator, why does this Creator let bad things happen?

What is the purpose of life?

Why are we here and what is it all for, and where are we going?

Is there life after death?

Is there some way to know more about this Creator?

It's not really surprising or extraordinary to expect that the One who created this universe would give some guidance in such matters, since the Creator has provided a means to satisfy every need that we have, both physical and emotional. We feel hunger and need nutrients to sustain us, and all the means to provide those nutrients are there. We thirst, and there is drink, we need clothes and the means exists to protect ourselves from the elements, and so on. We also need companionship, love and support and we have parents and families and live in societies that fulfil those needs. It makes sense that the One who has provided for all of these needs would also provide the answers to such deep, pressing and important issues.

In fact, in some ways those deeper questions are even more important than the physical and emotional issues, since they define our very reason for being. Evidence shows that when people have no clear and convincing direction and purpose in life as individuals and societies, they become profoundly dissatisfied, confused and unhappy. So the need to know why we are here and where we are going

and what this is all for, is as important to us as food, drink and sex!

There may be many possible answers to these questions, and looking at the numerous ideas that have come from the human mind, it would seem that reason might not be the best thing to use to find the answers to these perplexing questions because what we want are not just any answers, but the right answers. The problem here is that this is in fact an area where reason doesn't do very well.

As an example, imagine someone took you to a strange building. You're standing at the closed front door, and that person asks you, "What's behind that door, inside the building?" How much could you know through reason? You might be able to guess some things, like perhaps there being tables and chairs and lights and taps...but you could be wrong. It could be completely empty or completely full, or...well, almost anything. So how could you know, how could you reach certainty about what is behind that door? Well, of course you could go in and see it with your own eyes, but what if that was not possible? How, then, could you come to know what is inside?

Well, one way is that someone who has been inside tells you, or even a person who knows someone who has been inside tells you. But the question here is, how can I trust that person? How can I be sure that they are telling the truth?

It's the same with these big questions; the purpose of life, why is there suffering, is there life after death...what is behind the door? It is hidden, unseen and unknown. Reason can't come to any definitive answers, nor is there any reason to believe that intuition, or just 'feeling it' would do any better.

We can only get a degree of certainty when someone we have good reason to trust, tells us.

Of course we still need reason. It's only that it doesn't work so well here as a direct source of knowledge about these matters. We still

need reason to figure out whom to trust.

We're back to the man in the red underpants! Why should I believe or reject his claim?

Religions generally are making quite a special claim. The claim is that they have a message from the Creator, and often a message that is supposed to be exclusive to that religion. So it's a case of: 'I'm right and everyone else is wrong!' Not that this claim is in and of itself a problem from the point of view of reason. After all, if this Wise Creator did decide to send us a message it would make sense for it to be a consistent one, and since different religions make some contradictory claims, they can't all be right! No, the challenge here is deciding which one, if any is right. Instead of one person claiming they've come to read the gas meter, there are seven!

All is not lost. You see, looking at all those people gathered at your door, by using the same process of reason there are some things you can easily use to pick out who really is the one entitled to read the gas meter. For example, he or she might have some form of identification. and a uniform with the name of the gas company to whom you pay the bill to, and probably a device to read the meter. In the same way there are some signs we can use to distinguish the true religion from the false.

Since this is such an emotive issue it might be worth taking a little time to reflect on the sorts of inappropriate means testing that we might sometimes apply. This can be something like: 'which one looks like me and is from my race?' Would you use that to decide who comes into your house to read the meter? After all, criminals come in all races and colours, as do gas meter readers.

How about: 'Let me just feel who the right one might be, and then I'll just believe it enough for it to be true'. No! I thought not. Well, how about the one who makes a really good offer, like "If you have faith in me as the gas meter reader you can have free gas for-

ever!” Tempting, but unlikely!

Or maybe just pick the one who looks something like the guy that used to come knocking on your parents’ door sometimes (even though they never even had gas...hmmm!)

How about the one who looks smartest and with the most money?

Thought not!

The point being here is that when it comes to religion you need to dismiss certain ideas. For instance, like merely following whatever your ancestors believed just because it seems familiar, or because you love them so much or can’t imagine how they could have been wrong! I’m sure that all of you do some things, if not many things, differently from your parents. So how is it that they could be wrong about those things and not about religion?

There is simply no compelling reason to assume that whatever your parents and ancestors believed was the truth, and it also does not make any reasonable sense just to ‘believe’ and take a leap of faith without any sort of reasonable justification. And what sort of reasoning would lead one to conclude that the true religion should make you rich, or that by merely believing in a particular person or thing you will get eternal life? Of course, one of the favourite reasons for justifying a choice of religion is that someone started following this religion, it changed their life and they’re happy! This actually does make some sense, since there are some good reasons to believe that this is what the true religion should do, but the problem here is that lots of other people make the same claim about their different religious experiences. It seems that we have been created to be religious. It’s part of our nature. If we don’t follow one of the standard religions we’ll soon invent one! So some religion will always make us happier than none. So again, just claiming your religion is true because it changed your life can’t be on its own a sound criterion, because then other religions must also be true because

they too have changed peoples' lives. In fact, even someone who has decided to believe that there is no Creator at all might make the same claim that he or she used to follow a religion and now they don't, and they are more happy and free! As the saying goes, what's good for the goose is good for the gander. If it's true for one it must be true for the other also.

So these are all mere claims. Claims need to be proven.

So true religion, (if there is one!) should have some I.D. It should have some markers through which and by which we can know that its origin is from the Creator.

So what tests could we apply?

Chapter 3

THE TEST OF TEACHINGS

The first test, and probably the best and most convincing, soon leaves us with very few options.

What exactly does it say about the Creator? Which religion teaches that there is One Unique Creator whose nature is different from that of the creation: i.e One, Eternal, Self-Sufficient, and Transcendent Creator?

It's not my intention here to criticise and mock various religions, since all religions teach and encourage a common range of morals and values. They all have their various strengths and weaknesses. Rather, the purpose is just to examine them in the light of this simple and universally understandable criterion.

In the light of this we have, perhaps controversially, only three real

contenders: Judaism, Zoroastrianism and Islam. Christians might claim that they have a right to be included in this category, but at least from the position of normal Christian belief it must join every other religion in compromising or distorting this concept of the Unique Creator in one way or another.

For example, Hinduism generally has a pantheistic concept of God. This is the idea that everything is God. The universe, earth, moon, stars, trees, animals and us, are all God.

How can we reasonably understand and justify such a claim? If we mean by 'God', the Creator, then this is saying the creation created itself, and the creation is the Creator. How does this explain the ordering of a finite universe, and what rational evidence is there to support such a claim? This is really like saying the universe created itself. But if it was not there in the first place how could it have created itself?

Also, we don't ascribe to the universe the ability to order and systemise. It is not one of its qualities or attributes. The universe is made up of stars and galaxies, and these themselves are in need of a Creator. Since they need an organiser individually, they also need it collectively! A collection of needy things does not somehow become self-sufficient. A country full of starving people is not any more likely to be able to feed itself than an individual starving person!

Christianity shares a similar problem. Of course many Christians would put forward the same arguments for the existence of the Creator as I have already put forward, but then go on to say that Jesus, a limited, finite, needy being, was God. The problem here is clear. How rationally can anything be two complete opposites at the same time? How can the finite also be infinite at the same time? How can something be self-sufficient and needy, eternal and temporary, both common and unique, one and many all at the same time?

This is rather like saying, for example, that a circle became a square but still remained a circle. One could conceive of the idea of taking the line of a circle and forcing it into the shape of a square, but of course it then simply stops being a circle. Or one could put the circle in the square or the square in the circle, but it can't be both a square and a circle at the same time. This is by definition an impossibility, and you can never bring a reasoned argument for an impossibility. So this is a claim that can never be proven. The biggest problem is that it contradicts the reasoned arguments for the existence of the Creator in the first place, since if one created, finite, needy being could be the Creator, why not another and another and another? How can you rationally defend such a belief against pantheism, for example?

The response to this is often "Well, God can do anything". This, of course is a claim about God, and claims about God, like anything else, need to be proven. It's also a statement that is fraught with problems. For example, one might ask "Can God stop existing?" or "Can God do something evil?"

There are two usual responses to such a question. Either: "No, He can't", which contradicts what the Christians previously said about God being able to do anything, or "Yes, He can if He wanted to but God never would do anything evil because the nature of God is good."

Why then is this true of God's goodness but not His other attributes? Exactly the same criterion applies to God being One, Eternal and Self-Sufficient. Just as it is not in the nature of the good God to do evil, also it is not in the nature of the Eternal, Self-Sufficient Creator to become a temporary and needy creation. So the claim that the Creator became creation and still remained the Creator is a claim that can never be proven, since it is by definition an impossibility, and this applies to any religion that makes such a claim about the Creator. This also dispenses with most of what Hindus and pagans believe since they make similar claims about the Cre-

ator being incarnated as some created being.

Some Christians might claim that they don't consider Jesus as God, but as God's Son. The problem here is what is meant by saying "God's Son"? A human son is human like his mother and father, so is God's Son also God? If so, we are back where we started and we have the same problem as before. Also a son is a product of a sexual act. So did God have sex? Clearly this would contradict everything we know so far about God being unlike the creation. Well, perhaps God sort of adopted Jesus as a son? This also makes no sense, since you can only adopt something as a son which is like you. For example, if someone had a pet fish called Flappy and said: "This is my son", no one would take it seriously. You might love it like a son, it may eat with you and have a room in the house and perhaps you might even get some adoption papers, but the fish is a fish and you are human. The two are not alike, and we know the Creator is not like anything in the universe. In fact, we are more like fish than we are like the Creator. We are limited, finite, needy beings and so are fish, whereas the Creator is eternal and self-sufficient. In fact, the Creator must be far removed from having a son, either literally or symbolically, except perhaps in the very metaphorical sense that our parents care for, guide and nurture us and so does the Creator. However, this term would apply to all creatures, not just humans, let alone just one human.

As for Buddhism, well the Creator doesn't really get a look in. This leaves Buddhism more like a philosophy than a religion, and this comes with its own issues, namely that explanations for the purpose of life, the reason for suffering, and the big unknown of the afterlife are the ideas of a man, not God. What we really need is something definitive, and certainty can only come from the Knower of the unseen, who is the Creator of the unseen. Everything else is speculation.

There are a few other religions that one might mention. Sikhism is similar to Buddhism in the sense that it doesn't claim to be of

divine origins, at least not directly. The founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak, took what he thought were the best parts of Hinduism and Islam and amalgamated them to form his own way. That is something many of us might be tempted to do in the face of such choice, but there is a simple rational problem here. If we agree that there is actually a revelation and message from the Creator, then how could we rationally choose to abandon the Creator's guidance and follow something else or presume to mix it up with something else, unless of course we could establish that this is what the Creator actually wants us to do? One might be able to justify that from Hindu ideas, but it would be very hard from the point of view of Islam or Judaism, for example.

We've already applied one test to see if the claim of a religion being from the Creator is valid or not: Does it agree with the rational basis through which we can understand that there is a single, unique, eternal and self-sufficient Creator who is distinct and separate from the Creation? Are there any other criterion that we might apply to shorten our list of candidates?

Chapter 4

THE TEST OF UNIVERSALITY

Well, perhaps there are a few other tests we could apply to see if the I.D. is valid or not. One of them that makes some sort of sense is the idea of universality. What is meant by this is that this message from the Creator should be for everybody. As long as humans generally have the rational capacity to understand the reasons for the Creator's existence and to actually ask the deep and profound questions about life, death, the universe and everything, it seems unreasonable that the Creator would only give guidance to one select group of humans and leave everyone else out. Of course the Creator might have very good reasons for choosing a select group to carry and follow these wise instructions, just as there might be

good reasons to choose to give the message to one outstanding person rather than speak to everyone individually. Even so, it begs the question that if we are not one of that select group, what are we supposed to do? What happens to us? All this then becomes sort of irrelevant. It seems strange that the Creator, who has provided for every human the means to fulfil every need, doesn't provide the means to fulfil what is psychologically, mentally, and spiritually the greatest need, which are the answers to the big questions!

This pretty much eliminates Judaism. Judaism is great if you are born to a Jewish woman, not so great if you aren't. Although quite a few of us tend to think in some way that our country, race, tribe, town, or football team is the best (or at least will be some day), most of us would find it pretty hard to stomach the notion that unless you are born into a certain race or tribe you haven't got a hope of getting to the eternal bliss of paradise when you die, and that the wise guidance of the Creator is only for them and not for you. So even if it was true, then most of us would have to dismiss it as irrelevant anyway! There are a few other reasons why Judaism might reasonably be discounted, but this is not the time for it.

I need us to stop here for a brief interlude.

Now I did warn you right at the beginning that you weren't going to like this!

Perhaps I should have warned you a bit more that the conclusions of this rational approach might mean going completely against your desires and the things that you think you want in life. Perhaps I should have warned you that you might actually hate the truth, and if you're that kind of person who thinks your life's alright, and I have everything I want anyway...well, I could warn you that there are lots of reasons why things might not stay like that for you for long. But then if you're that sort of person, you probably wouldn't really listen anyway. So here it is.

WARNING!

What follows is only for people who are really ready to put prejudice aside, to think a little deeply and follow the most reasonable conclusion.

So far things have been easy going. What follows is going to be a bit of a rough ride when it comes to the sort of decisions and conclusions you need to make. I'm not trying to put you off. Really I'm not, because it will be well worth the effort. After all, was there anything really worth having that didn't take some hard work to get? Well, the conclusions I am leading you to here, will take some effort to follow up. In fact, for some it will take a momentous effort.

The hard work here is not physical, or even mental in the sense of having to think a lot. If you've agreed to use reason and common sense to come to your conclusions, and if you are ready to take the most reasonable option and that's all that matters to you, I reckon you'll be fine. Some of you won't. Some of you reading this might even agree with everything and then just keep on living the way you always did...or at least you'll try. I say try because you won't be able to, and I speak from experience. What follows is going to lead you to a conclusion that for some might come as a shocking truth. Others might have suspected it already. One thing is for sure, once you know the truth your life can never be the same. It will always be with you. However hard you want to escape you can't run away from yourself.

YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED!

So back to where we left off..

That pretty much leaves us with two contenders. Zoroastrianism and Islam.

There are a couple of reasons why Islam has the ups over Zoroastri-

anism. Firstly, Islam claims to be a universal religion for everybody. Contrary to what some people might think, and contrary to how some of the followers of Islam might behave, Islam is not an Arab/Pakistani/Indian religion. It's just as much for English speaking white people as it is for Arabs, Africans or Eskimos.

It's also interesting that the word 'Islam' is an Arabic word that has a meaning, and that it is a descriptive term that means 'submission' or 'surrender' to the Creator. A Muslim then is one who claims to obey and follow the Creator's guidance. It also claims that this basic message of believing and following the One, Unique and transcendent God is the basic message that the Creator has always revealed through special chosen people referred to as Prophets or Messengers. The name of this religion is not connected to a particular person or place. Judaism (Juda), Christianity (Christ), Buddhism (Buddha), Hinduism (India), Zoroastrianism (Zoroaster), are all connected to a person or place. So, for example, if one lived in some remote location and never heard that a man called Jesus, who is also God and God's son, died for one's sins, there is no way at all that one could come to the realisation of this through one's mind or through experience. You could never reason it. Someone would have to tell you. This is not the case with Islam. The basic idea of Islam, that there is a Unique Creator whose guidance we should follow, is something anyone anywhere could figure out. As an idea, Islam, submission to the One God, is truly universal.

Chapter 5

THE TEST OF CHARACTER

There are a few other tests that one could apply.

The first is connected with the character and personality of the person making the claim. If the person claiming to have a message from the Creator is known and displays truthfulness, sincerity and honesty, it becomes easy to accept that the person is also telling the truth about the Message they are receiving from the Creator. Of course this could be countered by the claim that this person is simply deluded. They think that they are what they claim to be, and are honest and truthful, but their experiences are a product of some mental aberration or hallucination. How can we know that this is not the case?

Certainly none of us want to be conned or taken for a ride by a fraudster or end up following a madman. Of course a good fraudster will do everything in his or her power to make you think that they are sincere and truthful. They will certainly make what they have look and sound like the real thing, and they will often tempt you with an offer that seems too good to be true. The problem here is that we can easily end up back where we started. All our contenders could end up looking like pretty credible characters, but the point here of course is that we are not dealing with the actual claimants themselves. It's not Moses, Krishna, Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus, Mohammad or Guru Nanak knocking on our door themselves, it's people who claim to be representing them and what they said. We have stuff said about them and written about them. So before we can examine these characters we need to have some idea about how we know what they actually said as opposed to what people have claimed that they said.

This is why the issue of scriptural authenticity is important. The

problem with Zoroastrianism is that there is nothing really left of the actual writings and sayings of Zoroaster. The liturgy remains, as do some ideas of the basic theology, but his actual words are more or less lost. The problems with Biblical authenticity are well known even to honest Christian and Jewish scholars. Here is an area where the Quran, the main scripture of Islam, is really outstanding. There is very little controversy over the authenticity of the Quranic text. In fact, one could pick up a copy of the Quran from any mosque anywhere in the world, and one could compare these with manuscripts dating to within thirty years after the death of the Prophet Mohammed and you would find the text unchanged except for the style of writing and certain marks placed to aid pronunciation. This is quite remarkable for a text just over 1400 years old. Not only is there an excellent record of written preservation, but the Quran has a remarkable history of oral preservation as well. Muslims claim other scriptures have been changed, lost and distorted in various ways, but the Creator (whose word the Quran is) has promised to preserve the Quran because it is the last revelation from the Creator for humanity and thus Mohammed is the final messenger. Although Muslims themselves are human and fallible, and as such do not necessarily represent the true face of the religion, the Quran, and example and teachings of the Prophet remain intact for people to be able to find out what God's guidance really is.

This is what Muslims claim, but aren't there lots of problems with Islam?

I mean, how can anyone in the civilized free world, or in fact anywhere, be expected to follow a religion that's 1400 years old? It seems to treat women as second class citizens (but in the civilized free world women are still paid less for the same job, are regularly portrayed as sex objects, suffer scary amounts of sexual and physical abuse and find it almost impossible to be respected as mothers and wives, but at least in the civilized world we claim that women are supposed to be equal). I mean the Quran actually says to beat your wife on certain occasions! Men can have up to four wives and

unlimited concubines! Nice for them, and they get twice the inheritance, and a woman's testimony is worth half a man's!

Then there is this jihad business and all that terrorism and 'fight and kill the disbelievers wherever you find them.'

And how about all those seemingly barbaric laws with hand chopping for thieves, and death for apostates and adulterers (and how come it's always the women that seem to get killed?) and death for homosexuals, and whipping for drunks, and even crucifixion for highway robbers!

Isn't the Quran just like every other religious book; full of contradictions, vague terms and open to many levels of interpretation?

Well, the Quran seems to be unlike any other scripture from at least one angle, and that is the nearly undisputed fact of its preservation and authenticity. Then again, how many of the issues that people have with Islam are actually to do with the teachings of the Quran and the Prophet as opposed to the behaviour of Muslims?

Let's look at this rationally rather than emotionally.

Does the fact that the Quran teaches certain things that go against the customs and norms that we are used to, mean that it is not from the Creator?

There is in fact no rational reason why any of the aforementioned issues actually preclude its divine origin. So what if it does not seem compatible with 'modern' life? Perhaps the Creator doesn't like modernity or any other man-made ideology. I'm not saying this is the actual case, I'm just proving the point that again this is not a rational reason to reject the claim of the Quran to be from the Creator. In this respect, nearly every religion joins Islam in questioning the validity of a lifestyle based on pure materialism and enjoyment that seems to characterise much of modern life.

The problem with judging any given book or scripture only on its morals and laws is that morals and laws in general are far from universal. For example, something that may seem like a harsh punishment in one culture is considered soft in another. Limited polygamy might seem like an unreasonable restriction in a society that relies on marriage as a means of social security for women and practices unlimited polygamy. To them monogamy might seem like madness, especially to the women who rely on polygamy for security. The self styled 'civilized free world' is itself constantly changing its moral and ethical stance on many things. Things that were bad ten years ago are acceptable today and vice versa, yet some spokespeople for the values of the 'free world' talk about their morals and values as if they were some sort of divine writ, which of course they are not. In fact, the opposite is true.

The point here is that the biggest problem that people tend to have with Islam is actually not really a valid criterion by which to judge it. Rationally, one should take the position that if one can establish convincing evidence of a book's divine origin, then one should accept that the Creator of us knows what is best for us. In fact, it is quite likely that humans would choose morals, laws and values that they feel comfortable with rather than those which are actually good and beneficial for them, or that some humans (like those with authority and control) devise a system of moral order that keeps them in power! The fact is there are many things that are good for us that we don't like and many things we like that are actually bad for us. So we should put this issue of the so called incompatibility of Islam with modern life aside as a red herring (or perhaps as another man in red underpants!)

Now, this may be time to swallow the bitterest pill of all so far. Time to accept what for some of us might be the hardest truth; that the Quran just might possibly be that guidance from the Creator, and that Mohammed is a Prophet. At least we should put our prejudice aside and try to openly examine the reasoned arguments put forth in favour of the Quran's claim to be that guidance. After all, it does

already have a few things in favour of this claim. Let's go over them again. Firstly, what it teaches about the Creator matches what can be understood rationally by everyone everywhere, i.e. that there is One Creator that is unlike the creation. There are lots of verses in the Quran that expound this idea. For example:

“Say: He is God, the One and Alone, God the one whom everything needs and who Himself needs nothing, He is not born, nor does He beget, and there is nothing that can be compared to Him.” [The Quran; Chapter 112 - The Purity, verses 1-4]

Some people question the use of ‘He’ in the Quran. Does this mean that the Creator is a man? The Creator, according to these verses, is not like anything. It's just that in Arabic, the original language of the Quran, like many other languages, there is only male and female, no neuter. Even in English, saying ‘it’ doesn't really seem an appropriate way to talk about God. ‘He’ just happens to be the gender term that is used in the Quran, but it does not imply or necessitate that God is a man or male.

The second thing in Islam's favour is that the scripture has been preserved in a remarkable manner. The history of this preservation is itself worthy of some study, but for brevity I'll just relate some comments of various scholars on this matter, for example:

The orientalist Richard Burton writes that the Qur'an we have today is ‘the text which has come down to us in the form in which it was organized and approved by the Prophet...What we have today in our hands is the mushaf [text] of Muhammad.’ Kenneth Cragg describes the transmission of the Qur'an from the time of revelation to today as occurring in ‘an unbroken living sequence of devotion.’ Schwally writes in *Geschichte des Qorans* that ‘As far as the various pieces of revelation are concerned, we may be confident that their text has been generally transmitted exactly as it was found in the Prophet's legacy’.

They certainly seem convinced of the Quran's authenticity.

The third reason we should sit up and take notice is because the message of Islam claims to be a universal one, that is, for everybody regardless of race or status, and indeed makes clear that the Creator does not look at a person's colour, race, tribe, wealth or status, but rather at a person's heart, goodness and deeds.

The Quran, however, is no casual read. It can be very difficult to get one's head around, since it doesn't seem to follow any particular order of events, topic or theme. It repeats itself a lot and even in the best English translation its style is challenging to say the least. In fact, in order to understand it you are forced to think, and thinking is what the Quran asks us to do a lot.

Despite this, the basic message is very clear. There is only One God, who is both compassionate and merciful to all His creatures, but especially to those who are humble and believe. He is also severe in punishment to those who are arrogant and reject the truth. Life is a test, and when we die and this universe as we know it ends, there will be a day when we will be recreated physically and judged and either rewarded with eternal bliss, or punished with eternal torment. Well, I did tell you in the beginning there was going to be stuff you wouldn't like, like death and hell! Still, the fact that we don't like something doesn't mean it's not real or true.

Is there anything else that might help us accept the claim of the Quran to be from the Creator of the heavens and earth? Well, the Quran itself gives a sort of falsification test. This is in fact a good test to apply to any book that claims to be from the Creator:

“Do they not then consider the Quran carefully? Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein contradictions in abundance” [The Quran; Chapter 4 - The Women, verse 82]

The point being here is that if a book is from the Creator of every-

thing, it's quite rational to conclude that this unique Being must be very intelligent and wise, to a level that is perhaps beyond human comprehension. Certainly one would expect the Creator of all things to be familiar with the basic workings of the natural world and universe, and with events in human history.

Actually what is remarkable about the Quran is not only that it does not contain any contradictions, but in fact it seems to be making statements about history, theology, philosophy, law and the natural world that defies a normal human explanation.

And there is another remarkable quality about the Quran, and that is that it still stands today as by far the most outstanding piece of literature in the Arabic language. In fact, the Quran itself challenges the Arabs, who were masters of poetry and linguistic skill, to produce even one chapter that could compare to it. The shortest chapter of the Quran was a mere three verses! At a time when poets were the 'pop stars' of Arabia, Mohammed showed no poetic ability, either prior to or after the revelation of the Quran. In fact, his sayings and statements are clearly different linguistically from the Quran and can easily be told apart. Many of the most skilled poets and orators of that time admitted that these were not the words of Mohammed, or even a human. Many embraced Islam just from hearing the Quran being recited. For them it was the most convincing proof of its divine origin. Of course this may be hard for us to appreciate today, but it stands as a historical fact. The question remains as to how someone with no known poetic gifts was able to produce a piece of literature that until today stands supreme in the whole of the Arabic language at a time when the greatest pieces of Arabic poetry were being produced. If one were to take a modern day comparison, it's as extraordinary as an uneducated person with no scientific knowledge or training expounding a faultless unified theory of physics!

Mohammed was, like most people in Arabia at that time, unable to read or write. He had no access to the means of acquiring such

knowledge. Indeed, it was a constant challenge to his opponents then, as it has been throughout the history of those who refuse to accept the possibility that the Quran is from the Creator, as to where exactly he got all this information. Some Christian polemicists even went as far as to claim that Mohammed himself was in fact a heretical Christian bishop that had fled to Arabia, and others claimed that he had learned from some dissident monk! However, despite the rich history and available literature of Mohammed's life, no one can seem to be able to identify this character and how he managed to stay hidden for the duration of the twenty-three years the Prophet preached. Of course, another issue that this raises is the suggestion that the Quran was an invention, and that Mohammed was a liar, and such a claim is really very problematic, since any study of the life of Mohammed clearly shows his complete sincerity and truthfulness. He does not display the psychological profile of a con artist at all. This has led others to claim that he was deluded and mad, that he really believed that he was a Prophet, and managed therefore to convince himself and others. This leaves us still with the unexplained mystery of the amazing information and breadth of knowledge contained in the Quran.

You see, someone can't be both deluded and a liar at the same time. If you think you are a Prophet and really believe you are receiving information from God, when someone comes to ask you a difficult question as often happened to Mohammed, you don't go off running to your nearest priest or rabbi to find out what the answer is going to be. You're convinced God is going to tell you.

The most reasonable conclusion that explains the phenomenon of both the amazing level of information in the Quran and the clear sincerity and truthfulness of Mohammed is that he was what he claimed to be, the Messenger of God. It seems that this alone offers a plausible explanation for the information, because this knowledge is from the Creator, and acts as a sort of verification of it. The Prophet Mohammed's sincerity, truthfulness and principled behaviour is explained by him actually being what he claimed to be and having certainty that he was receiving a divine message.

Chapter 6

AMAZING LEVEL OF INFORMATION

Now some of you might, or perhaps should be thinking what exactly is this ‘amazing level of information’ that I’m talking about, and this is a vast topic in itself which could in fact fill volumes, and then we’d need to add to that all the arguments and counter arguments, and that would fill even more volumes! There’s some recommended reading and web sites at the end of this if you’re interested in going deeper. I’m just going to select a choice few things that I find particularly fascinating and personally convincing.

The first is to do with history. Lots of Christians have tried to accuse Mohammed of attempting to copy and use the Bible, and this is pretty silly for a number of reasons. One of them is because there just wasn’t a Bible in Arabic at that time and even if there was, Mohammed wouldn’t have been able to read it. Now there are a lot of the same people mentioned in the Quran that are in the Bible, and this is because they are, mostly, Prophets and Messengers of God. The Quran being the last revelation from the Creator deems their lives to be examples worthy of mention to inspire and motivate believers in times to come. It’s not strange that Abraham is mentioned, since the Arabs considered him their patriarch via his son Ishmael. One of the Biblical terms used for the Arabs was Ishmaelites because of their descent from him. However, what might seem strange and a challenge to explain is just how much there is about Moses in the Quran. Of course the simple explanation for this is that the challenges and tasks that Mohammed faced were so much ‘like unto that’ of Moses, and therefore the experience of Moses was a useful guide and inspiration to the final Messenger.

There are two fascinating little but telling details taken from these stories in the Quran.

Firstly, it is interesting how Joseph (son of Israel or Jacob) also mentioned in the Quran, never refers to the ruler of Egypt as Pharaoh but rather calls him King, whereas Moses is clearly dealing with a Pharaoh. The Bible calls both Pharaoh. Not such a problem one might think, except that when we try to locate Joseph in history we find that the dynasty ruling Egypt at the time were in fact the Hykos, who were Semites and didn't use the term Pharaoh, which was a term used by the native Egyptians for their rulers. The ruler of Egypt under Moses was a native Egyptian who had supplanted the Hykos and who began to oppress the tribe of Israel. If Mohammed had copied the Bible, why didn't he copy this historical error? And where did he get such accurate information from? There were no universities with departments of Egyptology at that time. The knowledge of reading hieroglyphs had been lost hundreds of years previously, and was not known again until the discovery of the Rosetta Stone 1000 years later. This makes the second piece of information even more fascinating.

The Quran relates the story of how Moses goes to Pharaoh and invites him to believe in...well, pretty much what you're reading here. Pharaoh starts to question Moses about this unseen God above the heavens. Now Pharaoh was the one who thought he was god, in fact he thought that through magic he could command the gods. So he arrogantly says to one of his people:

Pharaoh said: "O Haman! Build me a lofty palace, that I may attain the ways and means- The ways and means of (reaching) the heavens, and that I may mount up to the god of Moses: But as far as I am concerned, I think (Moses) is a liar!" [The Quran; Chapter 40 - The Forgiver, verses 36 and 37]

Much has been made of the mention of this Haman, claiming that Mohammed copied stories from the Bible and got it all mixed up. There is a Haman in the Bible in the book of Esther, a book which is considered of questionable authenticity itself, which places this character later in time in Persia as a minister in the court of Aha-

suerus. However, there are no independent historical records that show that such a character ever existed in Persia. In fact, Biblical scholars have identified Haman as the Elamite god Humman, or possibly the Persian hamayun, meaning 'illustrious', and to the Persian name Owanes.

We do however, contrary to the mocking claims of many Christian polemicists, have a Haman, located in Ancient Egypt that seems to fit the bill perfectly.

Dr. Maurice Bucaille was one of the first people to study the name Haman from an Egyptological view point. He surmised that since 'Haman' was mentioned in the Qur'an during the time of Moses in Egypt, the best course of action was to ask an expert in the old Egyptian language, i.e., hieroglyphs, regarding the name. Bucaille narrates an interesting discussion he had with a prominent French Egyptologist:

"In the book *Reflections on the Qur'an (Réflexions sur le Coran)*, I have related the result of such a consultation that dates back to a dozen years ago and led me to question a specialist who, in addition, knew the classical Arabic language well. One of the most prominent French Egyptologists, fulfilling these conditions, was kind enough to answer the question.

I showed him the word 'Haman' that I had copied exactly how it is written in the Qur'an, and told him that it had been extracted from a sentence of a document dating back to the 7th century AD, the sentence being related to somebody connected with Egyptian history.

He said to me that, in such a case, he would see in this word the transliteration of a hieroglyphic name but, for him, undoubtedly it could not be possible that a written document of the 7th century had contained a hieroglyphic name - unknown until that time - since, in that time, the hieroglyphs had been totally forgotten.

In order to confirm his deduction about the name, he advised me to consult the Dictionary of Personal Names of the New Kingdom by Ranke, where I might find the name written in hieroglyphs, as he had written before me, and the transliteration in German.

I discovered all that had been presumed by the expert, and, moreover, I was stupefied to read the profession of Haman: 'The Chief of the workers in the stone-quarries,' exactly what could be deduced from the Qur'an, though the words of the Pharaoh suggest a master of construction.

When I came again to the expert with a photocopy of the page of the Dictionary concerning 'Haman' and showed him one of the pages of the Qur'an where he could read the name, he was speechless...

Moreover, Ranke had noted, as a reference, a book published in 1906 by the Egyptologist Walter Wreszinski: the latter had mentioned that the name of 'Haman' had been engraved on a stela kept at the Hof-Museum of Vienna (Austria). Several years later, when I was able to read the profession written in hieroglyphs on the stela, I observed that the determinative joined to the name had emphasised the importance of the intimate relationship to the Pharaoh."

Now that's what I call an 'amazing level of information!'

Where did Mohammed get such knowledge from if not from God?

There is more.

Just think about the world 1400 years ago and the level of knowledge that existed, or perhaps we should say the level of ignorance that was prevalent, especially in regards to the natural world. Of course some thinkers and philosophers had made some amazing discoveries, even estimating the circumference of the earth, but they also got a lot of things very wrong. Legends and myths also

abounded. Reading the Quran, you find a distinct lack of such legends and myths about the creation of the universe and the natural world. Yes, there are miracles and wonders worked by the Creator to increase the faith of the faithful and confound the obstinate, but otherwise descriptions of the world and universe seem remarkably modern. You would expect the Quran to reflect the myths and legends of the time. Even if Mohammed had managed to pick up the best ideas of the time and leave out these legends, it still does not account for the remarkable consistency of the Quran with modern science.

Here are a couple of verses in the Quran dealing with the universe and its creation.

“Do not the Unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of creation), before We clove them asunder, and We made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe?” [The Quran; Chapter 21 - The Prophets, verse 30]

Ever heard of the Big Bang and how the universe started as a singularity, a super-condensed ball of matter and energy? We talked about that in the beginning, remember? It sure seems that the information in the Quran is correct about something that we discovered just about seventy years ago. Then how about this:

“And it is We who have constructed the heaven with might, and verily, it is We who are steadily expanding it.” [The Quran; Chapter 51 - The Winds That Scatter, verse 47]

When Einstein was conjuring up his theories, the consensus among scientists was that the universe was static and had been like that forever, but new observations made it clear that this was not the case and that in fact galaxies were moving away from each other at a constant rate. In other words, the universe is expanding. More than strange is how these things came to be found in a book 1400 years old.

Science is a very fickle fellow. Things which scientists all agree upon at one time are turned on their heads and are shown to be contradicted by observations at another time, so perhaps it's not the best thing to judge a book by. Still, there are some things that seem to have been observed so often and so much that it becomes some sort of 'fact'.

One of these things is the embryonic development of humans. The idea that we go through stages of foetal development is really quite new. Lots of theories abounded in antiquity and early modern times that today seem to sound a bit silly. For example, one of the dominant theories that was prevalent in the eighteenth century was the pre-formation theory. This was the idea that animals existed pre-formed in the sperm. There were even claims of observations of this through the primitive microscopes available at the time. So much for seeing is believing! Aristotle thought that menstrual blood congealed with the aid of semen to form a foetus. It was not until the late nineteenth century that what we know today began to be clearly articulated. Yet over 1400 years ago the Quran stated:

“Man We did fashion from a quintessence of clay. Then We placed him as (a drop of) fluid in a place of rest firmly fixed. Then We fashioned the fluid into a leech-like thing that clings (the word “alaq” is sometimes incorrectly translated as a blood-clot). Then We fashioned that leech-like thing that clings into a chewed-like lump. Then We fashioned the chewed-like lump into bones and We clothed the bones with flesh. Then We developed out of it another creature. So hallowed be Allah, the Best of Artisans”; [The Quran; Chapter 23 - The Believers, verses 11-13]:

“...who fashioned man from a leech-like thing that clings”; and [The Quran; Chapter 22 - The Pilgrimage, verse 5]: “We fashioned you out of dust, then out of a drop of fluid, then out of a leech-like thing that clings, then out of a morsel of flesh - partly formed and partly unformed...”

Keith Moore, Professor and Chairman, Department of Anatomy, University of Toronto, Canada, and author of 'The Developing Human', considered to be one of the world's leading embryologists, said concerning these statements in the Qur'an and authenticated hadeeth: "Until the 19th Century, nothing was known about classifying the stages of human development. A system of staging human embryos was developed around the end of the 19th Century based on alphabetical symbols. During the 20th century, numerals were used to describe 23 stages of embryonic development. This system of numbering the stages is not easy to follow and a better system would be based on the morphological changes. In recent years, the study of the Qur'an has revealed another basis for the classification of the stages of the developing embryo which is based on easily understood actions and changes in shape. It utilizes terms which were sent from God to Muhammed the Prophet by the Angel Gabriel and recorded on the Qur'an . . . It is clear to me that these statements must have come to Muhammed from God because almost all of this knowledge was not discovered until many centuries later. This proves to me that Muhammed must have been a Messenger of God."

Marshall Jonson, Professor and Chairman, Department of Anatomy, Director of the Daniel Baugh Institute, Thomas Jefferson University, Philadelphia, U.S.A., said: "As a scientist I can only deal with things I can specifically see. I can understand embryology and developmental biology; I can understand the words that are translated to me from the Qur'an. If I were to transpose myself into that era, knowing what I do today and describing things, I could not describe the things that were described. I see no evidence to refute the concept that this individual Muhammed had to be developing this information from some place, so I see nothing in conflict with the concept that Divine Intervention was involved on what he was able to say."

Another interesting statement that is found in the Quran concerns the mountains:

“Have We not made the earth as a bed, and the mountains as pegs?”

[The Quran; Chapter 78 - The Great News, verse 6]

Today we know that mountains have deep roots under the surface of the ground and that these roots can reach several times their elevations above the surface of the ground. So the most suitable word to describe mountains on the basis of this information is the word ‘peg’, since most of a properly set peg is hidden under the surface of the ground. This theory of mountains having deep roots was introduced only in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Mountains also play an important role in stabilizing the crust of the earth since they hinder the shaking of the earth.

“And He has set firm mountains in the earth so that it would not shake with you...” [The Quran; Chapter 16 - The Bees, verse 15]

Likewise, the modern theory of plate tectonics holds that mountains work as stabilizers for the earth. This knowledge about the role of mountains as stabilizers for the earth has just begun to be understood in the framework of plate tectonics since the late 1960s! The Quran mentions many things about the natural world and asks us to think deeply and contemplate, and that those with understanding will realise that these are all signs that point to the power and wisdom of its Creator, that all of this is not for nothing or for entertainment, but rather for a profound and noble purpose.

The Quran is not meant to be a book of science, but a book of signs. It is easy to understand how the Creator would know about the common origin of the universe, the details of embryonic development and that mountains have roots, but it is not easy to explain how Mohammed managed to include this information in the Quran unless we accept his claim to be a Messenger. It would seem that accepting this would be the most sensible thing for a rational, sincere person to do.

Chapter 7

TEACHINGS OF THE BOOK

What then are the basic teachings of the Quran?

Well the first thing to accept is that there is One God, who is unique and unlike anything, and that nothing is like God. God is One and Alone, who has no partners and no rivals, and we should pray to and worship only the Creator.

How to pray to and worship the Creator and be guided by His knowledge is where Mohammed comes in. The Quran teaches that all of God's Prophets and Messengers to the humans have been human. That is because they are not only delivering a message, but their life is also a practical example of how to follow and implement that message. This makes sense. If one human can do it, then at least in theory the rest of us can too! If the messenger for all of us was an angel, then we'd all be making lots of excuses about how we couldn't possibly be like an angel since it's easy for them to be, well, so angelic!

Life, the Quran tells us, is a test. That is why there is suffering and joy, health and illness, wealth and poverty, good and evil, night and day, darkness and light. It is through its opposite that we come to know something. How can we really appreciate what is good without evil, and how often is it that we only appreciate good health when we are sick? The test is to make known the reality of our selves. Will we accept the truth or follow our desires? Will we obey the Creator or rebel? God has given us guidance and free will. We should use our intelligence to understand and follow that guidance. If we make mistakes, as is inevitable since we are human, we should know that as long as we keep seeking the Creator's guidance, asking for forgiveness and doing our best to change ourselves for the better, the Creator will keep forgiving us. In fact, this understanding

of our limitations and recognition of God's greatness is the essence of what Islam is about. This is why humans should submit and surrender themselves to God, and that is what Islam really means.

The reason for our existence, the primary purpose of our complex minds, and the gift of reason is to understand and to try to do everything in a way that is pleasing to the Creator. We know how to do that through the guidance that has been given to us. In order to help us live most effectively and be constant in this, the Creator has made it an essential component of this way of living to establish regular acts of worship in our lives. It is not that God needs this, not at all! God is without needs and is entirely self-sufficient. Rather, we have been created with that need. Just as our bodies need food, our minds, our souls are designed to be nourished through remembering and worshipping God.

This is why the most important action that a Muslim (one who follows Islam) has to do is to pray in a special way at special times throughout the day and night. There are five of these daily ritual prayers. Establishing this regular ritual prayer with sincerity and understanding is the key to changing ourselves. When done properly, it is a life transforming ritual.

Another essential component is giving charity to help those who are less fortunate and needy. One of the most important components of living a life that is pleasing to God is being kind to and helping others.

Of course living this life takes discipline, self control and patience, and this is the reason why fasting has always been a component of religious life, and this is also the case with Islam. Every year there is a month called Ramadan when one has to leave off food, drink and sex from dawn until sunset. It is also important to try to keep away from evil in speech and actions, since that is the essence of what fasting is supposed to lead to.

Speaking the truth and not lying, keeping promises, fulfilling trusts, always being just, even against one's own family or self, are essential characteristics of the true believer.

Respecting one's parents and being kind to them, especially in old age, being good to one's neighbour, and encouraging good and discouraging evil are essential virtues.

These make the fundamentals of Islam and being a Muslim.

Life is short and soon, very soon we will all die, but death is not the end.

The Quran teaches that there is a day of judgment when God will assemble us together and we will have to answer for everything that we have done. Every atom's weight of good and evil, we will know about.

For those who rejected truth, who chose to rebel, there is a terrible punishment in store. It is a choice they made. The truth was clear to them, yet they preferred to ignore it, and so an awful fate awaits them, the fire of hell, where people will be roasted and burnt yet will not die, but continue to suffer eternally.

Those who were good and lived a life of obedience to God will live forever in complete joy and bliss in paradise. There will be no hatred or anger or jealousy, just peace and happiness, physical and spiritual. What a beautiful abode!

That, really, is what the Creator is inviting us to; His paradise. Following Islam does not mean that there will be no more tests or difficulties in life. In fact, the Creator tells us that we will not be left just saying we believe without being tested. Following the guidance of God teaches us how to deal with those tests, and hardship turns into ease, confusion into understanding, pain into pleasure, and sadness into joy.

Knowing this and following it brings true peace to the heart. In this sense Islam really does bring peace. A peace that is not merely the absence of war, but a peace that is deeper and more profound.

Chapter 8

THE JOURNEY'S END

So there we have it.

We have neared the end of our journey and the destination is in view. There is really only one thing left to do!

It's about time to open that door and let the true message from the Creator guide your life.

Yes, it may seem a bit strange and the things you need to do are probably not those you are quite used to. You're probably wondering what your family and friends will say! Well, you can always try just saying nothing except "read this" and pass it on!

As I said before, the difficult part is not understanding how much sense this all makes, the really hard part is doing it! In fact, really, honestly, truly even that is not so hard!

Just start by making a firm intention that you are doing this because it's what the One who created you wants you to do! Then why not actually try asking for some help. Yes! Just go ahead and try asking the Creator of all things, and ask Him alone, not through anyone or anything, just direct to the Creator, and do it sincerely from your heart to guide and help you to do the right thing.

OK! So how do you feel?

Well, if you feel the way I expect you to, then all you have to do is follow these steps.

Simply say: "I am a witness that there really is no god except the One God and that Mohammed is the Messenger of God (technically that is what makes you Muslim) or in Arabic "Ash shadu an laa il laaha il Allah wa ashadu anna Mohammadan rasul lu lah!"

You need to start learning to pray the five prayers that a Muslim has to pray every day. To learn how to do this, or for any other help contact "Muslim Now" (www.muslimnow.org).

And that really is just about all you have to take care of right now.

May the peace and blessing of God be with you always.

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