

## Chapter 2

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### IN REBUTTAL OF ATHEISM

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Alongside the recent rising interest in the religion and science interface, atheists have come out with best seller books denigrating all religions, maintaining that there is no evidence of the existence of a Creator. Using their claimed tool of reason and evidence, this essay shows that this question cannot be answered by bottoms up search of humans, but only by top down information originating from the Creator. Such information exists, but we need to rise above our preconceived notions and give it a fair hearing, based on rational considerations alone. The reality will then become manifest.

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### **BACKGROUND**

There has no doubt been increasing interest in developing a productive relationship between science and religion over the past

few decades, demonstrated by the rise of centers affiliated with reputable universities like Harvard, Princeton, Berkley and Oxford dealing with studies in science and religion.

In parallel, the forces of atheism are aggressively getting organized and have mounted concerted attacks on religion, especially the Abrahamic religions, and have tried to exploit the weaknesses of the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, by referring to their internal contradictions, inconsistencies, and conflicting viewpoints with modern knowledge. These have been exploited by the atheist crowd to discredit revelation *per se* and by implication infer that this shows that the existence of a super intelligent Creator is a delusion.

This chapter has been prompted by those recent best sellers appearing on the market by prominent atheists like Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, and Robert Stanger. Atheists are to be congratulated on bringing to the fore this most basic and important question about the existence or otherwise of the Creator. The author could not agree more that this issue needs to be resolved once and for all.

Let us also shake hands with them on the contention that the currency of discourse (as it is not fruitful to handle it in the form of a debate) should be based on reason and evidence and not faith. Nothing less will do in today's world. Let it also be remembered, as this book will show, that reason and evidence are not the monopoly of the atheists. In fact, reason was introduced by revelation in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, at least 1000 years before the start of the European "Enlightenment" during the 17-18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

My case is based on the 'Argument from Scripture' but with an essential difference. Dawkins tries to tear apart the Old and New Testaments which tantamount to discrediting the Ptolemaic and Newtonian sciences in today's context. The framework of today's science is based on Einsteinian Relativity and Quantum Mechanics just as the case for revelation ever since the 7<sup>th</sup> century relies on the final testament i.e. the Qur'an and not the Bible. So in all fairness, Dr. Dawkins and associates should match their wits with the Qur'an and see where they end up. To date, the atheists have not fully addressed a critique of the Quran as part of their writings against revelation, thereby ignoring a major pillar in the argument.

## CLEAR DEFINITION OF REVELATION

In order to have a meaningful discourse revelation must be defined precisely. Revelation is neither merely inspiration, under influence of which the four Apostle's of the New Testament are said to have penned their letters, nor can it be something which has undergone translation, alteration, adulteration or any form of human addition. It must be the pristine word of the Creator and literally be word for word from the Creator, such as the ten Commandment tablets received by Moses on Mount Sinai (and not the ones quoted in the extant Bible where they have again been translated if not also altered somewhat), for example the commandment about Sabbath.

Of all the claimed revelations, I will demonstrate that only the Qur'an lives up to this standard based on the objective yardstick enumerated therein (see chapter 3). Furthermore, let it be pointed out that it is a common mistake to treat the Qur'an only as a holy book of the Muslims, which it undoubtedly is; but it certainly is not a monopoly of the Muslims. It is guidance from on High for all of humankind without any exceptions.

Qur'an clearly belies the charge that it was written by Muhammad under inspiration of the biblical stories reaching him. It is true that it was brought in parts to the Prophet by Archangel Gabriel over 23 years who commanded the Prophet to recite Words which came verbatim from the Almighty Creator. Thus there is no mixture whatsoever in the text with the Prophet's own thoughts or ideas. Revelation was received by the Prophet always in a wakeful state and never in a dream. Muslim tradition describes in detail how the Prophet, while receiving revelation, would start sweating even in cold weather, his weight would increase and he would feel and show signs of distress. The point is that revelation was unmistakably differentiated from the Prophet's own thoughts and statements. There has been no confusion in Muslim literature on this count.

## THE CASE FOR ATHEISM

In the twentieth century, the case for atheism was projected in a paper published in the 1950's by the philosopher Anthony Flew who later on was dubbed as the guru of 20<sup>th</sup> century atheism. As it happened, rather to the chagrin of his followers Mr. Flew, quite courageously, changed his mind somewhat towards the end of the

century when he announced that recent developments in genetics especially the extreme complexity of the genetic code and DNA demonstrated that chance mutations and natural selection alone could not explain the rise of such complexity and that left room for super intelligent intervention. This was quite a shock for the hard core atheists.

Recently, there has again been a resurgence in the advocacy of atheism and a spate of books have appeared represented best perhaps by *"The God Delusion"* of Richard Dawkins and a *"Letter to the Christian Nation"* by Sam Harris, and *"God is not Great"* by Christopher Hitchens which have become best sellers showing that the core case for atheism still draws a lot of attention and interest. The notable new feature of these best sellers is the aggressive tone employed by the authors especially Dr. Dawkins who while putting his case effectively, in his usual manner, has also been sufficiently abrasive to jolt Dr. Deepak Chopra, an otherwise mild writer to comment that, "In his new book Dawkins expresses his position with deep disdain for those who disagree, and his poisonous tone weakens the argument."

A common view about these books is that the arguments used and the case presented is not all that different from one another. Their books mostly reflect the differences in the backgrounds of the authors and their fields of work so much so that it has led Prof. Terry Eagleton to club the two authors, the first and the last, together as Ditchkins. I will thus be treating Dawkins to represent the atheist's position.

Dawkins feels that "why" is a foolish, probably meaningless question, totally devoid of scientific interest. So be it. But "why" happens to be the single most important question humans ask, particularly when it comes to ourselves. Ultimately we want to know who we are and our purpose for being here. Dawkins doesn't seem to have any doubt about who he is: he's the evolutionary byproduct of chemical forces, physical laws, random events, natural selection, competition, adaptation, and survival. So is an amoeba. Sadly, this reductionist picture of human life is devoid of meaning. It's merely a map of how a physical machine called the body came to be built. Such knowledge is like knowing everything about a computer except how to plug it in.

### **MCGRATH'S SUMMARY OF DAWKINS CASE AGAINST RELIGION**

Let us look at the case made by Dawkins in favor of atheism which has been well summarized by the Oxford theologian Alister McGrath in the following words in his book *Dawkins' God*:

Dawkins hostility to religion is deep rooted, and not grounded in one specific concern. Four interconnected grounds of hostility may be found throughout his writings:

1. A Darwinian worldview makes belief in God unnecessary or impossible. Although hinted at in the *Selfish Gene*, the idea is developed in detail in the *Blind Watchmaker*.
2. Religion makes assertions which are grounded in faith, which represents a retreat from a rigorous, evidence-based concern for truth. For Dawkins truth is grounded in explicit proof. Any form of obscurantism or mysticism grounded in faith is to be opposed vigorously.
3. Religion offers an impoverished and attenuated vision of the world. "The universe presented by organized religion is a poky little medieval universe, and extremely limited."<sup>15</sup> In contrast, science offers a bold and brilliant vision of the universe as grand, beautiful, and awe-inspiring. This aesthetic critique of religion is developed especially in Dawkin's 1998 work "Unweaving the Rainbow."
4. Religion leads to evil. It is like a malignant virus, infecting human minds. This is not strictly a scientific judgment, in that, as Dawkins often points out, the sciences cannot determine what is good or evil, "Science has no methods for deciding what is ethical."<sup>16</sup> It is however, a profoundly moral objection to religion, deeply rooted within Western culture and history, which must be taken with the greatest seriousness.

### **REPLY TO DAWKINS BY MCGRATH**

McGrath quotes Dawkins, "Darwin has changed everything. Newton would be an atheist if he had been born after Darwin. Before Darwin, atheism was one amongst many religious possibilities; now, it is the only serious option for a thinking, honest, and scientifically informed person. To believe in God now a days is to be "hoodwink'd with faery fancy".

Intellectual history is thus divided into two epics: before Darwin, and after Darwin. As James Watson, the Nobel Prize winner and co-discoverer of DNA arguably put it, "Charles Darwin will eventually be seen as a far more influential figure in the history of human thought than either Jesus Christ or Mohammed."

In reply McGrath asks, But why Darwin? Why not Karl Marx or Sigmund Freud? Each of these is regularly proposed as having brought about an intellectual earthquake, shattering prevailing assumptions and ushering in radical new ways of thinking which lead to the bifurcation of human thought. The theory of biological evolution, historical materialism, and psychoanalysis have all been proposed as defining the contours of humanity coming of age. All interestingly, have been linked with atheism, the movement that the 19th and early 20th centuries hoped would prove to be an intellectual and political liberator. So why Darwin?

#### **REPLY TO DAWKINS BY CHOPRA**

Dr. Chopra summarizes Dawkins arguments in his characteristically clear manner as follows:

*Dawkins makes many points to support his claim that religion is nonsense and that there isn't the slightest shred of rational proof for God, miracles, the soul, etc. That science is the only valid way to gain knowledge. Nothing about God is needed to explain the world. Eventually, Science will uncover all mysteries. Those that it can't explain don't exist.*

*This is the bedrock of Dawkins' arguments, as it is of most skeptics and scientific atheists. In his new book Dawkins expresses his position with deep disdain for those who disagree, and his poisonous tone weakens the argument. Yet, there is no doubt that with current advances in genetics and brain research, scientists have more confidence than ever that mysteries are being unraveled as never before. By the same token, something as primitive as faith in God looks more and more pointless and misguided. At best, God is a matter of personal belief, at worst a superstition that blocks progress (in the way the Bush administration uses theology to block stem cell research).*

Dr. Chopra taking serious issues with Dawkins has the following to say about the core point of Dawkins that science alone is the route to valid source of information in the modern age:

*The unfairness of this argument is that it squeezes God into a corner. Dawkins makes it an us-versus-them issue. Either you are for science (that is, reason, progress, modernism, optimism about the future) or you are for religion (that is, unreason, reactionary resistance to progress, clinging to mysteries that only God can solve). He goes so far as to tar anyone who believes in God with the same brush as extreme religious fanatics. Sadly, the media often follow his lead, erasing the truth which is that many scientists are religious and many of the greatest scientists (including Newton and Einstein) probed deeply into the existence of God. Not to mention the obvious fact that you don't have to go to church, or even belong to a religion, to find God plausible.*

#### **INADEQUACIES OF RESPONSES OF MCGRATH AND CHOPRA**

To both Dawkins and Dr. Chopra, one would like to point out that God does not need to expound the intricacies of Quantum mechanics or Relativity or the Theory of Evolution to humans through revelation. For this purpose, the Creator has endowed us with a brain and our senses which are sufficient to do the needful. Qur'an says emphatically that man has been given the power through the judicious use of his intellect not only to understand the physical universe, but to use and exploit it for his own ends.

#### **QUR'AN INTRODUCES THE CURRENCY OF REASON**

There was a time such as that of Moses and even in the times of Jesus that the entire world thought that magic and miracles were the way of convincing both the plebeians and the elite.

When Moses confronted the Pharaoh no one in the Pharaoh's court made fun of him when he started to demonstrate his bevy of miracles. Pharaoh's courtiers only said that this was nothing but magic and thus in reply Pharaoh summoned the best known magicians of Egypt to come and confront Moses. The currency of the debate of the day was thus acknowledged by both sides to be one of magic and miracles.

Interestingly when the magicians threw their ropes which appeared like slithering serpents Moses was directed to throw his staff which ate up the snakes of the magicians. It was the magicians who gave up first, acknowledging that whatever Moses had done was certainly not magic, which was something they well understood and they declared their willingness to believe in the Lord of Moses.

Pharaoh's anger knew no bounds and he thundered that how dare the magicians surrender to Moses without the permission of Pharaoh, the God of all. But the magicians insisted that they knew their trade and could distinguish between magic from something which was other than magic, and based on their knowledge they were compelled to accept the logic of Moses. They told Pharaoh that they knew that he could have their skins pulled and have them killed but that is all he could do. Pharaoh had no control over the magicians' hearts and minds which had now come to accept the Lord of Moses as their master and Creator.

The rest as they say is history. Pharaoh was unmoved by this, not being able to distinguish magic from miracles and kept up with his persecution of the Israelites until he and his hosts were drowned in the bigger miracle of the parting of the waters. The point being that those with knowledge, the magicians, could see the difference but those without knowledge, i.e., the Pharaoh and most of his courtiers remained unconvinced. It was only while drowning that even Pharaoh had no choice but to say that he too was willing to believe in the God of Moses, not by voluntary choice but under circumstances of compulsion. Qur'an declares that it was too late for Pharaoh to repent. Repentance is meaningful only when done voluntarily and by exercising ones free choice.

Even during the peak of Greek philosophy and logic, the common populace whether of Greece or Rome was still governed and carried away by magic and superstition. The halls of the Oracle of Delphi were much more popular than the schools of Plato and Aristotle.

Coming to revelation, the New Testament, like the Old Testament, bases its case on miraculous cures and doings of Jesus rather than an appeal to reason. Of course, according to the Qur'an the revelation received by Jesus was not quite the same as the extant New Testament, which at best is a humanly written account of what certain apostles or individuals could gather about the teachings of Jesus. It is the accepted view of historians that none of the four Apostles Mathew, Mark, Luke or John had the honor of meeting or learning directly from Jesus or any of the original apostles. Even Paul, often called the founder of modern Christianity, as will surprise many people, never personally met Jesus or had the opportunity to benefit directly from the guidance of Jesus. What happened to the original

revelation of Jesus, which must have been in Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus, is shrouded in the mists of history.

Instead what we have as the New Testament are accounts, claimed as God inspired accounts, but written almost a century later on the average in old Greek and only remnants of those are available. In addition, the books of the extant New Testament were selected by a council of Bishops under Emperor Constantine, held in the 4<sup>th</sup> century at Nicea out of almost 20 books presented for inclusion in the Bible. What goes as the New Testament is the translation into modern languages of the modern Greek version which was claimed to be based on fragments of the writings of the four apostles, who albeit may have been inspired but never actually met Jesus or even his original disciples.

To what extent the New Testament then reflects the revelation originally received by Jesus can only be a matter of individual inclination and guess work. Thus it is quite surprising, when one thinks about it, the amount of energy and ink wasted by the atheists of all hues in demolishing the basis and content of both the New Testament and the Old Testament which is on even weaker grounds, which stands documented so copiously in world literature that it is not worth repeating here. The point is that whatever the status of these scriptures they seemed to have staked their case on the basis of miracles and supernatural occurrences, which was the commonly accepted norm of the age.

#### **CASE FOR REVELATION BASED ON REASON AND NOT FAITH**

There is a lot in what has been expressed by the viewpoints stated by McGrath and Chopra, but it does not appear likely that people of Dr. Dawkins thinking will be impressed by this line of reasoning because they have in their minds already rejected such reasoning however sound it may look to the other side. I would like to approach the subject from a different direction.

I would like to take up Dr. Dawkins on his own turf of using reason as the yardstick and not allow faith based arguments to intrude into our discussion. Let us accept the stance of Dr. Dawkins that reason is and can be the only arbiter and every assertion must be supported by and be based on objective evidence which can be verified or falsified in the manner practiced by science. Faith, or other

feelings, not amenable to the measuring techniques of science will be kept out of consideration.

In Dr. Dawkins framework, miracles are hog wash because they do not measure up to the critical criteria of science. But what if some miracles did live up to the criteria of science? Perhaps then Dr. Dawkins will say that they are not miracles. We all are aware that the classical miracles starting with the flood of Noah's time followed by Prophet Abraham not being affected by the intense heat of fire, or the well known miracles of Moses preceding the exodus of the Jews from Egypt, the staff of Moses turning into a serpent which ate up the snakes of the Egyptian magicians and sorcerers, the hand of Moses turning white and finally the parting of the waters to drown the hordes of the Pharaoh as well as the miracles of Jesus in curing the lepers and the blind and in resurrecting the dead are all based on the authority of the scriptures and not much else. Any other evidence which may have been marshaled by proponents of miracles, archaeological or other is arguable and suspect.

#### **RESPONSE TO CARL SAGAN'S COMMENTS IN CONTACT**

Another icon of atheists has been the well known host of the wonderful TV series "Cosmos", Carl Sagan. In his usual inimitable fashion Sagan, in his scifi novel *Contact* (p. 166 to 173) puts forth some concrete suggestions as to how the subject of the Creators existence or otherwise can be approached:

*But imagine that your kind of god - omnipotent, omniscient, compassionate - really wanted to leave a record for future generations, to make his existence unmistakable to, say, the remote descendants of Moses. It's easy, trivial. Just a few enigmatic phrases, and some fierce commandment that they be passed on unchanged...Joss leaned forward almost imperceptibly. 'Such as ...?*

*'Such as "The Sun is a star." Or "Mars is a rusty place with deserts and volcanoes, like Sinai." Or "A body in motion tends to remain in motion." Or-let's see now' she quickly scribbled some numbers on a pad. "The Earth weighs a million million million million times as much as a child." Or- I recognize that both of you seem to have some trouble with special relativity, but it's confirmed every day routinely in particle accelerators and cosmic rays - how about "There are no privileged frames*

of reference"? Or even "Thou shalt not travel faster than light." Anything they couldn't possibly have known three thousand years ago.

'Any other?' Joss asked.

'Well, there is an indefinite number of them – or at least one for every principle of physics. Let's see...."Heat and light hide in the smallest pebble." Or even "The way of the Earth is as two, but the way of the lodestone is as three." I'm trying to suggest that the gravitational force follows an inverse square law, while the magnetic dipole force follows an inverse cube law. Or in biology' – she nodded toward der Heer, who seemed to have taken a vow of silence – 'how about "Two strands entwined is the secret of life"?'

What I am saying is, if God wanted to send us a message, and ancient writings were the only way he could think of doing it, he could have done a better job. And he hardly had to confine himself to writings. Why isn't there a monster crucifix orbiting the earth? Why isn't the surface of the moon covered with the Ten Commandments? Why should God be so clear in the Bible and so obscure in the world?

"So how come fellas, why don't we see him with crystal clarity"? Oh come off it. You know what I mean. Where are the burning bushes, the pillars of fire, the great voice that says "I am that I am" booming down at us out of the sky? Why should God manifest Himself in such subtle and debatable ways when he can make his presence completely unambiguous?

If that signal is from God, why does it come from just one place in the sky- in the vicinity of a particularly bright nearby star? Why doesn't it come from all over the sky at once, like the cosmic black- body background radiation? Coming from one star, it looks like a signal from another civilization. Coming from everywhere, it would look much more like a signal from God.

Occam's razor says if you have two different, equally good explanation of the same experience, you pick the simplest. The whole history of science supports it.

How can a thoroughgoing conscientious scientist be an agnostic? If you can even imagine a world without God? Wouldn't you just have to be an atheist?

If the laws of nature explain all the available facts without supernatural intervention, or even do only as well as the God hypothesis, then for the

*time being I'd call myself an atheist. Then, if a single piece of evidence was discovered that doesn't fit, I 'd back off from atheism.*

*I say again, if your God wanted to convince us, He could have done a much better job.*

In his inimitable manner Sagan is making two points:

First that God could have stated in the revelation (ancient book) things that could not possibly have been known to humans of the time and were only discovered by science much later.

Secondly, better still, being the omnipotent Creator some overwhelming piece of evidence such as "Why isn't there a monster crucifix orbiting the earth? Why isn't the surface of the moon covered with the Ten Commandments? Why should God be so clear in the Bible and so obscure in the world?" or one might add "Why could He not make the sun rise in the West?"

Interestingly, the Creator responds in the Qur'an to both of these points very clearly. It is almost as if such observations/comments of the skeptics had been foreseen and answered in advance.

Regarding the first point, Qur'an, as touched upon in these writings, which will be more fully elaborated in my forthcoming book, gives dozens of instances, from various fields of knowledge such as Cosmology, Embryology, Genetics, Geology, Meteorology, Sociology and History, to name just a few of them. The overall effect of all this evidence is collectively so overwhelming, and it was that which brought me back to my senses when I too drifted close to skepticism. It adds up to showing beyond any reasonable doubt that it is indeed a revelation from the Creator of the Universes (if indeed they turn out to be more than one) and not a human product.

However Sagan has every right to point out that instead of all these signs why could the Creator not produce one overpowering expression of his power and majesty which would have made all humans bow down to His authority and accept His existence. Not surprisingly, the same question was posed to Prophet Muhammad by his pagan listeners in Mecca. The Qur'an responds by stating that, for sure, this is the easiest thing for the Almighty Creator to do, but it happens not to be part of His design. It will happen but that will take place only on the last day, the day of reckoning if you like. Until that time, mankind has been given the freedom of choice, and if such an

overpowering proof were to be forthcoming now then it would signal the end of that freedom.

Freedom of choice for humans is an important integral part of the Creator's design when Man was declared the vicegerent of God, and this would explain the lack of an overpowering sign.

Qur'an further elaborates that all the rest of nature i.e. the sun, moon, stars, mountains, physical phenomenon, plants, even animals and birds unquestioningly obey the Creator's laws. It is only humans who have been given the freedom of choice. But, it points out; they must remember that they will be held accountable for the choices they make. It is not going to be a free ride.

#### **DISTINGUISHING AUTHENTIC REVELATION FROM INSPIRED WRITINGS**

This brings out the necessity and crucial importance of distinguishing genuine revelation from revelation which did originate from the Creator when it was initially made known. This was the case of the revelation given to Jesus called Injil in the Qur'an which would have been in Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus, but has subsequently either gotten lost in the vicissitudes of history or was reconstructed by human authors, at best under inspiration or at times to serve their own agendas. These works therefore cannot fully represent genuine revelation and can at best claim to be only second grade representations of guidance from the Almighty.

It is well known in knowledgeable circles that a translation of any work into another language can never retain and carry the full meaning or import of the original, however sincere or capable the effort may be. Let alone when one talks of trying to translate or convey the meaning of God's own words which, stemming from the super intelligence, must perforce be unique and unmatched. Professor Hanna E. Kassis of the University of California in her *Concordance of Qur'an* states, "Translations lose much in tone and nuance, let alone the incommunicable beauty, grandeur, and grace of the original". She further states, "The Qur'an is unique among sacred books in style, unity of language and authorship, and significance in the life of the faith it governs. The western reader should be prepared to receive it on its own terms."

Similarly, Professor Arberry quotes Pickthall who maintains:

*The Koran cannot be translated. That is the belief of old fashioned Sheykhs and the view of the present writer. The book is here rendered literally and every effort has been made to choose befitting language. But the result is not the glorious Koran, that inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy. It is only an attempt to present the meaning of the Koran – and peradventure something of the charm in English. It can never take the place of the Koran in Arabic nor is it meant to do so.*

*Pickthall and Arberry p.21*

*Briefly the rhetoric and rhythm of the Arabic of the Koran are so characteristic so powerful, so highly emotive, that any version whatsoever is bound in the nature of things to be but a poor copy of the glittering splendor of the original. Never was it more true than in this instance that “traduttore traditore” (translation traitor).*

*Arberry p.24*

Thus, it is a *sina qua non* that any such claim to being authentic revelation must be available in its original language in which it was revealed and be in its original form and sequence in which it was announced by the recipient and stand the scrutiny of having been preserved over history and be available for study and reference by all concerned. The only claimed revelation which can stand such scrutiny and meet the above requirements, by a wide margin, is Al Qur’an, the recitation received by Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century A.D.

#### **CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING THE AUTHENTICITY OF REVELATION**

Anything claiming to originate from the Creator must be capable of meeting the most stringent, but reasonable criteria.

Such a draft criteria has been proposed in my article appearing in the 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2008, issue of the Science and Religion journal *Zygon* along with an invitation to refine and expand the same by anyone seriously interested so that it can act as a common yardstick to ascertain the authenticity or otherwise of any claimed revelation. It then goes on to show how the authentic revelation can not only stand all the objections raised by the atheist viewpoint, but actually convincingly demonstrate that such authentic revelation simply could not be the product of any human agency and thus its origin has to be accepted to be a “super intelligent source”.

Furthermore, the Qur'an explicitly explains what it is, who it is from, and then goes on to tell us what we need to know, and the limited degree to which human minds can comprehend the reality of the Creator and the "Big Questions" such as, What is the purpose and objective of life? What are we doing on this earth? What follows death, etc...

#### **ADVENT OF THE AGE OF REASON**

The challenge of deciphering genuine from tampered revelation changes radically when we come to the final testament i.e. the Qur'an. There we find a fundamental shift in the paradigm. Not only is the Qur'an available in its original language, Arabic, but its form and content is faithfully preserved in the form and shape that Muhammad passed on to his companions and associates and can be obtained readily from any large bookshop of the world in its original rendering and language. But the point that concerns us here really is that though the Qur'an calls itself the miracle given to prophet Muhammad it basis its whole case not on the old style miracles of Moses and Jesus (which called for faith rather than reason), but on the need for reflection, pondering and thinking in order to understand the message of the revelation.

Six hundred years after Jesus, humanity had matured and by the time of Muhammad, for the first time we find that the currency of miracles has been replaced with the currency of reason and evidence. Qur'an says that it is the miracle of Muhammad which appeals to man not by overpowering his senses but by urging him to make full use of the senses bestowed upon him by his Creator. This was the beginning of the age of reason.

It is as if the sender of the revelations wanted to announce that mankind had matured and developed and come out of the age of old style miracles and magic such that it will now be more amenable to the use of reason and logic. This was a giant step in the history of mankind. Mankind had now come of age. The advent of the Qur'an can thus be rightly considered to be the beginning of the age of reason and not sometime in seventeenth century Europe. The age of reason had now dawned. Its sun would never set and from now on reason would rule the day and be the touchstone of human progress.

The followers of Muhammad took this lesson to heart and it is amazing how these rough denizens of the Arabian desert who had little culture and no intellectual achievements to show until that time not only extended their physical domains from China to Spain but much more importantly developed open mindedness and the ability to absorb all kinds of knowledge from all kinds of people they came in contact with, Greeks, Persians, Hindus or Chinese. For the next five centuries from the 7<sup>th</sup> to at least the 12<sup>th</sup> century the Arabs displayed outstanding allegiance to reason and gave rise to a remarkable civilization, which sparked off the new awakening in Europe through the Arab influence seeping through their dominions in Spain and Sicily which were still part of the Muslim lands. This story has been covered in greater detail in my forthcoming book.

The impetus for all this was no other than the status given to reason in the Qur'anic teachings and the rational conduct displayed by the prophet Muhammad and the new spirit of reason inculcated in his followers. With the sack of Baghdad by the Mongols and the gradual reconquista of Spain by resurgent Christianity this phase seems to have come to an end and the torch of reason was picked up and so ably carried forward by the newly awakened and rising Europe through its Renaissance, Reformation and most importantly by the industrial and the modern scientific revolutions.

The difficulty faced by Europe was that this new spirit of rational enquiry and reason were totally incompatible with the spirit of the Old and New Testaments which still carried over its legacy of miracles and magic, and this could not be cured through the attempts made to bridge the gap through the Herculean efforts of the instigators of the Reformation. The result was that as the spirit of rational enquiry took deeper roots and developed further, the gulf with the scriptures widened and the inadequacies of the scriptures kept showing up more and more leading to moves away from Christianity towards agnosticism and atheism typified by the philosophers preceding the French Revolution such as Rousseau, Voltaire and Hobbes.

In the Islamic world although there was a resurgence of military and economic power, after the debacles of Baghdad and Spain, under the banners of the Ottomans, the Safavids and the Mughal empires, the spirit of rational enquiry ignited by the Qur'an seems to have

subsided and the gulf between practices of the Muslim peoples and the teachings especially the rational spirit engendered by the Qur'an kept getting wider and wider until a situation has been reached where it would not be wrong to say that the Muslims have almost abdicated the Qur'an, in spirit at least, if not in name. This will be covered in detail in my forthcoming book, *The Case for God*.

Thus, both in the West and the Islamic world, the position is that a big gulf has opened up between the proponents of reason and the proponents of scripture which is unfortunate. As this book tries to show there is no real conflict between reason and authentic revelation. As explained earlier, the age of reason in reality was ushered in not by the efforts of human philosophers after the European Renaissance but by the final revelation, i.e., the Qur'an. What is needed is for mankind to marry rational enquiry with the guidance of the final and rational revelation i.e. the Qur'an to find solutions to mankind's perennial problems of racial discrimination, gender inequalities, economic and social injustices, environmental concerns and the rising specter of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism. This is not an attempt at proselytization, rather it is an effort to point out that there is a moral law pervading the universe, just like the physical laws of science. Without this, mankind cannot find its true bearings and that can only come through revelation from the Creator.

Effectively, it said that this is not only possible but is indeed the case for all nature, i.e., the sun, the moon, and the plants and animals. All follow the built-in laws of nature given by God—none of them dare to question and disbelieve—only humans can do that—why? By the Creator's own design, they have been given the freedom of choice. They have been made free to either believe or disbelieve even in His existence. At the physical plane, life goes on, same for a believer or a disbeliever. Even the most arrogant of the disbelievers, the Pharaoh, is not denied the air to breathe or life giving water to drink because everyone has been given the freedom of choice.

Dawkins has been guilty of the very fault that he so vehemently condemns in the Creationists, i.e., that of selectively picking the evidence which suits them. Here, Dawkins has done exactly the same by picking up Bible (the Old and New Testaments) as scriptures and

accepting the claims that they are authentic revelation from the Almighty God, yet he has not even addressed the Quran.

#### **THE ARGUMENT FROM SCRIPTURE**

Dawkins lists out the various arguments which have been used to prove the existence of God at various times such as the ontological arguments from beauty, personal experiments, scriptures, and then proceeds to demolish them one by one. Here, I would like to take up his argument from scripture and show the crucial evidence that Dawkins has missed out.

This book maintains that while no absolute proof exists of God's existence as stated in the Qur'an itself, it is not because an All Powerful God could not have produced an all convincing show, rather it is purposely done by God to allow his creation, mankind, to retain the freedom of choice which God desired to bestow upon His creation.

While rebutting the argument from scripture, Dawkins quotes three points made by C.S. Lewis and then adds a fourth from his own.

Dawkins quotes C.S. Lewis in saying that the historical evidence that Jesus claimed any sort of divine status is minimal. If scriptures maintain that Jesus claimed to be the son of God, he must have been either right or else insane or a liar, i.e., "lunatic, liar, or lord." Dawkins adds that a fourth possibility, almost too obvious to need mentioning, is that Jesus was honestly mistaken (*God Delusion*, p.92).

I would like to mention a fifth possibility which Dawkins seems to have missed out and that is the stand taken by the Qur'an, that Jesus never maintained that he was divine. It was his followers who venerated him and heaped divinity upon Jesus. If Jesus was to learn of what has happened, he would likely be most disappointed and angry. Qur'an clarifies this mistake by stating that Jesus was none but an honored messenger of God just like Abraham, Moses, and Mohammed (May peace be upon them all).

Dawkins picks up on the New Testament citing paragraph after paragraph of inconsistencies and inaccuracies therein. No one can argue with this viewpoint. Qur'an too says the same. After all, that was the reason why the Old Testament was replaced with the revelation to Jesus (the original of which was either lost long ago or perhaps was never even compiled in the form of a book). The New

Testament was an attempt by the followers of Jesus to do their best in recreating what they understood of his teachings and therefore cannot be categorized as revelation from God. When the same fate overtook the New Testament, it was replaced by the Qur'an—the Final Testament. The Qur'an claims that God himself is the guardian and the Qur'an cannot and will not be corrupted which is why it is dubbed the final testament. More relevant to this discussion, Qur'an rests its case not on miracles, as in the past scriptures, but appeals to reason and urges its readers to think, to ponder, to reflect, to deliberate, and use their minds and not to follow even verses of the Qur'an blindly.

According to Dawkins, "One of the truly bad effects of religion is to be satisfied with non-understanding (*God Delusion*, p.126). Dawkins is exactly right, but this holds only for what might be called tampered religions or corrupted revelation. Genuine revelation, on the other hand, which is the Qur'an, totally supports this viewpoint. Qur'an, on no less than 44 occasions, invokes the need to reason, ponder, and think, leaving no room to be satisfied with non-understanding.

On page 127, Dawkins states, "On the other hand, evolution makes the strong prediction that if a single fossil turned up in the wrong geological stratum, the theory would be blown out of the water." Compare this with the statement of the Qur'an that this is a book in which there are no contradictions or inconsistencies and it is prepared to be judged on the same stringent yardstick.

Regarding the weaknesses of the God of the gap argument (stated by Dawkins, page 128), where he states that creationists adore gaps, the Qur'an's position is that gaps are of a temporary nature because there is no end to the extent of knowledge. The universe is infinite. Quran specifically states that, "if all the trees were pens and oceans ink, then knowledge would not end."

#### **QUR'AN - UNIQUE MIRACLE OF MIRACLES THAT MAKES ITS CASE ON REASON**

Qur'an—a miracle of miracles, not just because it is supernatural, but because it is a miracle which can be verified by reason. Qur'an states that it is the miracle given to Prophet Muhammad. Now that does sound rather strange. Qur'an on the face of it is only a book,

*albeit* claims to be revelation. But it is nothing as dramatic as Noah's flood, or Moses parting of the sea, or Jesus giving life to the dead until one really examines and studies what it says to realize what an amazing piece of evidence it is. For example, Qur'an makes astounding claims about itself, about its unique style, its inimitable language, and priceless content which have been detailed in various places in this book.

#### EVIDENCE OF VERACITY OF QURAN

1. Claims of the Qur'an, its majestic language, its consistency, its clarity. Lack of any contradictions therein.
2. Various prophecies stated in the Qur'an, which have come true over time such as the triumph of Muslim armies over the Persians and earlier of the least likely victory of the Byzantines over the threatening army of the Chosroes. (See Hitti's *History of the Arabs*).
3. Reference to items of knowledge pronounced 1400 years ago which are found to be so compatible with modern knowledge that they could not be known to people of those times unless originating from the Almighty, Super-intelligent.
4. Allah being the guardian and protector of the Qur'an, which is so eminently borne out by its history ever since its revelation in the seventh century AD.
5. The unusual claim that Qur'an has been made easy to remember, which is borne out by the hundreds of thousands of Qur'an memorizers all over the Islamic world.
6. Underlying numerical patterns and design - Numbers 19 and 9, etc.
7. Amenability to falsification tests.
8. Living miracle, always available for reference, testing, and verification.
9. Sad fate of modern Muslims who have abandoned its teachings resulting in the opposite of *istikhlaf fil ardh* (to be given paramouncy over this earth).

The above points have been discussed further in the following chapters. Fuller details will follow in my forthcoming book with the same title *The Case for God*.

## **BOLD CLAIMS OF THE QUR'AN**

At the risk of repeating, Qur'an is not a book of Science; rather it may be called a book of signs, containing guidance for mankind in the moral sphere. It teaches man what he knows not (and cannot know fully by his senses alone), i.e., it teaches us about who we are, what are we doing on this earth, what follows death, what is expected of us, and what is our relationship with the Creator. When Qur'an does talk of the universe, physical phenomenon, human nature, etc., it is actually making some point and driving home some moral lessons or giving a sign about the existence of the Almighty Creator. This is the principal theme of this book.

Qur'an boldly proclaims that it is consistent and free of any contradictions whatsoever. It has been made easy to remember, which is borne out by the amazing fact that hundreds of thousands of Muslims all over the Muslim world, even those who do not understand a word of Arabic, the language of the Qur'an, remember it by heart and can recite this book, of approximately the size of the New Testament, from cover to cover with felicity and ease. Such persons are to be found amongst all Muslim populations Arabs and non-Arabs including Iranians, Turks, Indians, Chinese, Indonesians, Africans, and across Europe and North America and the rest of the Western world. Indeed no one can question or doubt that Qur'an has been made easy to remember. Question then arises, made by whom? No human, however exceptional, could have achieved this feat. Muhammad expressly stated that it was not his word and he was only a vehicle for its expression. What sayest thou Dr. Dawkins? How can this "feat" be explained except by the claim that it is indeed a special creation and a manifest sign of the Almighty Creator?

Perhaps it will be said that no human could have done this but who is to rule out that super-intelligent extra terrestrials could have pulled it off. If so to what end? The book has no other agenda but the welfare and future development of the human race. If the extra terrestrials had done it they would have taken some credit for it or left some clues and hints, however veiled, as to their identity, or how to contact them.

Qur'an, in fact, states categorically that it is the word of the Almighty Creator and goes at length to spell out the attributes of the Creator. Most interestingly Qur'an repeatedly urges mankind to use

their intellect and reasoning and even states that the verses of the Qur'an itself should be reflected upon and pondered over and not accepted blindly and just on faith. Now what else could Dr. Dawkins ask for? Instead of belief based on faith Qur'an says, "We will show you our signs in the four corners of the Universe and in yourselves that indeed this is the truth." If this is not using the yardstick of reason Dr. Dawkins, what is?

Qur'an allows full freedom to scientists and searchers to explore all nooks and corners of knowledge without any hindrance. If a scientist's findings are leading him away from the explanations or viewpoints mentioned in the Qur'an, he should not be stopped or discouraged from pursuing his work as was often done by the Christian church in the medieval days and by the communists in the recent days—e.g. the Russian scientist, Lysenko, who was denied continuation of his research which was going against the communistic ideology. Qur'an confidently maintains that the scientist's finding will invariably lead him back to the Qur'anic viewpoint for the simple reason that Qur'an is a revelation from the All Knowing Creator and thus there can be no contradictions between the work of God, i.e., the universe, and the word of God, i.e., the Qur'an.

All earlier revelations could not stand the ravages of time or corruption by humans. They could not be preserved in their original form or languages. Qur'an, being the final testament, has been given the guarantee of protection by the Creator, who states in the Qur'an itself that "I am its guardian". Nothing like this has ever been claimed by any revelation. In the case of the Qur'an, it is not just a claim, but a historical reality. Qur'an has indeed been preserved intact in the form and fashion that it was revealed to the Prophet Mohammed. Copies of Qur'an from any part of the globe, belonging to disparate peoples are identical and have been so ever since the time of Prophet Mohammed. Even those who do not accept Qur'an to be of divine origin do not deny that it is available today after 1400 years in exactly the same form as Prophet Mohammed recited before he passed away.

*We have a book absolutely unique in its origin, in its preservation .... on the Substantial authority of which no one has ever been able to cast a serious doubt.*

Rev. Boswell Smith in *Muhammad and Muhammadanism*

## RISE AND FALL OF NATIONS

While talking of history of the people of old, the Qur'an often talks about the "people of the book" and in particular refers to the remarkable history of the *Bani Israel*, the Children of Israel, which it mentions no less than 22 times in its pages wherein it says there are lessons for all peoples—people who ponder and think. The Children of Israel have had a long and remarkable roller coaster history. They have seen the glorious period of the rise of David and Solomon and have also experienced the ignominy of the total destruction of their holiest of holy temple in Jerusalem on more than two occasions and prolonged captivity of the entire nation twice, once by the Egyptians and then by the Babylonians.

The purpose of the Qur'an in talking about the Israelites is not to cover their history *per se*, but to focus upon the lessons their history carries for all of us. What were the factors which led them to their peak (because they had patience and constancy (7:137))? And more importantly, what were the factors which dragged them to lows, such as their inordinate love of life (92:96), as well as tyranny and corruption on this earth (17:4) which have not been equaled by many nations. Along the same lines, what is meant by being the chosen people? It was indeed a privilege, but was meant to be discharged by the entailing obligations of leading the world by example and not meant as a license for the elite or the select, which many took it to be (2:80). Qur'an highlights their triumphs and their failures as a lesson and a warning, especially for Muslims and indeed for all peoples of the world, and promises that the laws of the rise and fall of nations—who as nations have no hereafter like individual humans have and hence face accountability in this very world here and now, without any exceptions whatsoever, and without any partiality or favors.

## REPLY TO THE CHARGE THAT ISLAM MERELY BORROWED FROM JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

Many Christian and atheist writers (*Ibn Warraq*) have wasted ink and paper and their reader's time in building a case that there is nothing new in Islam and it offers so many similarities to Christianity and Judaism and even Zoroastrianism and Hinduism and that the Prophet mostly put down what he learnt from Jews and Christians.

They seem to not notice or deliberately ignore that Islam does not claim to bring anything new. It only once again repeats to humanity the message that all prophets of the Abrahamic tradition mentioned in the Qur'an as well as the Bible (Old and New Testaments) ever since Adam and Noah brought it to mankind. Since the origin of the message was the same, i.e., the Almighty Creator, is it any surprise that the message was essentially the same? If these messages were drastically different, then there would be inconsistency and cause for comment.

In fact, it would have been surprising and self contradictory if the essence of the message was not the same. The Qur'an explains it clearly. Over time, the original message would get lost or transformed which would then call for a new messenger and a new message to refresh and rejuvenate the same eternal message. An essential aspect of Qur'an is to rectify the errors which had crept into the older revelations, i.e., Old and New Testaments. Qur'an emphasizes the deviations relating to crucial areas of differences, i.e., the divinity of Jesus in no certain terms and points out the fallacies which had crept into the Old Testament. It emphasizes that the scriptures no longer reflected the true messages which were brought by Moses and Jesus.

Then why is there an insistence on Mohammed having borrowed from the earlier scriptures? No borrowing happened; rather, the source, the origin, and the contents of the message were the same, as pointed out so clearly by the Qur'an itself.

#### **SUMMATION**

Let me clarify what the proof of God's existence really means. Nothing can be proved to those who do not want to accept it. Isn't it a fact that there is no dearth of people all over the globe who even today refuse to believe that humans have landed on the moon? Also, as McGrath points out, for many years after the theory of relativity was propounded by Einstein and he had made three predictions as evidence for his theory, two of these had been borne out experimentally, but the third had to wait a long time before the right conditions arose to confirm the same. During the intervening period, most scientists had come around to accepting the theory without waiting for the last confirmation. The pattern is that evidence keeps

accumulating; the scales keep getting tipped until increasingly, acceptance of a viewpoint becomes the norm.

Qur'an follows the same line of reasoning. It maintains that lots of evidence for the Creator's existence has been spread around:

- In the physical universe, i.e., in the galaxies, stars, the sun, moon, the earth, oceans, clouds, plants, and the like for those who want to see.
- In the history of the people of old times and the rise and fall of civilizations. What made them prosper and what brought them down.
- And within the nature of humans, in their desires, passions, needs, relationships, anger, love, rebellion, and submission.

The Qur'an then invites, draws attention, cajoles, and warns the reader to look at these signs, to ponder, to reflect, and to think as to what it all points to. Based on all this evidence and not blind faith, it explains that one should come to accept and believe in the same manner as science does, that indeed there is an Almighty Creator. This Creator is beyond the reach of our sense and understanding, not because there is any doubt in His existence, but because of limitations of the human mind. How can a finite mind fully comprehend the infinite?

It will be objected (as done by Sagan in his book *Contact*), that surely there should be no problem for an Almighty Creator, by definition, to show Himself in such a manner that all mankind will be forced to believe. Indeed, this question was hurled at the prophet by the non-believers which was answered by the Qur'an itself. Effectively, it said that sure this is not only possible but is indeed the case for all nature, i.e., the sun, the moon, and the plants and animals; all follow the built-in laws of nature given by God—none of them dare to question and disobey—only humans can do that—why? – Because by Creator's own design, they have been given the freedom of choice. They have been made free to either believe or disbelieve in His existence. At the physical plane, life goes on, same for a believer or a disbeliever. Even the most arrogant of the disbelievers, the Pharaoh who claimed divinity for himself, was not denied the air to breathe or life giving water to drink because everyone has been given the freedom to choose, but for an appointed time only.

Surely, a time will come—at death—when freedom ends and accountability begins. At that time, the Qur'an says that reality will become obvious to everyone—no questions will be asked on the day of judgment because all questions would stand answered, all veils and obstructions would have fallen, and man would be freed from his human limitations and be able to understand reality, something that he cannot do in this life.

Freedom of choice is thus the greatest gift to mankind befitting indeed a vicegerent on earth and one before whom the angels were asked to bow down.

*If your Lord had so wished, everyone on earth would have believed, all of them together, So will you force mankind to become believers.*

*Qur'an, 10:99*

The question thus arises as to how mankind is to learn about the Creator and what is expected of them. Qur'an says that it can only come through top-down guidance—what the Almighty Creator wants His creation to know and that is what revelation has been all about. This includes the Old Testament of Moses, the Psalms of David, the New Testament of Jesus, and the final revelation, i.e., the Qur'an of Prophet Mohammed (and many others to different peoples and nations of which little trace is left). They are only hinted towards in the Qur'an. They all contained guidance and directions for mankind and addressed questions such as how do we fit into the scheme of this universe? What are we doing here? How should we conduct ourselves? What is good and what is evil? And what follows death?

Qur'an also contains guidance about questions crucial to human welfare in this life. Are all human beings equal or are some groups intrinsically superior to others as maintained by some people? Are there any groups chosen by God? What is the relationship between genders? Should sex be free amongst consenting adults or is it better not to stimulate this already powerful and headstrong instinct and keep it in check? Should there be laissez faire in economic relationships in society or do the needy and under-privileged need any special considerations? Is "might is right" a correct philosophy of life or whether "to meet evil with good" is a better course to adopt?

Can these and a host of other questions, crucial to human welfare, be fruitfully studied by science? Can unaided reason give us the correct answers without causing heaps of misery and bloodshed

amongst innocent humanity? Have we not learnt anything from our long historical experience? Have the holocausts and interminable and unending wars taught us nothing? How do we deal with fellow humans of conflicting views and interests? Is war permissible under any circumstance? Is it not a reality that mankind has only recently woken up to the need for laws and rules to conduct wars and handle conflicts?

Qur'an, the final revelation, is full of guidance on just such questions and the quality of the content speaks for itself. It invites reflection, study, and emphasizes the need for rational understanding of this very content and pooh poohs blind faith even on its content. It says successful are those who conduct their affairs through consultation. It advises that the correct policy of existence is not to lookout for yourselves, but to do unto your neighbor what you would like him to do to you. It claims unambiguously that this attitude will give us better and more satisfying results and lead to a much more wholesome win-win society.

Extreme atheists like Dawkins or Sam Harris are dismissing even the possibility of the existence of matters such as soul or afterlife or God, and feel that science should not come down from its high pedestal of recognizing only what it can measure or whose effects it can feel through instruments.

So let us look at things whose reality cannot be denied even by diehard atheists. As examples, let us take the Jeffersonian proposition that "It is a self evident truth that all human beings are born equal" or the proposition of gender equality or that special people shall have equal rights regardless of whether they contribute equally to the society, or that might is not right, or what is good and what is evil. Now what does science have to say about such propositions? Does it have the tools to sift the various alternatives?

In conclusion it should be stated that if atheists really want to discuss and debate the existence of god or the veracity of revelation and its relevance to the modern world then they should look to the Qur'an which is the only genuine version of revelation available today. We welcome their study, attention, critique and comments so long as they are based on objective considerations and not on past prejudices of the Western world and not colored by the conduct of many Muslims of today who have turned their backs on Qur'anic

teachings and are an affront to Qur'an's sublime message of peace and reason. Let me repeat that Qur'an is not a monopoly of the Muslims; rather it is meant for all of humanity.