

### **Committee on Religious Reform (CORR)**

**I was able to present the Committee on Religious Reform (CORR) project through the assistance of Mr. SamaH HeLal. Without his help, I could not have collected the material that I have presented in this work. Mr. SamaH HelaL has been a long time contributor to the American Druze Society and his dedication to the Society has been immeasurable.**

**Julie Makarem, September 2008.**

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### **Charter for the Committee on Religious Affairs**

This committee by its very nature must be the heart of the conscience of American Druzes and the head of the leadership preserving the uniqueness of the Druzes. In spiritual matters it must maintain a considerable measure of independence including financial independence. This is a “service oriented” committee that must develop the long-range corporate welfare of the spiritual congregation as well as provide pastoral services to individual Druzes. Responsibility for religious education falls to this committee as well as religious scholarship, religious history and research, theology, and ethical pronouncements. Contributions and trusts dedicated to “religious affairs” will be placed in the areas of greatest need as selected by the committee. Donations for specific purposes may be accepted or rejected by the committee depending on how favorable they are to the mission and objectives of the committee. Committee members must be mentally and spiritually prepared to be at odds with the popular weal, realizing that innovation, leadership, and progress in a field as abstract as spiritual growth and welfare cannot be manipulated by internal politics and current vogues if great spiritual truths are to be identified, espoused, and incorporated into the repertoire of the believer.

The committee is empowered to undertake the following:

- 1) Administration of an obligatory religious levy (zakat) of 2.5% of annual income on every “true” believer so pledging.
- 2) Identify and fund “research” in the field of religion.
- 3) Identify qualified American (born, reared, and schooled in the U.S.A.) persons to enter the field of religious education, music, and ministry. Provide scholarships for such qualified individuals.

- 4) Sponsor publication of books and articles on religious subjects including religious history.
- 5) Act in an editorial capacity on all publications used to “school” the Druze corporate congregation on matters of faith and spiritual growth.
- 6) Comment on the ethics of acts by individual or group of members.
- 7) Place God’s purposes as dictated by the conscience of committee members ahead of the goals of the society or of individual members.
- 8) Recommend to the Board, members of un-impeachable moral character to serve on the committee.

The committee is responsible for:

- 1) Clearly stating its annual expenditures and sources of funds (made to the Board and filed with the National Treasurer).
- 2) Abiding by the requirements of tax law as it affects the, A.D.S. corporate legal status.
- 3) Investigating the background of committee members.
- 4) Programming of all national religious activity.
- 5) Providing religious articles and editing of religious articles to the Newsletter.
- 6) Inter-faith activity with organizations representing the faiths of Islam, Christianity, Bahai, and Judaism in support of a pluralistic society in America.
- 7) Espousing religious freedom.
- 8) Gaining Board support and endorsement of long range programs and current services provided members of the Society and community congregations.

- 9) Locating, identifying, and selecting qualified young Americans for scholarship awards.
- 10) Obtaining services as required to protect the interest of donors, scholarship recipients, and other members of the A.D.S.

**Committee On Religious Affairs**

**Chairman:** Samah HeLal

# 1968

### **THE DRUZE'S ROLE IN AMERICA TODAY**

JUNE – Abdallah. E. Najjar

Some people live and die by faith, but not because facts have proved it. Only when faith meets hard facts – facts of juvenile delinquency, racial hostility, alienation, injustice, disease, uprooting of heritage or culture, etc., do policies emerge. Therefore, I must relate my conscience to the problem of the secular society of which I am a part, for it is my duty as a citizen to express my convictions in economic, social and political affairs. Likewise, you and I feel compelled to speak out – in the absence of a pulpit – on issues where moral and spiritual principles are involved. It is time we do so. It is time I dust off my dormant heritage and jolt it awake. It is time for me to share my spiritual bread with all who wish to partake of it. In this context, and in answer to the question, “Who am I?”- Let me say – As a Druze I am a mystic in temperament – A Pragmatist by necessity – An Idealist by choice – A Republican in theory, and a Democrat in practice (or visa versa).

As a Druze, the East and West merge in me. For 1000 years I have been in the midst of the stream of human history, championing the dignity of man and fighting for

his freedom. As a Druze I am a Muslim influenced by oriental theology and western thought; by Christian witness, Judaic law, and esoteric practice, As a Druze, I am a proud mountaineer reared in the puritan and tribal traditions of an austere and devout society.

As a Druze, I have my due share of brimstone and hellfire, but my theme of love has always given meaning to it all. For the love a brother as his brother's keeper, the love of a mother instilling compassion in a child's heart, the love of a father for individual prowess in his son. And like you, as a Druze, my heart quivers still like that of the Princess who recited, some 1000 years ago in Damascus, this poem:

“As hut with rustling breezes cool  
Delights me more than palace high  
And more the cloaks of simple wool  
Than robes in which I learned to sigh  
Was more than this fine bread to me  
The wind's voice where the hill path went  
Was more than the tambourine can be.”

As a Druze my spiritual cup overflows as I begin my every move with this invocation: In the name of God the compassionate, the merciful, and I end it by: Thanks and glory be to God.

It is true, as a Druze I do not pray in the conventional sense, but the Lord and His word are present and evident in all events and in every circumstance. It is an experience of continually encountering in every day events the fellowship of God, whose name I announce, I hear, I expect.

Druzism is an Order or a Sect of Islam. It is the product, for most part, of religious and political strife that dates to the partisans of Ali, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet. Ali's partisans, known as Shiah, split into many factions throughout the years. From one such faction Druzism emerged. It is a Unitarian movement which also claims to have found the long awaited Messiah or Imam in the person of Al Hakim of the Fatimite Dynasty who ruled from 996 to 1021 A.D. with Headquarters in Cairo, Egypt.

Druzism gets its name from Ben Ishmail Al-Dorazy, a Persian of Turkish origin. The movement developed into a secret sect, built mainly around mystical interpretations of the Quran. Druzism was greatly influenced by Sufism – an ascetic mysticism originating in the eighth century in the East and developing in Persia into a system of elaborate symbolism of which the goal is communion with God through contemplation and ecstasy. However, throughout the years, Sufism suffered from lack of talent and learning. Today there are still many scholars who think that such Shiah movements as Druzism were subversive attempts by Persians bent on overthrowing the Arab dynasties and undermining Arab ascendancy in the then all powerful Islamic world.

Druzism, as known and practiced today, is presented in six hand-written books called Al-Hikma or the six books of wisdom. It deals with two major aspects of a message: The Metaphysical and the Ethical, i.e. the precepts of faith and the precepts of living.

The precepts of faith are basically Quranic, presented with aspects of the esoteric (demanding special training to be perceived) and a blend of Greek philosophy and Sufism.

The precepts of living or the moral code is more explicit and simple. It has more than any other factor helped mold the Druze outlook and the Druze life for it is so highly placed, so strongly woven, and so forcefully stressed that it has, through the centuries, left its wholesome and indelible mark on Druze secular thought and behavior.

Druzism claims five disciples who preached and formulated the dogma. They also represent the five principles or bounds of the Sect, namely: the Mind, the Soul, the Word, the Past, and the Future. The first three principles – Mind, Soul and Word – represent, in a sense, a Trinity. The last two principles – Past and Future, or Cause and Effect, if you wish – complete the necessary weave of the Druze belief in the incarnation or transmigration of the soul which abides over and over in human form as it has done and will continue to do until the day of judgment – the day when each soul gets its due.

On this day of judgment, it is believed the five disciples will appear from the East – each wearing his own color, Green, Red, Yellow, Blue and White – hence the official flag of Druzism in Quintet-color. They will classify the person each according to his deeds.

In preaching their message, they told us to guard the books of wisdom from those non-deserving of it and commanded us to (1) speak the truth, (2) be our brother's keepers, (3) profess the unity and oneness of God, (4) accept His will and, (5) surrender ourselves totally to His command.

Since one does not die in fact, but changes habitat through incarnation, a Druze has no fear of death.

I am convinced that we are in possession of a liturgy which combines the severe faith of a Catholic, the predestination of a Presbyterian, the logic of a Unitarian, the



fundamentalism of a Baptist, the assertion and piety of an Orthodox, the zeal of a Mormon, and the roots of Islam.

In an age of upheaval and collapsed time we see more technological and scientific progress in a year, or perhaps even in a month, than our ancestors saw in a century.

Therefore, pending the accessibility of all the Druze sacred literature in English, and pending the establishment of an English periodical addressing itself to the spiritual needs of every Druze in America, what would be the alternative in the meantime?

1. Maintain the Status Quo
2. Abandon the religion and heritage of our forefathers
3. Affiliate with another religious group or
4. Participate in a reform movement to give Druzism a blue print for tomorrow, a new strategy for growth. This last road, I feel certain, is the one you wish to travel.

Man has in all ages sought spiritual life, growth and values, and the Druze in America, bewildered, as he may seem to be, is rightfully attempting to cope with his existential anxiety by having the 'courage to be' - a self-affirmation in spite of the threatened possibility of non-being.

As you know, our Druze Elders maintain an aloofness from the world, virtually ignoring modern society, the new power structure, and the conflicts that torment the conscience. By this aloofness the Druze church has turned its back on its own first principles. Its treasures are collecting dust in the archaic minds of apathy and illiteracy.

The Ajawid - Elite or initiates - lead an ascetic life, wholesome and soul purifying, but this does not equip them to assume roles for which they are not prepared or

qualified - the role of prosecution, Judge, and jury. We too are guilty for our abdication or collusion, for not picking up the-challenge of reform.

We have no conflict with the excellent code they live by. The rules of abstinence, hospitality, cohesiveness and moral law, which gave them order, direction, strength, and solace. But we no longer wish to live on the periphery if we are to be heirs to this tradition. We must enter the Majlis and partake in the sacrament. We must open the door and invite those who are in sympathy with our views, and who wish to or have already, cast their lot with ours.

Let me repeat that the Druze Books of Wisdom are based on the Quran - the original masterpiece, that they are an allegorical interpretation of it. Add it to your library, accept it as the bible in your home. There are several good translations by Muslim scholars. Other translations are either commercial, inadequate, or seriously defective by reason of the intention of their authors to denounce or discredit.

The English version unmask only part of the beauty clothed in poetic Arabic, but unmatched by any tongue, brush, or chisel. By re-discovering such spiritual roots the Druze can today find his identity and affirm it. By being a living witness to this glorious heritage can he receive the blessings of a faith of true brotherhood with man and peace with God. I believe the Arabs would still be today as they were of old in the forefront of progress, enlightenment, and power had they remained truly faithful to the spirit and teachings of their sacred books. Do not be misled because of their weakness and present lowly station; all nations have their ups and downs in history. For many a century the Arabs - and I mean the Syrians, the Lebanese, the Jordanians, the Palestinians, the

Egyptians, the people of the peninsula - were the standard bearers of civilization and the leaders in science, commerce, and the arts.

America today is affluent and mighty, but America is becoming increasingly materialistic, caught in vicious chain reaction of socio-political and economic events. Today, the people do not run the nation, they only think they do. The real rulers make up a minority that controls communications as well as the sources of wealth and power. Ladies and Gentlemen, this is not the America I dreamed of as a child, not the America of Washington, Franklin, Jefferson or Lincoln. There are, it seems, camouflaged forces bent on destroying this last haven of liberty and justice. In a span of just ten years the proportions of American adults who believe that religion is losing its influence has jumped from 14% to 57%. This represents one of the most dramatic shifts of American life today. It is so alarming that we must do our utmost, through education and by faith, to reverse this trend and pierce this sham.

There have been ages and places where our witness meant suffering and dying. There have been ages and places where our witness meant withdrawal from the world. In this age and place, our witness is to be in our strong convictions, in our abiding faith, 'to be' through education, courage, and cooperation. When the flames of religious witness burn slowly, our young men and women will go elsewhere seeking the bonfires.

But let us resolve that from this sense of helplessness, of being strangers in a world too large to love, from this sense of weakness, of ignorance and humility, of reaching out for enlightened help, there will come the strength which will make us again a mighty spiritual force to temper the materialistic world we inhabit.

With Faith and Knowledge bound together, we can hope to cherish and protect those values, those dogmas and those treasures of a heritage that we carried from the East and blended with the best of the West.

# 1973

## **THE DRUZES' DILEMMA AND CHALLENGE IN AMERICA**

JULY – Abdallah E. Najjar

The purpose of this brief presentation is to discuss the problems and challenges facing us as Arab-Americans, as Lebanese-Americans in general or as Druze-Americans in particular; to focus on factors that affect our future in the West and on ways I think necessary to preserve, share, and propagate a heritage, an identity and a spirituality threatened by attrition in the new land.

In identifying weaknesses or past mistakes, it is not my intention to criticize, but to seek ways to overcome difficulties. The Druze Community in America - more than any sectarian Arab group. - is sparsely scattered as is the case in all 'al-mahjar.' Our spiritual heritage thus transplanted has yet to take root in a country of highly organized institutions and constantly changing ideas, making it increasingly difficult to retain our inherent qualities.

We live in a society in which exists well-established cults and other alternative "ways to God" - ways that are dogmatically pursued by zealous adherents who presume monopoly on the ultimate Truth and use Madison Avenue techniques to propagate it. In a land where assimilation - melting in the pot - is common and natural, DRUZISM may not survive with its classical emphasis on ethnicity alone, as it has thus far. Accordingly a spirituality-based approach must be the springboard, the cornerstone as well as the common-bond to give it permanence and universality and to quench our thirst from the spring whose source begins here in the East.

To do so we must look into the metaphysical as well as the ethical precepts of our existence in the West and accept the challenge of a movement that gives Druzism a

strategy for growth. We should consider opening our spiritual door to those who knock with good faith; and as good hosts, say: Welcome to the "Majlis." We see the edge of renaissance on the horizon, ahead, beginning to glitter.

The Druze youth of today are a highly educated intelligent generation with inquisitive minds and spiritual hunger. This youth is seeking an identity with a relevant and meaningful explanation of what Druzism is all about. It is our right and our obligation to see to it that their questions are answered within the framework of their contemporary society and its life style. It is so necessary to do this even-if it has to result in a reform movement, particular to America only. In multi-cultural America, we are readily suited for the task. For in a very real sense those of us in the American Druze Society concerned about its spiritual viability may begin a dialogue with its counterparts in Mexico, Canada, Australia and other places and with the 'mother-source' through a 'coordinating council' - if we are to share and compete on the "Righteous Way to God" with other cults and theosophies.

It is imperative that we have a knowledge and interpretation of the 'Books of Wisdom' -translated into the new tongues we speak - to accomplish the joyful task of bringing our people closer to God, The Merciful, The Compassionate, The Universal, The God of our forefathers; the future belongs to those who prepare for it.

These ideas may seem grandiose when spoken or written, but I deeply believe they can be implemented in our journey toward the second millennium, the first steps of which have been taken jointly with the Druze spiritual leadership and some of your intelligentsia here and abroad - on a journey not only towards the preservation, but the transmittal of a true and explicit outlook of our spirituality and heritage and its relevance

to our future generations. These efforts still require "think tanks" for long term planning and financing to give Druzism a blue print for tomorrow and an enlightened strategy for growth and relevancy in our adopted land.

In all our endeavors our keynote must be CREDITABILITY. It is only by being what we are that we retain a reason for existence as we should be with responsibility and responsiveness. The Druze Society's desire-to return, here and abroad, to its mosque, to its church, to its universal 'Majlis,' to its real Spiritual House is much in evidence among its discerning members.

Surely many of you have found out the hard way - as I have - that men grow weak and weary feeding upon the husk of materialism and egotism, that the heart hungers for the things of God; that self -aggrandizement, pride of possession, and saturation of desires of the flesh crumble under their inability to sustain man as man.

The American Druze, in his first century in America, for his first and second generation was in a struggle for survival and self-limited objective: For our third, fourth and future generations whose ethnic consciousness differ from ours, the Druze Society must create a fresh atmosphere conducive to a spiritual identity and a new sense of history - relevant and meaningful without compromising fundamental principals. Toward this reality, a modern program of education in Druzism becomes the backbone of our spiritual identity.

Ladies and gentlemen, make no mistake about it, we love our adopted land, America, but shall continue to do our due share as good citizens in fighting and exposing the camouflaged forces within it that are bent on destroying this last haven of liberty and justice. When we point out shortcomings, we do so constructively and with love.



Western Man (and we speak of ourselves as we speak of him), in spite of his technological feats is becoming aware of the fragmented being he is, thoroughly compartmentalized, more part than whole, incapable of putting together the pieces to answer the ultimate puzzle of his existence as he proceeds in a mindless rat race; he is not able to envision within the arrogance of his own mind the REALITY which he cannot structure, invent or conquer.

By going inward, we do discover the Almighty God that harmoniously unites us with the Cosmos, free from the limits of time as life continues to re-emerge and to evolve to new and higher plateaus, thus making change a means to perfection.

As a Druze community in America, we are charged with a three-fold task of:

1. Identification of the problems of our people and of the institutions with which we are concerned
2. Elimination of the gap between promise and performance by setting and meeting attainable goals, and
3. Best possible use of the resources we have toward the realization of the Promise.

If, at times, our progress seems frustratingly, even agonizingly slow, "despair not, for in the stillness of the night, when it is darkest, thy God has not forsaken thee."

In closing, please sympathize and understand that productive ideas and deeds must take the place of fruitless longings and regrets of times past. The knowledge that we have power to act in the living present brings with it a breath of fresh air. Life takes

on a new sparkle with the sharpening of our spiritual sense as we look for and see the constantly unfolding good that is ours as the spiritual expression of God.

# 1976

## NURTURING THE SPIRIT

### **APRIL – Samah HeLal**

Rumors are circulating that some of our young people were so impressed with the two presentations at the “75 annual convention on “On Arabic Heritage through Scripture” and “The Druze Faith” that they have decided to stop frequenting churches. Such “conclusions” can be expected, but a critique is in order.

The presentations were designed to whet the appetite for spiritual awareness, but are not sufficient to satisfy spiritual hunger. If man is not to live by bread alone, sources for nurturing growth are required. The organization of churches, mosques, and synagogues provide for the intellectual and spiritual growth of their members. The members of the ADS have no plans for maintaining their spiritual independence or for establishing an organization responsible for their spiritual growth.

It is well for us to remember that most of us are uninitiated (juhhal). It may well be that during our lifetimes the guidance for becoming initiated (uqqal) may not materialize. YET THE SPIRIT HUNGERS. Are we then to cut ourselves off from all spiritual nourishment?

Perhaps when we emphasize that “ours” is a unique understanding or creed of life, it will place our dilemma in perspective. Our “creed” may not be that of the Christian, Muslim, or Jew but our moral perspective and theology is a common seeking with them. According to the Qur’an mankind has only two distinctions: the believers and the non-believers (in God). Therefore the moral imperatives of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are generally binding on Druze.

To seek God is the loftiest of all vocations and until we have "Uqqal" in America whose vocations are ministering to our spiritual needs can we afford to ignore any institution that may help us attain spiritual maturity! It is only our "creed" that need not be compromised. We must not subscribe to spiritual poverty due to some vague notion that as Druze we must cut ourselves off from all sources of spiritual truth except the "pure" source of Unity (TawHid).

When America gets its first Shaykh E1-Aql, he will need the services and support of those who have cultivated a spiritual rapport with God. Hopefully for his sake, all of us won't have to begin at the Primer Level. The "Call to TawHid" is the call to superior knowledge through which the individual moves toward his goal of self realization in God, the Ground of his essence! How then can any Druze countenance an isolation from any opportunity to develop spiritually?

Abide in faith, hope, and love, but avail yourselves of the waters from the everlasting fountains of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as fits your circumstance. Indeed, it is better to have some knowledge of God than not to have known Him at all. Our awareness that a process for attaining knowledge exists by responding to the "Call" cannot remove from us the responsibility for acquiring available knowledge. While we seek together the "purer" waters of our spiritual heritage (TawHid) let us nurture our spirits at the fountains of our "sister" monotheistic religions. See you in Sunday School!

# 1977

**TAWHID HYMN OF CREATION:**

**A Contemporary Rendition**

**JANUARY - Samah HeLal**

**In the beginning: God!**

God is so aware!

God, the All in all, being Omniscient, Omnipresent, and Omnipotent chose to create an order within which to share His awareness. At the instant of His choice all was emptiness and light. The light that pierced the emptiness radiated from His brilliance and the emptiness was dark. From His radiance issued all creation. God is the Source of light and His light is Eternal. His radiance is infinite and so is His awareness.

The beginning of creation was consciousness and consciousness was intrinsic with God at the beginning. God was conscious of His Love and Holiness and He originated the sequence of creation (refer to chart) by His Will. From a sparkle of His radiance He created the first (of five) cosmic luminary principle. He called this emanation of His Divine Will the (Cosmic or Universal) **Mind**, endowed it with His omniscience and created it the most perfect entity of all creation. He made it the Beginning and the End of (the process of) creation, the Cause of all causes, and the Source of spiritual reality. It is the intellectual nature of the universe. The **Universal Mind** being in perfect union with God reflected God's Will, Thought, and Vision and its joy was in fulfilling its purpose of being in constant awareness of Him. Becoming conscious of its quintessence of perfection, it momentarily abjured its perfect oneness with God by taking joy in itself and was deflected from its constancy of perfect love by an inferior (self) love, the original sin. From this deflection from its original course God

designed the dualistic nature of the cosmos, vis-à-vis action and reaction. He created disobedience from the Mind's obedience, darkness from its light, ignorance from its wisdom and arrogance from its humbleness.

**It was the end of the first epoch (day).**

Absence from (knowledge which is the light of ) God is mere non-existence, that is, death, which is utter darkness. **The Mind** was now aware of its momentarily being separate from God. It recognized its imperfection and its temptation to sin. It begged for help against the newly created principle of adversity called the Adversary.

From the Mind's state of contrition God created the **second luminary** principle. He called this emanation of His omnipresence the **Universal Soul (Spirit)** and made it the source of life and action of the Macrocosm. As the **Mind** reflects God's Will, so the **Soul** reflects the activity of this Will. It is the spiritual nature of the universe. It is the Holy Spirit (Presence).

With **The Soul** assisting **The Mind** in causing the emergence of all things created, the Adversary struggled for self-affirmation. In pursuit of its objective it interacted with the **Mind**, the source of all activity. This interaction permeated the **Soul** and caused it to momentarily focus inwardly upon itself. From this indulgence God created the principle of antagonism which (due to the action of the Adversary) was by its nature attracted to the principle of adversity. The dualistic nature of the universe was confirmed. With the emergence of good came evil, with harmony came discord, with love came hate, and with awareness came negation.

**This was the end of the second epoch.**



Realizing that it had been deflected from its purpose of taking joy in the oneness of God, the **Soul** turned back to the One. Here, united with the **Mind** in union with the Whole, it made known its need to overcome the darkness of adversity and antagonism. From this need God created the **third luminary** entity to assist the **Mind** and the **Soul** in obstructing the temptations of the Adversary and the Antagonist. Thus the divine **Word** of God came forth from the **Universal Soul** and it is the animating (vital) principle in the process of creation. Endowed with God's omnipotence the **Universal Word** is the actualization of life and motion in the cosmos. It is the communicative nature of the Universe.

**This was the end of the third epoch.**

In its quest of realizing itself within the Unity of God, the **Word** implored the One for assistance against anything that might divert it from its natural purpose of enjoying constant union with Him.

From this desire for effacement God created the **fourth** of the five luminary principles which He called the **Precedent**. It is the source of harmony and order in the universe and is the perfection of all beings (bodies) in the Macrocosm. Encompassing all cosmic reality this luminary entity is the light pervading everything. It is the sensing nature of the Universe.

**It was the end of the fourth epoch.**

In its endeavor for realizing its natural purpose, the **Precedent** sought God's help against darkness of selfhood that detracts from the feeling of union with the One. God caused the last of the five luminary entities to issue from the pervading light of the **Precedent** to assist it to overcome the darkness of (selfish) individuality. He called it

the **Follower**. It is the perfection of all corporeal beings and an externalization of God's Will or Intelligible Wisdom. It is the volitional nature of the Universe. Together **The Precedent** and **The Follower** are the source of the sensible world.

**It was the end of the fifth epoch.**

Realizing that it was liable to be deflected from its perfect union with the Whole, the **Follower** pleaded for help to obstruct this possible discord. From this desire God created the earth a composite of many elements (but in its entirety a single unity) as evidence of His Oneness and thereby helped the **Follower** in the constant struggle against the principles of adversity and antagonism.

**It was the end of the sixth epoch!**

And the seventh epoch began with the first of many cycles of progress as God entrusted the five luminary entities with the process of creation that He had originated. He created the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms of nature. Of these He made the animal kingdom the most noble over which humanity reigns. Humanity in turn is the quintessence of the cosmic and corporeal worlds. Human progress toward perfection reflects the influence of the **Universal Mind** and **Soul** through the achievements of various human minds and souls.

And God created man (Adam) and woman (Eve). **It was the beginning of the seventh epoch.** Time as we know it began.

God did not rest! The epoch has not ended and it shall not end until humanity is perfected, that is, individual self-realization in the Oneness of God is achieved and His day (epoch) of judgment arrives. **So be it!**

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## COMMENTARY

The hymn of creation exalts and glorifies the order in the universe. It expresses awe and praise of a singular deity and establishes God's absolute sovereignty. It is majestic poetry.

Also, it is a kernel of process theology expressing hope in an ordered evolution through which each person realizes the self in union with the one God. It resolves the unity-diversity dilemma through a judgment day in which the diversity in human personality blends in a singularity of perfect love for God. This is the feeling of union with the One. It anticipates the advent of the coming day of judgment implying the end of human fallibility.

Luminary principles (Limitaries or Boundaries) of the same substance (light) of God (Lahut) become images of human beings (Luminaries) and enter the realm of time dimension (human history) to interact in human existence. Each human life becomes a microcosm of the eternal struggle between right (good) and the wrong (evil). God is a moral **Deity** and all creation is subject to His will and priorities. Intellect, spirit, relationships, emotions, and actions of the individual will be tested in the corporeal world of four dimensions: space (length, breadth, height), and time. It is here where the struggle and final victory will transpire. As humanity evolves, persons will mirror the attributes of the five luminary entities and the original intent of God's choice to create will come to pass in universal harmony which is the unity valued by the Muwahhidun.

The evolutionary process was continuing for 343 million years with the luminaries propagating God's message to responsible humans. Then in the eleventh century A.D. an event occurred that was decisive for the direction the struggle of good and evil would take and for the support persons could obtain for perfection (unity with

God). A change in the course of history was introduced by the grace of God. This is the “Call” to TawHid. **Deity** as understood by evolved humanity would be reflected upon the individual mind for any person electing to love God perfectly. The call to perfect love is the call to unity with God in a spiritual sense. The entire *theosophical system* in response to this Call is **TawHid**.

God as reflected on the human mind is **Nasut**. **The Lord (Mawla or Nasut)** henceforth directly communicates His truth to each person according to the person’s ability to understand. While in a corporeal sense the struggle of good and evil ensues, humanity continues to evolve in a spiritual mode in direct communication with the **Lord (El-Mawla)**.

In Arabic, “Allah” includes the Muwahhidun’s concept of **Lahut** and **Nasut**, but **El-Mawla** refers only to **Nasut**. The diagram tries to depict the origin of the divine-human intercourse and the Muwahhidun’s understanding of the one singular deity. TawHid’s distinctiveness is in the manner in which it develops the event of the “Call” to the “knowledge” of God’s Unity (God mirrored on the mind) and practices this “new” divine/human relationship.

The “Call” was the seed planted in the eleventh century (A.H. 402). One thousand years later, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the seed is to sprout roots ubiquitously and grow a canopy under which all monotheistic faiths unite in love, peace, and victory to the glory of God. On an intellectual and spiritual level the Muwahhidun are to lead the good and right to victory over the evil and wrong. This is the “good news” of the “Call”. Today’s mystery is why the light of TawHid has been kept hidden. For emigrant Druze there is no reason for maintaining the “secrecy” of the “Call”. **Let the message (of truth) be told.**

## Vocabulary

<b>Abjure</b> (verb)	give up or renounce
<b>Adversary</b> (noun)	opponent
<b>Adversity</b> (noun)	poverty and trouble
<b>Antagonism</b> (noun)	opposing principle
<b>Contrition</b> (noun)	a feeling of remorse for sins
<b>Corporeal</b> (adj)	of a material nature; sensible as opposed to spiritual; earthly as opposed to heavenly
<b>Cosmic</b> (adj)	of the universe exclusive of the earth
<b>Cosmos</b> (noun)	the universe considered as a harmonious and orderly system.
<b>Effacement</b> (noun)	remaining unnoticed
<b>Emanation</b> (noun)	something that comes forth from a source
<b>Entity</b> (noun)	a thing that has real and individual existence, in reality or in mind
<b>Epoch</b> (noun)	a period of time considered in terms of noteworthy events
<b>Hudud</b>	limits or boundaries; Limitaries prior to the creation of time
<b>Lahut</b>	absolute deity
<b>Luminary</b> (adj)	enlightening; intellectually brilliant
<b>Macrocosm</b> (noun)	the universe
<b>Nasut</b>	comprehensible or experienced divinity
<b>Omnipotent</b> (adj)	having unlimited power or authority
<b>Omnipresent</b> (adj)	present in all places at the same time.
<b>Omniscient</b> (adj)	knowing all things.
<b>Quintessence</b> (noun)	the most perfect manifestation or embodiment of a quality
<b>Theosophy</b> (noun)	a system of thought that proposes to establish direct contact with divine principle to gain spiritual insight superior to empirical knowledge
<b>Word</b> (noun)	the Christ and the Qur'an

## **ISLAM: A Liberal Perspective**

**SEPTEMBER – Samah HeLal**

The spirit of Islam is too dynamic and versatile to remain dormant in a world of seething ideologies. While there will be a continuous resurgence of fundamentalism, modernists will continue to advocate reforms in the old traditions of Islam. This can be viewed as a historical process. In the eleventh century the Druze were "forced" into a "Sect" status upon departing from the monolithic precepts of the majority. In the nineteenth century the Bahai faith was "forced" to don the cloak of a new religion in order to give vent to this spirit that refused to be contained within political boundaries of Muslim countries. The liberal perspective belongs to that school of thought which seeks to unleash the spirit of Islam from its confinement in crusted tradition.

This school of thought permeates all ranks of Islam, be it Sunni, Shii, Ismaili, Druze, Metwali, Bahai, or Ahmadiyi. It does this because it is the perspective that honors truth above all else. It seeks to establish a climate in which the individual is free to investigate without recrimination all lawful avenues that lead to the truth and deals primarily with principles and their applications. It is the foundation of intellectual honesty, intellectual liberty, and intellectual responsibility.

What is the truth? Who is God? What is man's nature? Is he a free agent? Can he communicate with deity? What about intelligent beings on other planets? Does the personality persist after death? Is faith alone sufficient for eternal life?

The liberal perspective honestly encounters all of these questions and submits that there is a unity among all of the diversity of knowledge that mankind will attain. The liberal perspective respects this unity as it seeks Islamic answers to such questions.

The liberal perspective relies staunchly on truth as the basis for its tenets. The truth here means going beyond the usual meaning of its synonym, "the facts". It concerns itself with ultimate reality, an idea, which finds its pinnacle in the expression "God is Truth".

The liberal approach rests its proposition on the premise that man has been endowed by his creator with the ability to know the truth. Intellectual honesty thereby becomes the cornerstone on which man can build his understanding of the truth. The responsibility for such honesty is a sacred obligation which man owes himself, his fellow man, and his creator. Anything less than complete honesty on the part of the individual falls that much short of the truth when one seeks true understanding. The liberal perspective has little to commend it to the individual who is not willing to be 100% honest with him/her self.

How can man know the truth? Three ways are suggested: (1) through science, which deals with man's physical life, (2) through philosophy, which deals with man's intellectual life, and (3) through religion, which deals with man's spiritual life.

It is interesting to note that all three aspects have the "mind" as their seat of emanation. (This fact led the early western philosophers to allege that man "created" God rather than vice-versa.) While the truth cannot be equated with intelligence, it becomes obvious that the discernment of truth is impossible without intelligence. It is this unique



attribute that distinguishes man from the remainder of God's creation. It is through intelligence that man can know the truth.

The liberal perspective addresses its appeal first to man's intelligence and secondly to man's unrelenting spirit which constantly strives to find meaning for his existence and destiny. An attitude of honest searching, then, becomes an imperative for those who desire the understanding supported by the liberal approach. With this attitude, man can ascertain "the truth which 'passeth' all understanding," namely, God. This ability implies that reality itself is rational and the whole of reality can best be understood as the manifestation of a divine universal intelligence.

The reader may have noticed the obvious lack of reference to Islam in the discourse. This is intentional; first, because the truth is not unique to Islam; and secondly, because the liberal school of thought maintains that it is best for the individual to conclude that "Islam is the truth" and thereby become a "true" Muslim through his powers of reasoning.

The concepts of religion are basically abstract. Theology develops its own repertoire of words to discuss these concepts. This tends to make the issues more confusing than they are complex. The medium of language must utilize finite terms to describe abstract ideas.

The Evangel (Gospel) states that "God is spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth." The Qur'an takes this for granted and refrains from describing God, though some 99 adjectives are posited to Him. Nevertheless, man's most persistent question is "Who" or "What is God? The Judeo-Christian-Islamic answer to this question is unique and the whole structure of the monotheistic faith is founded on it.

Sociologists tell us that the three basic functions in all religion (regardless of how primitive or advanced) are:

1. - People
2. - Beliefs
3. - Practices

Notice that God is not a necessary factor for religion. The monotheistic faith however centers itself about a divine being who has entered the arena of human history and remains active within it.

History testifies to a progressive revelation of God through a succession of prophets. In the myth of Adam and Eve we see the Qur'an symbolizing the idea of the creation of man. In the legend of Noah we learn that no matter how great a physical catastrophe may happen to mankind, God's essential goodness can be depended upon to sustain life. The Torah portrays a relatively primitive idea of God, clothed with many characteristics of humankind (anthropomorphic). As time moves on and the fund of knowledge about human experience with God grows, we find the God of wrath becoming a God of mercy; the God of vengeance becoming a God of forgiveness; the jealous God becoming a God of justice; and the "nationalistic" God becoming a universal God.

There are three events in history pointing out this growth of man-God relationship. First, we witness the monotheistic state of Israel under Solomon and then later under the Macabees. Secondly we witness the spread of Christianity from Britain to Russia proclaiming God's new covenant. Thirdly, we witness Islam sweeping across the eastern hemisphere from Morocco to India. (Note: Even so, monotheism encompasses only half of mankind.)

The history of these three religions of God are intertwined and all have been Semitic in origin as though the deserts of Arabia somehow held the secret of the key to the path of God and to the heart of man. Monotheism proclaimed the dignity of man and the sacredness of human life. It established God's concern for man and a personal-moral relationship between man and his Creator (Note: The proper names alluded to God in chronological order are Yahweh, Elohim and Allah Taala). In turn, we find Judaism emphasizing the righteousness of God; Christianity emphasizing the love of God; and Islam emphasizing the unity of God. (Note: perhaps we are witnessing history in the making. The student of history and the scholar of theology are ready to give the Bahais a rank in monotheism. The Bahais emphasize the universality of God). Each religion claims to have the most significant revelation from God. Each has developed traditions based on its own experiences with God. Each believes itself to be God's true representatives in this world. Each has its unique source of authority. Yet each is founded on the same "divine-human" interrelationship.

The Druze faith is no different in this aspect of the historical process. It upholds a unique understanding of God's unity. Then, who is the God of Monotheism?

He is one and unchanging: without an equal. He alone is the absolute and impartial judge of human deeds and motives. Yet His judgment is coupled with His attribute of mercy, which arises out of His compassion as the Father (Creator) of all men. His most compelling motive is love and man is commended to reflect His love through spiritual brotherhood with all other men. He is a nameless spirit who is powerful (omnipotent), all-knowing and wise (omniscient), and everywhere and always present (omnipresent). He is most great - too great not to care about each of us as an individual.

He is the source of all good and everything that has been created was created by Him. He is neither whimsical nor arbitrary, but as consistent as the stars in their movements or the pull of gravity toward the center of earth. In His divine plan He created man a free agent to have fellowship with Him. He can and has communed with man.

Communion with Him requires that man first exercise his power of choice by deciding to submit his will to Him. This initial decision on the part of man is Islam stripped to its essence. The liberal perspective holds that one cannot call himself a Muslim who has not made this decision with a full understanding of its ramifications and who is not committed to do God's will in this world. It seeks a true understanding of the God-man relationship that will bring about an inner transformation that will transcend the individual to the closest possible relationship with his Creator.

In the Zaboor (Psalms) we find the writer asking, "When I look at the heavens, the work of your hands, the moon and stars which you have set on course; what is man that you are mindful of him and his descendants that you should care for them (Psalms 8:3-4)? The monotheistic faiths have made a unique and valuable contribution toward the understanding of man's nature.

In the Torah we read that "God made man from the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Genesis 2:7) and likewise we read in the Qur'an "I, God, breathed into him (man) from my spirit (Surah 33:78). And again in Genesis 1:25-28 we find that "God created man in his own image" and gave him dominion over the earth.

This myth depicts God imparting a part of his own essence to man by breathing His spirit into him. Because the spirit (breath or wind) of God is in man, man's spiritual nature is in the image of God. To restate the idea in more concrete terms, we may say that

God gave some of His own attributes to man and therefore man and God are spiritually related. Man is essentially a spiritual child of God.

In His "scheme of things" God also created man a free agent. He did not want a robot or puppet with which to have fellowship so He gave man intelligence and a free will. "Thou has made him a little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor" (Psalms 8:5). Even the angels bowed down to men (Surah 33:74). Yet, as the myth continues, this spiritual kinship becomes estranged when man chooses to follow his own will rather than the will of God. This is all symbolized in the temptation in the Garden of Eden.

With all of this scriptural insight, what then, is the nature of man? Perhaps only God will ever know the complete answer to this question. Yet we can affirm that man is a spiritual being as well as a biological being. Of all of God's creation only man is endowed with the capacity to worship. Only man can exercise value judgments (determine right from wrong). Only man is free to choose the "high" road or the "low" road. Perhaps we can safely say that the nature of man is one of potential -- for good or evil. Man must choose between God and Satan. If he would choose the good, he must place the will of God first in his life.

God in His infinite wisdom knows that man is weak, and through His compassion (love) for man He has inspired the prophets to help man choose the way of truth, righteousness, and love. We are Muslims not only because we have made the decision to submit to the will of God, but also because God, through His Concern, has sought us. Indeed He is relenting, merciful, forgiving. He has not deserted man after the events in

the Garden of Eden, but is seeking to open the doors of reconciliation to any who will enter. One of these doors is the Qur'an to the person who can understand its meaning.

What does it mean, then, to maintain that man has a spiritual nature, a kinship to God above that of the rest of creation?

First of all, this idea of creation is the basis for belief in the infinite worth of human personality. A person is also potentially a child of God, and for both of these reasons his worth must be respected. Injustice violates this respect. For this reason also, a man must never be used as a means to an end, but always as an end in himself. To cultivate the friendship of a person merely for the ways he may serve you is a betrayal of this principle. Neither should he be subordinate to any system, whether economic or political. That is exploitation.

We have seen that God gave man dominion over the remainder of creation. Therefore, all things are to be utilized by men for the realization of the purpose for which he was created. Thus in monotheism there is no real place for asceticism.

But neither is man to be interpreted in terms of these relationships with the rest of the universe. He is not a material or economic unit. He is not the sum of the impulses he shares with the animal world, whether it is hunger for food, or sex, or companionship. Making any of these central brings disaster. They must be sublimated and made to serve higher purposes and sometimes sacrificed.

Then what is man's goal in life? For the true Muslim it can only be the realization of man's potential for becoming a son of God, spiritually -- "To live today as though it is the last day of our life and to plan for tomorrow as though we shall live forever." Islam teaches that heaven begins in this life and continues into the next. The liberal school of

thought emphasizes the spiritual nature of this continuing fellowship with the Heavenly Father.

Transcendentally speaking, there is a purpose at the center of the universe ("heart of God") beckoning man to reconciliation and "At-one-ment" with the Creator. To those who do not respond (by submitting their will to God) it is promised, "The Truth is ... that I shall fill hell . . . with such as these ..." (Surah 33:85-86). The wisdom of an old Arabic proverb may be appropriate at this point, "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God." There is nothing abnormal about becoming "one who surrenders his will to God," through fear of eternal justice (compensation). But how much more in keeping with the divine motive of love it is to become a Muslim by responding to that love! Indeed, it is more natural to be in harmony with the divine purpose than to be alienated from it. But for the self-centeredness (self-will) of man, heaven would surely be on earth.

"But only those who understand take heed; those who keep faith in the promises of God and do not break their obligation, those who uphold all that God has sanctioned and fear His justice, and those who persevere in seeking the countenance of the Lord, who pray and who are genuinely charitable, and overcome evil with good, theirs, will be the eternal fellowship (Surah 13:20-22).

One of the most controversial subjects in monotheism is the nature of life after death. Does the personality persist after the experience of death? Any attempt to answer this question has to be predicated on the existence and nature of our god. If we can experience the nearness of God and understand that He cares for us and is constantly seeking fellowship with us, then faith in immortality becomes a certainty.

Early biblical thought assumed a three-storied universe composed of an upper world (heaven), the earth, and an underworld (Sheol). Sheol was imagined to be a huge underground cavern where the souls of the departed slept. This sleep was a denial of death. The "breath" (spirit) of the body did not die but went to sleep.

When the king of Syria (168 B.C.) tried to force the Hellenistic (polytheistic) culture upon the Hebrews, many of the faithful met death in the ensuing conflicts. Jewish thinkers began to realize that a good god would not send all men, good and bad, to Sheol. They analyzed their conception of judgment day (Zoroastrian in origin) and concluded that "reward and punishment" could not be meted out without a physical body. The Hebrews of this conviction were called the Pharisees. Those who maintained that with death the personality perished were called the Sadducees. The teaching of the resurrection of the physical body became dominant in monotheistic thought during this period of development.

The Gospel quotes Jesus as saying; "Let not your hearts be troubled: believe in God, believe that He sent me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so; would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself that where I am you may be also." Thus to Jesus, resurrection meant more than mere extension of the life span, it meant a certain quality of life, a quality that results when men give God their deepest allegiance. The surrender of self to God is to possess eternal life, now!

The Quran is not explicit on the nature of immortality. Its apocalyptic description of paradise allows one to interpret the nature of that life as being either physical or spiritual. The history of Islam points up a variety of thought on immortality,



some so wrapped up with emotional experiences that they remain with us today as espoused sects.

One such sect is the Druze. While Christians and Muslims accept death as final, they look forward to the consummation of the historical process in a final resurrection and "judgment day". The Druze do not deny this, but rather claim special insight as to how this will happen in a tenet having to do with the "transmigration" of souls. Belief in this tenet is not binding on Druze, but is one of their divine mysteries.

We live in a spiritual world of invisible realities. We know this is true when we pause to think about it. Have you ever called a doctor when a member of the family was critically hurt? Have you experienced the tremendous relief that swept your entire being when he finally arrived? Probably it was not his instruments or his drugs that seemed important at that moment. Rather it was his understanding of the injury, his friendliness, his knowledge, his confidence. These invisible realities were the most important factors.

Goodness, truth, love, friendship, kindness, forgiveness, the sense of moral responsibility, the love and concern of God ... not one can be seen with the eye. The things that are unseen are eternal.

The body may be buried; the person will not be buried. The personality...its mind, its emotions, its spirit ... remain alive with God. The resurrected person will still think, for this is a part of his being. He will still reason, will still love, will still know others as he is known by them. He does not become nothing nor does he become someone different. He is himself ... but living now in a "spiritual body".

Our answer then is not based on infallible proof, but on faith. Faith is not blind credulity. It is the only explanation of the universe and human life which makes sense out

of what is otherwise nonsense. Is it possible that God could have created man simply to place him in a grave? Does He who seeks us so persistently intend to toss us into oblivion at the end of our physical life? We cannot believe that. The very nature of God, as revealed in man's goodness and in the teachings of the Prophets, point to the reality of immortality.

Faith in immortality is in its last analysis faith in God. Immortality of man is based on three great postulates:

- (1) The moral perfection of God
- (2) The reasonableness of the universe, and
- (3) The worth of human existence.

A good god would not create in man the expectation for immortality, only to deny the anticipated object. Theism (belief in God) implies immortality.

An experience of God by the individual buttresses this faith and makes it real. Such an experience can come only after an inner transformation takes place in the personality -- a transformation that moves the individual from a self-centered to a God-centered existence (TawHid). This, in part, is the peace of God that comes with the true submission of the will (Islam) to His ... the awareness that all is well, and for the individual, the transformation of hope for immortality (Iman) to the certainty of the eternal fellowship.

When a doctor of law (Scribe) asked the Messiah (Peace be upon him): "Which is the great commandment?" Jesus displayed his intimate knowledge of the Torah by restating Deuteronomy 6:4-5. "Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God is One; And you shall love the Lord with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength"

(Mark 12:29-30). Christ chose to add the faculty of "mind" to the scripture. The Prophet Mohammed (Peace be upon him) expressed the same idea in saying, "The way to heaven will be made clear for him who searches after knowledge".

Today the use of the mind is denigrated by at least two sources of thought. Following the philosophy of Nietzsche, some contend that man is obsessed with the will to power. Others, following Freud, maintain that hidden beneath the surface of man's consciousness are tremendous impulses which thrust themselves up into the area of consciousness in unguarded moments. From either point of view the mind of man is a frail entity, which on one hand may be struck down by an overpowering impulse or on the other hand, tossed into irrationality by the sea of one's sub-consciousness.

Unfortunately, Muslims cannot escape the responsibility of using their minds as easily as these two philosophers suggest. We are called upon to "Go in quest of learning - even unto the remotest spot on earth" (China).

The word theology suggests "thought about God." It should be the concern of everyone who is sincerely interested in religion. The Prophet said "one hour's contemplation on the work of God is better than years of obligatory prayer." However, theology really is more inclusive than that, for it brings us to serious thought about the meaning of God in human experiences. It has to do with the many beliefs revolving around the God-man relationship.

In every generation there are certain questions people keep asking about life and its meaning. Some of these are: Where can we get answers to these questions? Do we rely on a book, person, institution, revelation, reason, intuition, or personal experience? Is

there a central purpose in the universe? What is sin? What is Islam? Is death the end of me?

It can readily be seen that people might well disagree on how these questions are to be answered. The perspective that seeks to relate the results of the latest investigations to these ultimate questions is the "liberal" perspective. Perhaps the title of "contemporary" perspective may be more appropriate.

With the beginning of the "modern" era, many people are asking new questions about the faith of Islam. Can one be a Muslim and believe in evolution? Can one accept the findings of science and remain a Muslim?

If Islam in twentieth century America is to exercise its greatest power for good ... It must clarify the meaning of Islamic faith, show its sources and grounds, relate it to our knowledge and show its implications for life in general and in these United States in particular. It is not enough simply to go about doing this and that. We need clarity in the area of our faith.

A purpose of this article is to point up the foundations of our monotheistic faith and indicate in a general way the dynamism (spirit) which catapulted Islam to one of the "high" religions of mankind. It is hoped that the thinking of the reader may be rekindled and in the process help him to become a committed advocate of the true Islamic way.

It is well to remember that theology is not the whole of faith. A swimmer must have beliefs about water and his relationship to it. However, one does not become a swimmer until he actually gets into the water and commits himself to the enterprise of swimming at a given time and place. Along with assuming active responsibility in

swimming; he must learn to trust the water to sustain him when he does his part. Thus swimming is a combination of belief, trust and active commitment.

So it is with faith (iman). Faith is the whole response of the whole person to the whole of existence. It is a hopeful response. It involves beliefs about ultimate concern. It involves a trusting relationship to God. It involves the readiness to get into life ... assuming responsibility. Faith has both inner and outer dimensions. It has to do with our perspective about things ... our beliefs, attitudes, appreciations, and aspirations. It also has to do with our outer lives and is manifest in action and in our varied relationships.

Ultimately, we are concerned with the coming of faith. Islam is concerned that persons shall come to a "faith-full" way of life. True Islam is a fellowship of faith in which faith is expressed, nurtured, and shared. It is a religion ordained by God in which every individual can achieve the fulfillment of his destiny -- the maturation of his spiritual-self.

The only legitimate purpose for the existence of the American Druze Society is to champion that destiny.

# 1978

## **PEACE – FAITH - UNITY**

### **June – Samah HeLal**

In the process of discovering our cultural heritage, emphasis must be given to a uniquely Druze religious idea, which can be thought of as our “Holy Trinity.” I am referring to our concept of Islam, Iman, and Tawhid, which I translate as Peace, Faith, and Unity. There is no reason that the uninitiated (Juhhaal) as well as the initiated (Uqqaal) cannot actively seek and obtain the blessings from following this three-tiered approach leading to the deepest spiritual awareness between the individual and God.

It is the pilgrimage, the traveling of this triune path that marks the individual as a true member of “Beni Ma’ruuf” (the correct name for the community of practicing Druzes which I translate as “Community of Service.”) This pilgrimage can be rationalized as three successive levels of spiritual growth in a lifetime or as three degrees of spiritual consciousness for the individual seeking God's will for his life. In Druze perspective, the personality graduates from one level of consciousness to the next in three distinct stages on the pilgrimage of life. Being born Druze merely provides the opportunity to begin the pilgrimage. Some never take the first step and the word “Juhhaal” is more correctly reserved for such individuals. Those taking the first step toward the pilgrimage are technically or literally not “un-initiated;” it is just that their “initiation” is not complete. (The word “Uqqaal” can also, narrowly, mean those “initiated” into the meaning of certain esoteric practices with which this article is not concerned.) It is the completing of the pilgrimage, the consummation of spiritual growth, or the achieving of the highest degree (third level) of spiritual consciousness that qualifies the personality to be numbered among the saints.

At the age of 14 each Druze person becomes morally responsible for his own actions. Until this time the parents are wholly or partly responsible. According to some adherents of Islam (Many “practicing Druze,” MuwaHHidun, believe that true Islam is TawHid; i.e., they are the “true” Muslims.) at the age of 14 an account is opened by the angels in heaven for each person in which a record of good and bad actions are kept. This is so for the faithful and the faithless believers. Thus the nature of the individual at the point is one of potential-- neither sinless nor sinful. A conscious deliberate decision at this stage places one into the category of believer (in the sovereignty of God). The pilgrimage has begun. This decision becomes the base line for measuring spiritual growth for the believer. His belief must commit him to the seeking out of God's will for himself and humanity. Now let us take a look at the three levels of spiritual consciousness available to the believing pilgrim in this life.

During his active seeking the believer may experience his first mystical communion that resolves emotional and mental conflicts and permeates his soul with a deep sense of “Peace (Islam) that passeth understanding.” This is one of the principal “four graces (mercies)” bestowed by God according to some Druzes; i.e., the serenity of spirit (ridha el rabb). The experience establishes a personal certainty that the “hand of God has touched his heart” or stated differently, this is the initial conversion of the personality from being a “child of man” to becoming a Child of God. Thus “Peace” is the first level of spiritual consciousness in a growing relation between the spirit of the individual and the Holy Spirit (God's presence). This is not a permanent condition, nor is it necessarily repeatable at will but becomes the cornerstone for other spiritual experiences.



One root meaning of the word Islam is this peace. Islam can also refer to the peace that comes from submission of self to God's will, a notion embracing Tasleem (surrender) more than ridha (serenity).

The second level of spiritual consciousness is Faith. This level embraces and supports the first level. The certainty experienced in the first level has become the foundation for building a faith full life with less striving for knowledge (of God) and more growing awareness of His pervading presence with a dependence on Him and a trust in Him. The change in emphasis is from seeking (knowledge) to using (wisdom). In this level the pilgrim is shifting his quest for knowledge from empirical evidence to transcendental truths or Hudud (principles). There is no specific time to spend at each phase (level) along the pilgrimage. Awareness is the key and total involvement in life lends quality and meaning to experiences along the pilgrimage.

The third and ultimate level of spiritual consciousness is Unity (TawHid). Some mystery surrounds this level, partly due to the polity of the clerics and partly due to the historical necessity for defending the Sect based on the experiences of struggling for survival as a society or sub-culture, but also due to the perceived nature of the “call” and the enigmatic character of the sixth Fatimid Caliph of Islam. Because of lost scripture (epistles), loss of correct meaning of allegories, loss of academic excellence in the ranks of the initiated called Uqqaal, and the cult's absorption in "class" in the community (probably a spin-off of feudalistic organization of society) the mystery may never be solved even though there are honest, brave, intelligent Druze interested in full disclosure. I personally feel that at issue is a theological approach and the mystery should not deter

any Druze from seeking moral values and prayerful living in developing his own God-Man relationship; i.e., from undertaking the pilgrimage.

As I have indicated in previous articles Unity is very similar to evangelical (born again) Christianity's understanding of the concept of “sanctification.” This is the state of near spiritual perfection where doing God's will becomes the first and most compelling inclination for any act the MuwaHid (Unitist) undertakes. It is a condition of near sinlessness when the desire to be at unity with God is stronger than any other desire and ecstasy is being at-one-ment with His Holy Spirit. It is complete awareness and identification with the immanence (nearness or omnipresence) of God.

It is this three-sequenced step approach to human perfection (spiritual maturation) that makes the Druze pilgrimage a unique one. It is difficult to understand why any human being should be excluded from the pilgrimage. So few elect to undertake it. There is some ambiguity whether upon being blessed with the highest level of consciousness (Unity) one qualifies as an Uqqaal. Indeed, when one becomes a MuwaHid in the real understanding of the term there is serious doubt of any real interest in becoming one of the Uqqaal, which in the narrow sense becomes little more than acquiring a title, and is therefore divorced from any milestone on the pilgrimage.

Get started on your pilgrimage and help another along the way (Tariqa). May you abide in Peace, Faith, and Unity and experience the reality of spiritual consciousness and the fullness of the life of God in the soul of Man.

## **REFLECTIONS ON DRUZISM**

Abdallah E. Najjar

As American Druze we respect our roots and recognize our cultural and theological heritage but refuse to stand on these laurels alone.

Mass education, women suffrage, industrialization, and restructuring of loyalties demand reappraisal of the system and possible acceptance of new principles without sacrificing tradition or continuity. Judaism and Christianity have instituted many changes so far. To avoid upheaval they packaged and marketed their reforms with great foresight and sophistication. After all Druzism itself started as a reform movement in Islam. It should continue for the only constancy in life is the constancy of change.

As American Druze we must speak of an ever-evolving concept in Druzism with more emphasis on the future than on the past. This is in harmony with our basic doctrine as we adopt ideas of progress yet continue to cultivate and propagate the uniqueness of this beautiful movement.

The Druze books tell us that God's works are still continuing as they have through the ages: that it is in the order of things to regenerate or degenerate to evolve or to regress.

If we are to question the solidity of such statements as:

"They are the chosen people"; "none enters my father house except through me"; and "I am the seal of the prophets, none to come after me";

We must also be true to ourselves and question the statement "that the door is closed" to all potential converts which was made 928 years ago to evident reasons that are other than theological.

Let us ask ourselves if we too aren't guilty of self-righteousness and holier than thou syndrome.

If I appear to be veering from orthodoxy in these comments I only do so constructively in the hope of deeper understanding of the historical circumstances that led to inclusion of contradictory thought to our basic doctrine.

For example the concept of "God incarnate is erupting again among theologians of different creeds in this country and abroad looking for new explanation. In Christianity some are calling for an updating on the premise that Jesus himself never claimed Divinity himself, but neither did al-Hakim. Yet differences of opinion need not constitute a difference of principle but rather of interpretation.

As adherents to a theosophy that places wisdom, reason, and intelligence as supreme of all of God's creation, we admit that none can claim monopoly of or has expressed the total truth; that all denominations have made their particular contribution; that we too the American Druze – of Canada, USA, Mexico, Central and South America, and other brethren in Australia, Europe, and elsewhere – should have the privilege and responsibility, in freedom of conscience and thought to express this ultimate truth as members of the universal family of God and not as outcasts nor as an exclusive racist group. But we must never travel that road some have taken parroting some one else's dogma on the basis of a limited exposure to its slick packaging and marketing or on the basis of expediency or on the basis of the misguided exhibitionist.

We have every reason to rejoice. Humanity is rediscovering its spiritual relationship to the "national order" in their world.

Humanity's relationship to God is beginning to be seen – as the Druze see it – as a process of change: a dynamic ongoing revelation. Other religions are beginning to reject the static view that encapsulates God in a reality based on perception of centuries ago.

The traditional separation of religion and science will be no longer tenable nor will the notion of conquering for Moses, for Jesus, for Mohammad, or for Hamza ibn Ali. We must accept and be accepted as being members of the universal family of God. We must have the courage to concede that there has been intrusion into the Druze Scriptures of false doctrine by imposters and infiltrators; that these must be identified and weeded out; that as we await the test of time and circumstance it behooves us to attempt predicting the future and make plans to control it, by setting goals and objectives, establishing methods, monitoring milestones and working diligently. The future belongs to those who prepare for it and God helps those who help themselves.

## **ISLAM + MONISM = DRUZE THEOSOPHY**

**By Samah HeLal**

MONISM- the doctrine that there is only one ultimate principle

THEOSOPHY- a system of thought that proposes to establish direct contact with divine principle to gain spiritual insight superior to empirical knowledge.

It's much more complex, but reduced to its essentials Druzism can be expressed by the simple formula stated in the title of this article. Independent of political history, Druzism can best be understood as an intellectual system which is as credible today as it was in the era of its inception, approximately 1000 A. D.

This system of thought is the product of the Golden Age of Islam and provides the Druzes the uniqueness enriching their Arabic heritage. The “faith” portion of this theosophy is tied to the “Divine Call” in 1017 A.D. and the belief in the physical embodiment of the principles (HUDUD) of enlightenment. The call is to “Tawhid” (Monism).

Druzes ostensibly espouse the doctrine of Tawhid without necessarily becoming one of its adherents similar to Christians who do not practice the teachings of Christ. An analogy can be made between Tawhid in Druzism and “Sanctification” in evangelical Protestantism. Sanctification is the point in spiritual growth of the individual where the tendency to sin is replaced by the tendency to obey God. Likewise with Tawhid, it is the point in self-realization at which the individual is more at-one-ment with God than with things i.e. God-centered rather than self-centered.

Dr. Sami Makarem’s book “The Druze Faith” provides the first general reference in the English language that places the various notions about Druzism within the context

of a system of thought without advocating a specific interpretation. The American Druze Society can feel proud for supporting the research that produced the work “The Druze Faith”.

I have reviewed the book and speaking candidly it is written at college level and presumes a basic knowledge of Islam and Islamic History. To gain an in depth understanding one must sit down with a good dictionary and Islamic reference. As written the book provides for an understanding of the main ideas. It will be well worth the effort to peruse the 139 pages. This is not a book for lazy minds. I have read the text three times and with each repetition have come away with a new insight on Druze Theosophy.

# 1979



## **LEST WE FORGET**

ADS TESTIMONIAL DINNER, DETROIT MICHIGAN HONORING MR. FRED I. MASSEY (ABU-MUSLIH)

JUNE 2, 1979 - ABDALLAH E. NAJJAR

It was not until the mid 1960's that I began to realize the great service Mr. Massey had rendered to the American Druze Community. The book on Druze history, which he translated, annotated, edited and published in 1952, was for years the only work of authenticity and scholarship in the Americas about a vibrant component of the Arab and Moslem world. I was also to discover other works on the Druze which he published for the benefit of the American born among them as well as for other Arab-American Brethren, both Christian and Moslem.

As our friendship began to grow I learned early that Mr. Massey does not mince his words. There is a refreshing intellectual honesty about the man that commands respect and admiration. Around 1971/72 when I chaired (CORA), the committee on religious affairs of the American Druze Society I concluded that he was perhaps the ablest bilingual Arab American qualified to assist the Society in rendering into English some scholarly works on Druze faith and history. He consented to translate the book on the Druze by Abdallah Najjar, and I, being his namesake, was elated indeed. But true to his convictions Mr. Massey let it be known that if he disagreed with a fundamental principle or knows that a statement is contrary to fact he reserves the right to give his counterpoint. To that condition I readily agreed, and in the stream of our back and forth correspondence he once wrote "I like to serve my people but only truthfully and honorably."

“Since Druzism prides itself in the role of the mind, reason and logic I categorically refuse to have anything to do with the God incarnate aspects in the faith’s dogma or more specifically the divinity of Al-Hakim.” To that I readily concurred also.

Mr. Massey strongly believes that Druzism will come to its own, once rerouted back to the headwaters of its mother Islam, from which it diverged almost a millennium ago.

Just a few weeks ago Time magazine had a cover story on the revival of Islam. Except for some errors by one of the contributing writers, the essay, by and large, was an accurate story. It was refreshing to see the curtain being lifted so that our fellow countrymen could note the common heritage that Judaism, Christianity and Islam share. Many of the statements in that article about Islam’s ideological integrity and its opposition to materialism, consumerism, and atheism read as if they were quotes from Fred Massey’s writings and from his treasured correspondence with me this past decade.

# 1981

## **REALITY**

### **The Doctrines of Monism, Dualism, and Pluralism**

**By Samah HeLal**

What is real? What is temporary? What is permanent? What is eternal? These were the questions pursued by the philosophers of the Near East when the Greek culture was dominant there. So incisive were their findings in pursuit of the nature of “Reality” that humanity’s perspective, especially in the West, will forevermore be influenced by their enlightened reasoning. That the Constitution of the United States and the resultant school of Jeffersonian Democracy should end up as a repository of such influence often escapes appreciation. That Arabic, through Muslim scholars, was the medium through which the thinking of the philosophers was transmitted to Europe and sparked the age of enlightenment in the West is even less appreciated. That the movement toward theological monism (Druzism) was influenced by the philosophers during the Golden (Intellectual) Age of Islam is appreciated by only a few Druze scholars.

In past articles, I have discussed the intellectual system on which TawHid is based under the umbrella term of Druze Theosophy. This is necessary so that we can use the critical method for examining the reasons and logic underlying the development of the “Hakim Cult” without disparaging the true faith of TawHid and its religious tenets. There is a need to differentiate between the “mind” of men and the “mind” of God.

Inevitably, such a discussion leads to man’s perception of what is true, or Truth. TawHid unequivocally states that God is Truth. God is the only Reality. Therefore, Truth is Reality. The search for truth and the search for reality, therefore, are really two sides of the same coin, or stated differently, the two are perfectly correlated undertakings. The

search for truth is the work of philosophers and when truth is perceived as being spiritual in nature, the search also becomes the work of theologians. Thus we discover the reason why some philosophers are looked upon as prophets by Druzes.

The high respect for intellectual pursuit dominates any delineation or description of TawHid and is very noticeable in the convictions that the best understanding of God (Reality) is “right reason”, vis-a-vis the first of the divine five luminary principles, the Universal Mind (Will) or Aql. Obviously, the understanding of TawHid involves relatively complex thought processes. This partially explains why Ambassador Najjar and Sami Makarem could not over-simplify their versions of the Druze Religious System in their respective books. Since ours is not a doctrinaire faith, those interested in TawHid must undertake their own theology (thought about God). Indeed, intellectual pursuit of the truth is in keeping with the original spirit of TawHid.

As the philosophers of old attempted to get a hold on reality, several systems of pursuit were developed. These were initially theories, but today we customarily refer to the works produced as “doctrines”. Because the founders of the Druze movement were attracted to the teachings of the monistic philosophers, the latter were “canonized”. There is reason to suspect that their teachings guided the development of the Druze movement. Today, their teachings are used for defense of the tenets of the faith.

To try to better understand the attraction of monism to this vanguard (theological monists in Dar El-Hikma who began the Druze movement) of Muslim dissidents who seemed to be purists if not puritanical, we shall review in this article the three philosophical doctrines of Monism, Dualism and Pluralism.

Monism states that reality can be best understood when we accept the theory that everything that exists, perceived or otherwise, is composed of one kind of substance or can be reduced to that one substance. Philosophers of this conviction taught that mind, matter, energy and spirit were all of the same ultimate reality.

TawHid states that reality is existence, but since God is the only Existent, ultimate reality is understood through his Unity. Therefore, Unity in theological terms becomes the equivalent of Monism in philosophical terms.

Human life as we know it confirms this Unity, but death does not negate it. When we recall that the Druze concept of creation links everything back to the brilliance (light) of God, we have, in fact, a theological unitarianism and a “one stuff” statement supporting a monistic view of reality.

Dualism, on the other hand, considers the ultimate nature of the universe to be twofold or to be constituted by two mutually irreducible elements such as mind and matter, the spiritual and the physical, the visible and the invisible. Druze theosophy is replete with dualisms: Lahut (God as he understands Himself) and Nasut (God as understood by humans); arrogance and humility; light and darkness; wujud (immanence) and tanzih (transcendence); good and evil; body and soul, etc. While monism is the dominant perspective, dualism was well known to the architects of the early movement which later became known as Druzism.

Pluralism states that more than one or two kinds of ultimate reality constitute the universe whether or not there be independent entities that are material or spiritual in nature. We can safely state that early Druze thought disclaimed this doctrine. Yet pluralistic ideas do emerge in elucidating the faith, vis-a-vis: ash-sharia (law), at-tariqa

(right path) and alhaqiqa (truth); islam (submission), iman (belief) and TawHid (unity); aql (will); nafs (spirit), kalima (revelation), sabiq (sensibility), and lahiq (action). The charter of the Committee on Religious Affairs (CORA) states support of a “pluralistic society in America”.

Insofar as these doctrines help us classify, categorize, separate, distill and label the product of the thoughts of the philosophers, they are convincing. Insofar as they afford an appreciation of reality, they come off as an esoteric language suited only for a university classroom. However, that is exactly where the Druze Movement began and it is there that the roots of any revival must be established. Meanwhile, the task of understanding reality should become a common seeking for all men. The last word is not in. Humanity’s relentless spirit still probes and searches.

Druzes especially, due to their obligation in understanding jihad (striving), must take the lead in rendering reality meaningful in this life. The constitution of the American Druze Society opens the door in its stated objective to “perpetuate the universal teachings of the Druze Faith” and “the advancement of Druze . . . cultural knowledge through research . . .” You are needed in either or both leadership and support roles.

# 1983



## **THE NATURE AND UNITY OF GOD**

**By Samah Helal**

### **God is Good**

He can be trusted to do the right things. He is for us, not against us.

### **God is Love**

He cares for his creation and among creatures He has established a special relationship with humanity. This loving relationship is shown through the gift of free will with which we are endowed.

### **God is Great**

He is so great that he controls nature, the universe and the ordering of all things created. He is the Creator, but He is so great that He cares for each of us as individual souls (persons). His greatness is beyond the meaning we usually give the word “great”. He alone is the greatest.

### **God is Eternal**

Only God is not created. He created all things, ordered all things, begins and ends all things. He was before us and He will be after us. He alone is forever. He is the God of History and Ruler of the Ages.

### **God is Just**

Not only is He Good, but He is also fair. In fact only God can be completely just. We perceive his justice through his mercy and graciousness toward us. He is the final judge, but He is the merciful and righteous judge.

### **God is Truth**

God is True! Truth is part of His nature. He does not deceive. He is not whimsical. He is not arbitrary. He is consistently true and can be depended upon to do what is right. His nature of Truth is important to the Faith in His Unity.

### **God is One**

God is a unique singular being. Nothing can be compared to Him. Without Him there can be no existence, no awareness, no consciousness. Belief in His Oneness is called Monotheism. This is basic to the Faith in His Unity.

At this time in America, about ninety-eight percent of the citizens believe in some monotheistic concept of God. Most can agree to some degree with the manner in which we have outlined God's nature. They may wish to place more emphasis on one aspect of His nature than another, but most believers accepted the idea that God is Good, Love, Great, Eternal, Just, Truth, and One. The monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Bahai also endorse these general aspects of God's nature. However, there is a wide variation in the emphasis within and between these organized faiths.

Faith in God's Unity is a difference in emphasis which has been supported by the people called Muwahidun Druze since 1017 A.D. At that time, the Muwahidun Druze believe humanity was "called" to the knowledge of the Unity of God. To them this difference is so important that they have chosen to remain distinct as a Sect to preserve and grow in this understanding of our relationship with God. This understanding includes what was said previously about God's Nature, but for the Muwahidun Druze, the calling is to a higher, purer, more sublime understanding of God's relationship to His creation.

Druzes number themselves with believers in one God and do not object to the label of monotheists. Among monotheists, however, they prefer to be known as “Believers in God’s Unity”, that is Muwahidun.

There is an English word that tells partly what Muwahidun Druzes mean when they speak of God’s Unity. That word is monism. One meaning of monism is the belief that reality is a unified whole. When we speak of God’s Unity we say something about what we believe to be real. Things and conditions are generally understood to occupy space and time. But the “whole” of the monists goes beyond time and space and points to God, who is also beyond time and space as well as being within them. God is Existence and therefore He is Reality, but He is not limited as we are by time and space. All existing beings derive their existence from Him. The meaning of monism may lead us to think that God is the sum total of all existing things. Our concept of God’s Unity is a larger one than this. We can say that He is at least the sum total of all existing things, but if existing things increase or decrease God’s Unity is not changed. Nothing exists outside of Him. When we say that God is everywhere all of the time, we say something about our belief that He is the only Existent Being, One, Whole, All. These ideas are all part of the meaning that is implied by Muwahidun Druze when they speak of God’s Unity.

The Arabic word, which embodies all this to the Muwahidun Druze, is Tawhid. The true believer in God's Unity is called a Muwahhid in Arabic. Monism is the English word that most nearly approximates Tawhid in meaning.

In this lesson we shall try to keep our message simple. However, you may be now realizing that we are talking about ideas that are not seen, but are nevertheless real. Such ideas are called mystical because they deal with spiritual reality and are of a nature that is

divine or religious in character. Faith, after all, means belief in the unseen. Yet many people have had mystical experiences that were very real to them.

Faith in God's Unity is not only belief but also a way of life, a life style that says something about our awareness of the knowledge of God's Unity. When such awareness is cultivated to the extent that every action reflects that awareness, it moves us along the path of Unity to the point where we feel that our spirit has united with God. The Muwahidun Druze believe that ultimate self-realization or the fulfillment of the potential in each person can be achieved only by uniting with God, the source of all being. The system of practice that leads to this fulfillment is the path of Tawhid.

Muwahidun Druzes who adopt this pious way of life, striving to unite their spirits with God, are called Uqqal. Not all Druzes choose to do this even though they acknowledge that divine truth is embodied in the knowledge of God's Unity. Such Druzes are called Juhhal.

The practicing believer in God's Unity is known for his/her truthfulness, cleanliness of mind and speech, morality, purity of heart, humility, serenity of spirit, kindness, gentleness, and piety. Only by developing such virtues can the mind of the believer reflect God in self-realization.

Knowledge, intellect, and reason are viewed as important elements in growing in the faith, while the deeds and acts of the Muwahidun Druze reflect their faith. So dominant is the faith's dependence on reason that it is difficult for the lazy mind to grasp the truth of becoming one with God. Yet we are promised that God's Truth will be made known to each person according to his/her ability to understand reality, which is a reflection of God.

Belief in God's Unity, therefore, means practice at being one with God through obedience to His commandments and by becoming the best possible person we can become. The feeling of unity with God comes when our mind reflects God's Will.

In this lesson we started with the idea that Truth or Reality is a unified Whole and led the reader to what it means to put that idea into practice according to the tradition of Tawhid.

This emphasis on God's Unity is what gives the Druze Muwahidun their distinctiveness among monotheists. This emphasis becomes unique to the Druzes, however, due to their experiencing the "Divine Call" to the knowledge of God's Unity.

# 1984

## **THE DRUZE OF LEBANON**

**By Abdallah E. Najjar**

The Druze are an order or a sect of Islam. Some classify them as Islamic, being an offshoot of Islam, but not Moslem because they have veered too far from orthodoxy. For the most part they are the product of the religious and political disputes that date back to the partisans of Ali, cousin and son-in-law of the prophet Mohammed.

Throughout the years Ali's partisans - the Shi'a - split into many factions, one of which was the Ismaili sect. Out of this sect Druzism or Tawhid movement evolved under the tutelage of Al-Hakim, the sixth Fatimid Caliph, who ruled from 996 to 1021 A.D. Al-Hakim enlisted the help of learned preachers and appointed Hamza ibn Ali Ibn Ahmed Al-Zawzani their leader after declaring the beginning of his divine call to the faith of Tawhid. The preachers began spreading the new doctrine in a society in need of spiritual and social revival. Al-Hakim proclaimed slaves free citizens, mounted a campaign against the superficiality of religious rituals and practices, and gave equal rights to women, among other reforms.

The divine call continued on and off, at times secretly, until 1043 A.D. Baha Uddin, one of Hamza's companions terminated it upon determining that its purpose had been fulfilled. Since then, no converts have, been accepted.

Worldwide, there are approximately a million Druze, one fourth of whom live in Lebanon. They have proudly fought for Lebanese independence; they fought valiantly the Crusaders, the Ottoman, the French, and other foreign forces that threatened the integrity of the state. Many proudly trace their genealogy to noble Arab tribes that settled in

Lebanon and Syria in the ninth century A.D. Their Emirs or patriarchs were the founders of Lebanon as a pluralistic, non-theocratic state with equal justice for all sects. Only when outside elements interfered or when one sect within attempted to impose its hegemony over others, did the Druze community rise to the challenge.

The Druzism as known and practiced today is presented in six handwritten books known as the Books of Wisdom (Al-Hikmeh). It deals with two major features and messages: namely, the meta physical and the ethical, otherwise referred to as the Precepts of Faith and the Precepts of Living. The Precepts of Faith are basically Quranic presented with aspects of the esoteric (demanding special training to be perceived) blended with Greek philosophy and ascetic mysticism (Sufism). The Precepts of Living or the ethical code is more explicit and simple. It has, more than any other factor, helped mold the Druze character. It is so firmly woven, and so forcefully stressed that it has through the centuries left its wholesome and indelible mark on Druze thought and behavior, such as dignity, love of liberty, good manners, perseverance and heroism. A sort of catechism was also developed and was formalized in Epistle 6 of the Hikmeh, to wit:

1. Telling the truth.
2. Protecting the brethren.
3. Excising evil forces.
4. Repudiating aggressors.
5. Adoring the Lord.
6. Submitting to God spontaneously.
7. accepting His will cheerfully.



There is a general agreement among all Islamic sects on the desirability and the wholesome effect of the prescribed five Islamic pillars (ordinances), which are: 1. To testify that there is no God but God and that Mohammed is God's messenger. 2. To pray daily five times. 3. To give alms. 4. To fast during the lunar month of Ramadan. 5. To make a pilgrimage to Mecca. To these ordinances two others are added by the Druze, namely: to declare allegiance to the spiritual leader and to strive in God's way (struggle against evil). However, disagreement arises among the various sects about performance and interpretation of these ordinances. To the Druze, for example, 1. Testimony is the recognition and full comprehension of the oneness of God. This is realized, not by utterance only, but by striving toward Tawhid in word and deed. 2. Prayer is the link of the hearts and the drawing nearer to God by realizing oneself in the divine unity. This self realization is attained proportionately to the extent of purity that a person has attained. With such purity a true believer is able to reflect the light of God just as a mirror reflects one's own image. 3. Charity, means to a Druze, helping and safeguarding the brethren. Help is rendered freely without the feeling of an imposed duty. The actions of the believer are motivated by love and could be a testimonial of an exemplary way of life to others, a constructive guidance and counsel, or a material assistance to one in need. 4. Fasting. Not as popularly practiced, by means of daily fasting from eating, drinking and physical pleasures during the month of Ramadan, but to a Druze it means abstinence from every act that distracts one from the knowledge of Tawhid. By observing such real actions, one is drawn nearer to the One who transcends every limit. 5. Pilgrimage. The Druze do not accept the pilgrimage as comprising the ritualistic practices such as circling and kissing the sacred black stone of the Ka'ba; to them it is understood to mean a

journey to the house of knowledge, knowledge of the unity of God. The house is the place of refuge where one finds shelter and peace. As a man associates himself with the knowledge of God, he acquires the fruits of clarity of mind and his clear reasoning becomes his distinguishing mark. 6. Allegiance. “O Believers, obey God and obey the messenger and those in authority among you.” The Imam chosen by the people as the successor to the prophet, to uphold and defend Quranic laws, is considered to be the one in authority by other Islamic sects. To the Druze, allegiance is submission to the universal luminaries, who are 1. Al-Aql - the universal Mind, 2. Al-Nafs - the universal Soul, 3. Al-Kalima - the universal Word, 4. As-Sabiq (the precedent) - the Cause, 5. At-Tali (the follower) - the Effect. Such allegiance necessitates the believer’s acceptance of God’s commands: Man obtains realization in God by means of a guide or Imam who leads to the station of divine light. The Universal Mind and the other four luminaries known as Khams-Hudood, guide the believers, by their teachings. The Druze consider these five to be in divine authority and to them they pledge allegiance. 7. Strive in God’s ways. The word Jihad in Arabic means the exertion of every strength one possesses to get something accomplished. To the Druze Jihad is one’s own striving towards the knowledge of Tawhid. Epistle 6 in-the Hikmeh states that strife in God’s way is striving towards the knowledge that our Lord is one. This exertion that the believer puts forth to suppress worldly desires and to acquire this knowledge results in a state of peace and contentment in relation to God and is known as “Rida.”

The Druze throughout their turbulent history were victims of persecution and falsehoods unjustly spread against them. They were able to survive only in the rugged terrains such as the mountains of Lebanon, the Hauran plateau and the Golan Heights in

Syria and in upper Galilee in Northern Palestine. In spite of the repeated actions by the Druze in defense of their rights and Arab honor, there are still scholars today who think that such secret movements (Batiniyah) as Druzism were subversive attempts by non-Arabs, bent on undermining Arab ascendancy in the then all-powerful Islamic world. The history of the Druze shows otherwise.

The Druze elders (initiates) maintain an aloofness from the world, virtually ignoring modern society. They lead an ascetic life, wholesome and soul purifying. Their rules of abstinence, self-denial, self-discipline, piety, and simplicity of life style gives them the strength, direction and solace that is the envy of outsiders. However, some Druze scholars recently have begun a reform movement to bring relevancy to this unique and beautiful philosophy without compromising its basic principles. For example, the proper understanding of the idea of the unity of God and the unity of nature as a unity manifested in the micro and macrocosm in a sort of universal ecological system. Thus the theory of reincarnation, which is a part of the Druze faith, can then be better comprehended. The Druze initiates (those with access to the Books of Wisdom) as well as non-initiates, constitute a traditional conservative, God-fearing community akin to the Amish and the Quakers in some respects, and to the Mormons in other respects. Some of them refer to their movement as a reform Protestant movement within-Islam. Today almost every Druze household in Lebanon has at least one of its members in America, be he an uncle, a nephew, or a cousin, etc.

To the uninformed, the Druze sect has been an enigma. On the other hand, whoever read and understood its philosophy was profoundly impressed by it and regarded it as a homogeneous force in the entire field of metaphysics. Druze scriptures declare that

Reason (Al Aql) was the first of God's creations. 'Al Aql al-Kulli is the fountainhead of all beliefs; that justice in human affairs will not stand unless predicated on the premise of free choice.

The theory of reincarnation however, was not born with the Unitarist Druze movement. It was flirted with by different people in India and Egypt, by Pythagoras and Plato in Greece, but it was left to the Druze theosophy to give full national treatment and make it persuasive and resplendent. Faith wedded to reason is the Druze's stock in trade. Religious struggle or repression was in consequence the struggle between reason and faith when the two parted company.

In the light of the traditional Druze understanding of the seven pillars discussed above, members of the American Druze Society are fortunate to be living in a pluralistic society where they may exercise the privilege of dissent or nonconformity without fear of ostracism. Pluralism is the most effective way to preserve our intellectual freedom and spiritual heritage. Accordingly we should be allowed to proclaim that knowledge of God's unity (Tawhid) is the ultimate reality and invite others to examine it, discuss it and partake of it.

Moreover we should not look on our 'belief' in God as the determining factor in how "religious" we are. There is a belief in God that nurtures love and justice, and there is a belief in God that fans the flames of hatred and egotism. "Belief in God" has been used historically to sanctify almost every injustice and oppression.

Our concern with faith should be on the level where it really counts, namely the values which motivate our behavior. The Gods we worship write their names on our

faces. In the true spirit of Tawhid our values and actions should speak louder than our words and should continue to be the distinguishing mark of our identity.

As for those who claim to speak for God and who claim unto themselves moral exclusiveness, they are practicing primitive intolerance. They fail to recognize the diversity and pluralism we all share. As they go on calling all opponents sinful and immoral they remain ill equipped to deal with the real world and will eventually fade away. But beware for they in the meantime will emerge occasionally from their stupor of fear and desperation in a surge of misguided enthusiasm. It is too bad, in a way, for we all need each other.

# 1985

## **A DRUZE ENIGMA**

**By: Abdallah Najjar**

An amazingly large percentage of what has been spoken and written about Druzism by non-Druze consists of falsehoods. Most of this is due to well meaning writers simply repeating the untrue views of former authors, who in turn did the same. Because the Druze have not told their own story in full, others took the liberty to tell it for them. Some told it the best they knew how but others told it vindictively, to our detriment.

Although modern critical scholarship, with it's amazing facilities at separating truth from falsity has been applied effectively in most areas of thought, it is unfortunate that there is still a moratorium by the decisive Druze leadership in the motherlands on real scholarship to clarify a multitude of misconceptions regarding the Druze and their theology. The time has come that we, the Druze of America, tell our own story publicly, explicitly and exoterically; that we tell it loud and clear in competition with all the other stories in the 'book of man'; that we tell it so that others can examine it, discuss it and compare it.

It is unfortunate that there exists this big gap between us Druze on how we perceive ourselves versus how others perceive us or depict us. We must assume the responsibility and take the blame for allowing certain documents that found their way into our Druze writings in the early years and dark period of the Call. They have been used since as rusty weapons in the hands of our enemies. It is high time that we courageously state that these were forgeries introduced as authentic Druze epistles by

‘intelligence operatives’ of days past bent on undermining Arab and Islamic ascendancy from within.

As we continue to ignore innuendoes we will continue to be held suspect by non-Druze in addition to being in violation of our most sacred concern - Reason and Truthfulness. It matters not to them that our ethical code measures up to the highest human standard and that our actions individually and collectively have been the measure of our values through the ages.

I say to my fellow Druze that it is no longer enough to understand and cherish the universal truths of ‘Tawhid’ but that we must help spread them within the American perspective with complete mental freedom and the unrestricted use of reason. It is only in this way that we would be able to discern between those universal truths and high religious ideals and some of the long established rituals and superfluous insertions that won’t sink root in this land.

Yes we do have a glorious heritage but we had faults then and we have faults now - probably enough faults to match each one of our many virtues. Today we stand against superstition and fear and proclaim the noblest of God’s handiwork that he endowed us with, namely: Reason/Intelligence or AQL tempered with a conscience.

Let us no longer be guilty of silence, but admit from a position of strength that we have been carrying excess spiritual baggage, which is irrelevant, unnecessary and harmful. This alien baggage has blurred our exquisite theology and given comfort to our enemies. In this free land we are able to declare them null and void and discard them by the wayside as we proceed in our journey toward the second millennium - proclaiming that Tawhid is the ultimate understanding of God.



## **ON ABORTION**

**By Samah HeLal**

What does Tawhid tell us about abortion? Nothing, directly! But to conclude that the Druze community in emigration has no choice but to follow the “law of the land” is to sell short the value system that Tawhid provides humanity.

Medical and legal positions are tenuous and change with time. The spectrum of controversy is increasing with considerable polarization. Currently the dilemma seems centered on the question: “At what point does the fetus become a person?”, because only the person has status before the courts.

Based on the tradition that the soul enters the body of a newborn upon the first breath that he or she takes, Druze have no problem defining a doctrinal position of when a person begins. This may help provide a medical/legal answer for us, but it does not tell us whether Tawhid condones abortion.

As free agents we are obligated to make difficult decisions. Even the most pious may have to make a difficult choice when a complicated pregnancy can spare only one life, either the mother or the fetus. The mother must deal with her conscience considering the impact on the whole household (not only herself and the child she is carrying). Therefore, while it is apparent that Muwahhidun must be “pro-life” they also must be “pro-choice”. Striving to do the will of God means encountering the vicissitudes of life across the total spectrum. It is in our choices that we witness to our faith. We pray that our conscience is aligned with the will of God.

We have the responsibility for being custodians of God’s creation. This adds to the complexity of moral decision-making. God’s justice demands that each soul should

be allowed the full test of a “completed” life before it is judged. We have a stewardship responsibility to assist that soul to understand its moral choices (in the natural normal living required), but how do we decide when it cuts the normal lifespan?

To abort a normal healthy fetus is sinful by Tawhid principles. However, the Muwahhidun may be sinning if they allowed an “abnormal” fetus to come to full term and enter a life in which it is incapable of making moral choices and experiencing the consequences. While we cannot play God, we cannot avoid moral decision making which ultimately is a personal one. We can only rely on God for guidance and trust our own conscience to reflect His will. Accordingly we offer the following guidelines:

Abortion may be permitted when the pregnancy:

- 1) is dangerous to the mother;
- 2) results from rape or incest;
- 3) subjects the fetus to harmful substance abuse from the mother;
- 4) subjects the fetus to the risk of Aids or other harmful diseases; or
- 5) deforms the fetus to the extent that its future life would be sub-human.

Abortion should not be permitted when:

- 1) it is used as an alternate means of contraception;
- 2) it is an inconvenience for the parents; or
- 3) it is motivated by economic reasons.

CORA does not believe that there should be an absolute ban on abortion because it does not allow the exercise of moral choices and it will lead to illegal abortion practices. In Tawhid persons (souls) are responsible for their own actions throughout eternity. That responsibility carries with it the privilege and obligation of making

decisions based on the individual's understanding of God's will. We hope this discussion and the guidelines provided will be helpful in clarifying our faith's position on this contemporary issue.

# 1986

## **THOUGHTS and REFLECTIONS on the Tawheed Faith**

**By Anis Obeid**

The Druze are at a cross road in their history. It is axiomatic that life in general is a series of cross roads or as some scientists refer to as “Y” forks, and this applies to individuals as well as institutions. In fact it applies to instinctive behavior driven by determinants that are ingrained in the genetic code. However as the individual or the institution evolves to higher degrees of development of intellectual and cognitive skills, the choice at the cross roads becomes more critical in defining and directing the future. In successful endeavors the decisions at each fork in the road serves to clarify amplify and augment the purposes and aims of these endeavors. Thus growth and maturity move hand in hand in unison and harmony.

Decisions based on such enlightenment can also be effective in troubled times serving to produce maximum security without lethal sacrifice. Furthermore, evolutionary laws favor those who possess enough versatility to adapt to the changes dictated by environmental conditions in a process known as natural selection. Since life by definition is change and since nothing in nature stands still it follows that no law or doctrine can remain frozen in its nascent state and survive the test of time.

In this brief communication I want to share with you some of the questions that haunt me as well as, I know, many of you. If we start with the more concrete issues, it may be easier for us to follow through to the more complex questions in a logical and “reasonable” manner. After all we are commanded to use reason and to adulate the “Universal Mind” as God’s first and most important creation at a point when there was no time and a juncture where there was no place. The human mind is a miniscule but

nonetheless concrete extension of the First Creation. The Universal Soul followed and with that the kinetic expression of the Universal mind was actualized. The individual human soul is supposed to be a miniscule and concrete extension of the Universal Soul. The Universal Word, the Precedent and the Follower complete the list of Luminaries in the Tawheed Faith. It must be mentioned that These Luminaries are conceptually outside the realm of space and time, as we understand these phenomena at our own level of development. Their creation “preceded” or “presaged” the creation of the entire universe. In fact the entire universe is supposed to have emanated from the “Follower” who is the last of the Luminaries.

Juxtaposed to the five Luminaries are their counterpart antitheses, possessed of power and skills of darkness and evil that are comparable to those of the Luminaries, thus establishing the basis of life as a perpetual struggle between opposing forces that are evenly matched. This symmetry offers the opportunity for choice and conscious decision. Since the individual is in fact a microcosm of the Universal Phenomena, it follows that the struggle between the opposing forces of good and evil is an ongoing exercise in daily living and in thoughtful conduct.

The central theme in the Tawheed faith is that of conscious choice, active diligence and accountability. God’s guidance is forever present and His Grace is witnessed by each and every individual in accordance with the individual’s capacity to absorb and integrate into his or her spiritual repertoire. Tawheed did not restrict the methods that an individual can employ in the search for Truth or in the active pursuit in the individuals pilgrimage to the Ultimate Reality. From the concrete to the abstract Tawheed urged its followers to spare no avenue of research. In the final stages and when

the individual has attained a sufficient level of purity and wisdom, Reality becomes more of an ecstatic phenomenon as the individual transcends the physical experience of the senses and his or her soul approaches the Source of its being and its genesis. Meanwhile, the span of eternity affords the individual an unlimited scope for trial and error and levels the field for all contestants. Spiritual evolution is therefore a major tenet in Tawheed faith.

Based on this brief glimpse which in my understanding of the Faith is reasonably accurate, we can conclude that Tawheed is an ongoing and evolving process, starting in the primordial state of existence and culminating in the state of union with the Ultimate Reality. The Reality is one but the methods are multiple and may be as numerous as there are travelers on the road.

And now to the haunting questions that I referred to earlier. These I pose to stimulate us to think about these issues and to strive for answers; or, if the answers are not within our grasp, at least to recognize the compelling need to search, if not for answers then for satisfactory explanations.

1.) How can an eternally evolving and ongoing principle be subject to limitations in space and time, and in the duration of its utility, to a relatively narrow window of opportunity. The references to the permanence of God's guidance in the Epistles of Wisdom as well as in the Holy Koran and all other revelations are too numerous and too obvious to cite. Discontinuity is tantamount to extinction in life and negation in faith. In either case it runs counter to the cycle it professes to protect. It relegates the phenomenon of reincarnation to a state of irrelevant redundancy, as there would no longer be any meaningful purpose from such activity, which is predicated upon eternal struggle to the

Ultimate. Discontinuity also violates the concept of symmetry whereby the forces of evil and darkness will be left unchecked exploiting the void, a logical impossibility since the entire concept of life is predicated upon the struggle of opposing forces, and therefore by necessity depends on the simultaneous and perpetual presence of these forces. If discontinuity is incompatible with Tawheed, how can we then explain or justify the discontinuity in practice, and in the current understanding by the Druze.

2.) How can we understand Divine justice when the fate of individuals has already been determined and they have already been consigned to one state or the other. And what is the use of further efforts if the die is cast. With the results of the test signed and sealed what is the rationale behind continuing the journey and to what end. If as some of our sages profess everyone was given the final chance almost one thousand years ago, (and they insist on every single human soul), and every one opted freely and willingly at that time, and became bound by that choice to an irrevocable fate, what is to be served by prolonging the experiment. The vote is cast, the results are in, and everyone will be served in accordance with the decision. The game would have been over right there and then. But it obviously was not; otherwise we would not be here deliberating these issues. Furthermore, the premise implied in the first question is inconsistent with that of the second question unless we have come to the end of the journey, and transformed the infinite into the confines of space and time of the finite.

3.) How can we restrict the definition of the soul to the physical confines of the body. Tawheed defines the relationship of the body to the soul as that of a house to an occupant, or an abode for a traveler. The body is essential only in as far as and as long as it provides the sanctuary for the soul. Being finite and subject to the physical laws of



nature, once the body is vacated by the soul it becomes a thing and not a living being. The true identity of the individual (the soul), by definition everlasting, does not disintegrate like the body it once inhabited, but moves to another abode. Nowhere in the Epistles of Wisdom is a restriction of where the soul goes upon leaving the body nor the identity of the next body it by necessity enters, and no one can profess to know which newborn and to what parents will be the next residence for any given soul. As a matter of fact, it is considered blasphemous for any one to allege such knowledge as he or she would be claiming powers that the Almighty has not granted to mortals. If we do not and can never know when and where one's next station is going to be, it follows that it could be in any place on earth or beyond and to any sets of parents regardless of their color, race, or creed. This deep-seated anchor of Tawheed in the universality of humanism somehow got lost when discontinuity replaced continuity in our practices. The pilgrimage in Tawheed is towards fulfillment by the cumulative efforts of any one soul regardless of the type of body it occupies at any given time, providing continuity and permanence. To define the soul by the characteristics of the body at any given time would be a gross misrepresentation, not only of the teachings of Tawheed, but also of the very foundations on which it stands. Although there are sporadic and poorly defined references in popular thinking about the more extended family of believers in Tawheed than the minority of ethnic Druze, no efforts were ever made to identify these people nor to seriously explore these issues further.

This is but a partial list of issues and concerns that should be at the forefront of considerations for any one contemplating the future of our community. They are on the surface questions in philosophical and metaphysical aspects of our faith. However on

close scrutiny they deal with the core issues of our existence and our future. To close our eyes or to “pass the buck” is easy and that has been the case throughout our history. Is there any more justification for such abdication of responsibility given our trajectory to extinction if the present trend continues, or should we finally ask the hard questions and seek the difficult answers. After all are we not as we claim to be “seekers of truth”. We could stay the way we are, business as usual, heading straight to liquidation or create a genuine renaissance for our people as well as for all of God’s children.

## **THE MODERN CHALLENGE TO TAWHID**

**By Dr. Anis Obeid**

### **I - INTRODUCTION**

Of all the interrelated facets of Druze concerns in modern times, none is more compelling than the concern for the Tawhid Faith. For it is the faith of a religious community that provides the backbone of its existence. In the case of the Druze, the issue is more difficult because of the complexities inherent in Tawhid.

The Druze are among the few ethno-religious communities in the world whose existence is largely by tradition and historical continuity, rather than by theological activity. The reasons are complex and pertain to difficulties in the theological doctrine itself as well as paucity of resource material at hand for scholarship or dissemination. The result has been that the large majority of members of this faith have become largely religious illiterates. If we add to this the double jeopardy of closed doors for new comers and open gates for out-goers, the erosive effects of steady attrition become obvious. And no performance on the battlefields of politics or war can reverse the trend.

The Druze communities in the western world are even more threatened as a religious community than their coreligionists in the East. The intensive contacts in closely knit, densely populated, and socially integrated community which has largely preserved the ethnicity of the Druze in the East do not prevail in the highly individualistic mobile culture of the West where few members of the Druze community are sparsely scattered over a wide terrain. Therefore, in the Western world, the Druze must derive the major sustenance of their existence as a community from the doctrines of their faith.

It follows then that these issues should be debated seriously, since they deal directly with issues of self preservation and the instinct of survival. If our forefathers, (and by the sequence of reincarnations ourselves) had the intellectual and spiritual courage to accept the philosophy of Tawhid a thousand years ago, we should be now no less committed to take stock of what there is and what should be done about it.

But before we begin to invest heavily in this kind of endeavor, we should pause and examine the evidence for the worthiness and/or the feasibility of this endeavor. We should, in brief, examine the viability of this sect and the value of its message.

As I have come to understand the Tawhid phenomenon and the history of those who have embraced it, it appeared to me that we should address our consideration of the Tawhid faith from three different but interrelated perspectives. If it passes the test, then further investment becomes not only wise, but also mandatory by the same logic. If on the other hand it is found wanting, then other alternatives must be considered. This endeavor is in essence the pursuit of truth. Therefore, it should not be limited in scope, not bound by tradition, not stifled by dogma, and not intimidated by fear.

## II - HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Tawhid faith, as is known to its followers (adherents) today, is nearly 1000 years old. We should however remember that the last 1000 years are only the last chapter in an evolving concept that is anchored in the eternal concept of life and existence. This fact is of central importance to the emergence of an intellectual, philosophical and social revolution in the Islamic world nearly 1000 years ago.

Related to Islam by direct parentage, yet going beyond the traditional, literal understanding of the Islamic religion, the Tawhid faith was inevitably met with resistance

and rejection that were predictable considering the challenge. As it could not prevail and convince the majority in a relatively short period of time, it was expected to disintegrate and disappear as many similar movements have done.

Instead we know that it not only survived, but also created in the process of survival a historical profile that many a detractor would covet and envy. Friends and foes alike attest to the nobility of this historical record and its ability to withstand adversity. Time after time, it not only weathered the storms of possible annihilation, but its followers were able to spearhead movements of national defense and liberation; and more importantly behave with dignity and tolerance when they occupy positions of power.

What is note worthy is that this type of behavior is not characteristic of persecuted sects and besieged minorities.

As a result, the Druze, who are ethnically of almost pure Arab stock were able to produce long lines of leadership whose moral integrity and social enlightenment made it possible for a religio-ethnic tapestry to be woven in the Middle East with its epicenter in Mount Lebanon. The era of Druze sovereignty was built on harmony, tolerance, and freedom which created the concept of Pluralism in a region that has not developed such traditions in its social anatomy.

These accomplishments are not merely accidental events in the course of the tumultuous history of the area. On the contrary, fairness and chivalry are directly related to the aristocracy and elitism of the moral and spiritual teachings of the Tawhid Faith. Then as now, we see the followers of Tawhid firmly anchored and do not behave as a threatened and encircled minority. We can only hope that recent events do not tempt these Muwahhidūn to put a blemish on an otherwise impeccable record.

From a historical perspective then, Tawhid has earned the legitimacy of its birthrights, not only by mere survival but also by establishing a historical personality that is confident, secure, and tolerant, even in the face of danger and in adversity.

### III - THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Religious concepts are generally accepted or rejected by a process of emotional intuition that leads to faith. Once established, it quickly reaches the recesses of the subconscious from which it is very hard to dislodge. Above all, it becomes shielded from the challenges of rational discourse and logical analysis. Such is the distinction between faith and philosophy. Their historical struggle for supremacy in shaping human life and behavior is in fact the history of human civilization. Where does the Tawhid faith stand in this context and how well does it perform under the dissecting micro process of philosophy. That Tawhid is deeply rooted in philosophical tradition is attested by several features that are unique to this faith.

1. First, Tawhid venerates philosophy and claims by the process of reincarnation the philosophers who laid the corner stone to our civilization. Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras and Socrates for example are not only considered holy by the followers of Tawhid, but also their teachings formed the corner stone for the interpretation of the Islamic Religion as well as other monotheistic faiths. This allowed Tawhid unparalleled latitude in formulating bold and original concepts unrestricted by form, dogma, or fear. Veneration of the Universal Mind as the first of God's creation is but one indication of the premium that Tawhid places upon wisdom, logic, and analysis and upon the profound philosophical genetics of this faith.

2. The concept of the absoluteness of God, his presence in everything and everywhere, yet his inaccessibility to our comprehension pose an insolvable dilemma at first glance. Yet, Tawhid elaborated the concept of divine revelations that human beings can witness and comprehend, each according to the level of his/her development and refinement of his/her perception. God reveals of his divine light to the extent that the human being can absorb. Therefore, God's image becomes a reflection of ones awareness of his/her inner self. Thus, in everyone of us, there is a spark of the divine glowing brighter as we get purer. It follows, that it is up to the individuals to strive for purity and perfection and to remove the opacities that impede their vision and distort their reflection.

This is a unique philosophical approach that does not saddle the human being with original sin, nor does it limit his scope to the physical confines of material dimensions. Heaven and Hell in Tawhid are not physical places but metaphysical perceptions of wisdom or negation. It is only through active seeking and diligent struggle that an individual begins to attain higher and higher levels of cognizance and reflection.

3. The concept of reincarnation becomes of paramount importance for man to advance in the (hierarchy) of knowledge and wisdom. One life time, even if full (and many are not), is not enough for a human being to evolve and actualize himself in the supremacy of creation. Besides, if we are to accept some measure of reward or retribution for an individual's action in this life, what happens to such an individual between the end of his/her earthly existence and judgment day. Where is the divine justice in using the same scales in judgment of different ages, stages and means of survival. Reincarnation provides logical answers to agonizing questions in the miracle of life. In the first place, it redefines the lifetime of an individual as a phase in the context of his eternal existence.

Death of the body takes place when it becomes bereft of the soul which then incarnates another body in an everlasting process. More importantly, reincarnation is not merely the entrapment of the individual self in a perpetual horizontal circle without change. It is rather a spiral phenomenon with a third dimension of height or ascendancy. It is this radial projection in addition to the tangential property that gives reincarnation an upward mobility, consistent with evolution and progress. Not all the past is carried over with every change, otherwise the burden would be too heavy. Only the essence is retained, providing the soul with the necessary momentum to move radically on the ladder of growth and wisdom.

For those who believe in a final day of judgment, the long journey of the entire existence would provide ample opportunity for an individual to have made his choices and proven his case. For others who believe in the more metaphysical concept of heaven, a perpetual journey getting ever closer to the whole would be the only logical cause for being. Viewed in this light then, the concept of reincarnation becomes indispensable to the process of spiritual evolution and divine justice.

#### IV - ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES

It is no accident that the Druze (Muwahhidūn) have evolved a set of ethical and behavioral traits that are distinctive and that provide the major window through which the Druze are viewed by their peers. That the Druze share with other groups in the Middle East profound Arab traits based on family and tribe is obvious. That they also share with their neighbors the influence of geography and history is equally obvious. However, the Druze have gradually accentuated some of these traits, eliminated others, and evolved still others that are almost their monopoly.



Among the traits that are generally recognized in the Druze portrait are; courage, chivalry, valor, and generosity, which appear to be straightforward traits at first glance. Further observation however discloses more complex patterns such as a peculiar blend of pride tempered with humility, ambition tempered with acceptance, and enthusiasm tempered with patience. The Druze is forever conducting an exercise in self-assessment and self-criticism seeking the deeper layers of motivation and behavior. Truth is not merely an instance of accuracy but a continual quest in the long pilgrimage to perfection. Bravery is not merely a reflection of incarnate reassurance of perpetuity, important as this may be, but also a spiritual commitment to seek the ultimate truth and the ultimate reality whatever the price. Valor and chivalry are dictated by the deep, almost instinctive, respect to other peoples' rights and feelings. That stems primarily from viewing humanity as the extension of self over the recurring theme of existence.

Not needing external forms of ritual or aggrandizement, the Druze may be perfectly content in the modesty of means, while at the same time basking in the wealth of spiritual endowment. This reduces jealousy and curbs rampant materialism while stressing the virtues of toil and self-sufficiency.

The care of self is intertwined with that of progeny and ancestry in the continuum of life as the self merges into the race and the race into the great stream of life and eventually into the source of life and the source of sources.

The Druze behavior reflects a blend of pre-ordained determinism and active free will. Thus, the acceptance of an event as inevitably predetermined not only provides solace, but also evokes a sobering reflection on the lessons that can be learned from the experience and how does the whole encounter fit into the scheme of things. The resultant

peace and decorum ensues when the enormity of any event is viewed in the context of the board frame of life and existence. Forever searching for the deeper meaning of events and the relationship to the whole, the Druze do not take things for granted.

Now the question should be asked again, “Is what the Muwahhidūn (Druze) have evolved over the last thousand years, and by their theological perspectives since creation, worth worrying about, worth saving, and worth developing and promoting?” Is it in brief worth the effort? The followers of Tawhid are or should be distinctly aware that they face difficult choices. If it is not worth the effort, shouldn’t one pursue other alternatives, of which the supply is plentiful and into which many have already gravitated? If yes, and I obviously believe in the latter stand, then it is time we begin to do some homework.

The Druze are ethnically Arabs and theologically they trace their immediate heritage to Islam with considerable philosophical and metaphysical latitudes.

As we look at the Muslim and Arab worlds today, we cannot but wonder where does the Druze faith fit in the drama that is enacted on these two theaters.

It is obvious that for almost 200 years, the Muslim world has been confronted with a modern crusade from the West, they have never experienced before. From colonialism through mandates and more impressively through the overwhelming scientific and technological might, the west has invaded, controlled, exploited, and humiliated the Muslim and Arab people in a relentless way. More recently, the west engaged the Judaic component and converted the traditional Christian Crusade of the middle ages into a Judeo-Christian crusade with all the forces at its disposal.

The other half of the Western world, that is the Eastern block countries, relinquished the religious crusade in favor of an ideology that appears to be rigid, alien

and above all atheistic. These features made it difficult for the majority of Arabs and Muslims to relate to it in a profound way.

Forlorn, abandoned, and totally helpless against the onslaught of the West and unable to bridge the estrangement with the East, Muslims began to seek resurrection through their own heritage. Fundamentalism was by exclusion the only answer and the Muslim world began galloping forward to its past. The age of reason never had a chance to become of age before the age of faith took hold and began to consolidate.

We need not go into further details as the rush of events day by day is pointing to the growth of fundamentalism and theocracy.

#### V - CONCLUSION

The relevance of all of this to our subject matter is that fundamentalism does not tolerate deviations from rigid standards and codes and does not tolerate philosophy. The Druze must be prepared to face many a challenge in this regard. Furthermore, it is the Druze and other liberal and philosophical movements in this land that will remain the standard bearers for the renaissance that must usher the age of reason, once the age of faith loses its momentum. It is precisely because in the fundamentalist era conformity is the rule, that free thinkers must keep the torch of discourse, philosophy, logic, and liberalism alive and must keep the torch of learning aglow. The seed will then germinate in the future, when political climatic conditions become more favorable.

It is therefore a larger task than mere survival that we must consider. After all, if we are the seekers of truth, the truth recognizes no limits. If people can be persecuted for religious beliefs in the East, the West with all its drawbacks has overgrown this practice.

Much like in the height of Muslim civilization, thinkers could find the proper climate in Andalusia if Baghdad or Cairo became stifling.

We are blessed in living in this great land that protects freedom of thought and expression. It is also a land where the breath-taking progress in the material spheres has strained the social fabric of society and dramatized the wide gulf between material progress and spiritual poverty. If we have what we believe to be worthwhile contributions to the welfare of our people in this country, we should in this era of information, share our perception of truth and immortality with those who cherish Tawhid and are ready for the pilgrimage.

It has recently become my privilege to be involved with CORA, whose members are the finest that one can ask for. The contributions of many members of CORA that have been active in this field for several years should encourage the rest of us to follow their steps with objectivity and diligence. We are all called upon to ponder the impact that religious education can play in our lives and in the lives of future generations.

God's message is for man to better himself and his fellow man. Consequently, we should all heed this call.

# 1987

## **ISLAM**

**By Samah HeLal**

The statement that “Christianity and Islam are twins in the service of humanity” is credited to that great shaykh and fourteenth century provincial governor in the Near East that we lovingly know as Emir as-Sayyid. In personal holiness and in nobility of character he set a standard toward which all shaykhs aspire. If the life, sayings, and actions of this accomplished saint is not familiar to you, I suggest you obtain a copy of TawHid Faith book number four by the Committee on Religious Affairs and read the biographical sketch of this renowned leader in TawHid.

While I do not possess absolute knowledge of what Emir as-Sayyid was thinking when he used the word “twins”, I can be relatively sure he had in mind identical twins. Those of us who are acquainted with identical twins know how difficult it is to identify each member of the pair, especially when they are not side-by-side. And I think that was the point that he was trying to make. Restating his thought we might say that when he observed the neighborliness, caring, and charity of the people in his province, he could not distinguish by their results whether, they were performed by a Christian or a Muslim. This special insight is part of our Druze heritage and I am somewhat astonished that its significance eludes us when we pursue answers to religious identity. Are we not being challenged to understand that there is no essential difference between the God of Christianity and the God of Islam? The Arabic adage that “deeds alone open the gates to paradise” has its root in this proclamation.

The purpose of my lecture today is to make more palatable the notion that TawHid is an extension of Islam. Some of us embrace that notion as absolute fact but others eschew it and rationalize why it cannot be so. Regardless of where you are in this spectrum of thought, we must not allow ourselves to resort to stereotyping. Too much bigotry exists in this country towards anything Arabic and Islamic without our adding to the cauldron. While we may not be convinced of the wrongness of stereotyping, I hope we are all convinced that open mindedness and pluralism are in the interest of Druze everywhere. Nevertheless it poses no good to erroneously characterize or negate the connectedness of the Druze and Muslims. It may amaze some of you as to how closely correlated TawHid is to Islam. In fact in my mind the correlation is so significant that I want to suggest to you that we, together, focus on our faith as a plant whose root is Islam and whose blossom is TawHid.

Even the older among us have our perceptions colored by political events occurring at the beginning of this century. The defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War One marked Islam as a loser; and who wants to be associated with a loser? In World War Two the technical advances in the West were “modern” and cultures that could not compete were considered “backward.” And who wants to be associated with a backward country? All Muslim governments found themselves categorized as “Third World” countries. The creation of Israel in 1948 by the United Nations added salt to an open wound in highlighting the superiority of the Christian west over the Muslim east. How does one distance himself from a consistent loser? An unspoken conclusion is that God must be for Christianity, but against Islam.

Well, I can sympathize with these very human reactions, but “might” does not make “right”! It’s so easy to want to be part of a successful and materialistically advanced culture than to have to apologize for a poor troubled one regardless of how faithful the latter may be! The fallacy in our thinking is the association of political ineptitude by Muslims with the faith of Islam. We have confused political events with spiritual events, how sad, especially for us, since TawHid denies the credibility of anything materialistic! In rational terms alone we should beg the question whether faith perceived by *Muslims collectively* really represents the faith of Islam. Does the failure of Muslims represent the failure of God? I, for one, would never agree to TawHid being defined by the collective actions of the Druze, would you? No offense intended to you members of this august audience. In order to be reasonable and fair let us focus on the evidence with the eyes of faith in lieu of lust for gain.

We cannot separate Islam from the medium with which it was delivered to humanity. That medium is the Arabic language: Never had the Arab people been given a revelation in their own tongue. And it was delivered through an unlettered illiterate orphan. Of course I’m referring to Muhammad, peace be upon him, and the glorious Qur’an. This revelation set a standard for Arabic that has never since been equaled nor duplicated. Indeed the miracle that sets Islam apart from other religions is the elegant Arabic of heavenly origin. I can understand why Muslims believe it to be the language of the Angels!

On balance we can judge Christianity and Islam to be equally effective as missionary faiths. In carrying out its mission Christianity has translated the gospel message into more than 300 languages and dialects. Even though there are translations of



the Qur'an, Islam carries its revelation to all countries in the world through the medium of the Arabic language. This is one reason why many Americans think that all Muslims are Arabs. It is human error as opposed to God's purpose that often sets these missions on what appears to be collision courses. As a matter of fact it could very well be our own present biases that have been influenced by these missions.

The title El-Qur'an El-Karim can be translated as The Noble Recitation and let me suggest to you that a relevant criteria for judging a faith is by its nobility, for only God is truly noble. And if our own Book of Wisdom is to have any viability it must be a "nobler" interpretation of the Holy Qur'an. And the standard for such nobility must be the first commandment of Druze Discipline placing "Truth" as the foremost virtue. It is in keeping with that commandment that we meet here today and undertake the objective to understand the connection of TawHid with Islam. In the spirit of honoring Truth, I will try to gather various threads of common knowledge and then try to weave them into a recognizable portrait or tapestry to which we can relate.

The Qur'an is not a theological treatise. It is a collection of divine warnings, exhortations, discourses, duties, and prayers. It is the source of doctrine and ethics, but the latter are the works of men not of God. Even when inspired, men can make errors. And as difficult as it is to admit, even a group or community could make an error. Nowhere in the Qur'an can we find the term "pillars" used and even though the statements contained in the five pillars of Islam are found in different suras, never are they grouped together as five in the Qur'an. But Islam is not that unique in its formulation. A similar status exists in Christianity. Nowhere in the Injil is the word "Trinity" used. Yet this, still controversial, subject has become doctrine with

multitudinous justifications. Nevertheless the principal titles that identify the trinity are found throughout the Gospel. In Islam religious scholarship is concentrated on creating a good life for the believing community. This focus on the precise duties of believers results in an extremely practical people. Religious leaders turn their attention to religious obligations and jurisprudence, referred to in Arabic as Shari'a and fiqh. While theological activity--that is, speculation and investigation of such doctrines as resurrection, judgment day, and eternal life--does take place it is not given the priority that Christianity places on such matters. It is partly due to these variations in emphasis that the Western distinctions of the sacred and the secular do not correspond with the interwoven social and spiritual life of the Muslim. I would consider it brash to attempt to rank one approach as being superior to the other. While each has its place, we need to appreciate the Holistic approach of Islam to better understand how the unitary focus of TawHid was derived.

Civilization owes a debt to Islam. Without the early philosophers, scientists, architects, and artists of Islam, the brilliant achievements of twentieth century science and technology would not have even been possible. The inventive genius and intellectual curiosity, the breadth of vision and the practicality of those early Muslims were astonishing. And that heritage is ours! It is the foundation on which the "house of TawHid" rests. The impact of this progressive era is carried forward even in the English language from the Arabic in such words as zero, algebra, sofa, chemistry, alkali, alcohol, antimony, arabesque, cotton, divan, magazine, mattress, damask, muslin, nadir, and coffee. It was during this golden age of Islam that the philosophy developed on which the theosophy of TawHid is based.

Islam stresses the same virtues and deplores the same vices that Christianity does.

It demands unselfishness, kindness, justice, endurance, hospitality, purity, and honesty. It may come as a surprise to you, but the “equality of the genders” is advocated by Islam.

Let me read to you a translation from the Hadith:

The Prophet said, “All people are equal, as equal, as the teeth of a comb. An Arab is no better than a non-Arab, nor is a white person over a black person, nor is the male superior to the female. The only people who enjoy preference with God are the devout.” And let me continue with verse 13 of Sura 49 named the Chambers:

“O humankind, we created you from a male and a female, and made of you peoples and tribes, in order that you might learn about each other. Surely the most noble among you is the one who is most godly.”

Past and present evidence to the contrary, we need to draw a distinction between the acts of men and the will of God. Perhaps now you can better follow my earlier remark that the actions of Muslims should not be confused with the highest ideals and principles of Islam. And now I want to present you with a challenge. I want you to be big enough to admit that two famous historical events of which we Druze are so proud are really nothing more than the correct application of Islamic ideals. You know the two I’m referring to: the elimination of slavery and polygamy? Again let me suggest to you that our faith is a plant whose root is Islam and whose blossom is TawHid. And while we are on the status of women in Islam let me point out that Islam demands free and full consent of those who are to be married.

To some Islam appears as an immovable object, a monolithic structure that cannot respond to individual differences among persons. However, close examination shows that

Islamic culture is as diverse as any other. Even Islamic Law is not monolithic. The Prophet of Islam is quoted as saying “Difference of opinion within my community is a sign of the bounty of God.” There are four Sunni schools; the Hanafi, the Maliki, the Shafii and the Manbali. Among the Shii’ the Jafari school has the largest following. Let us remember that in the first hundred years of Islam the Umma absorbed Slavs, Berbers, Syrians, Turks, Chinese, Phoenicians, Copts, Ethiopians, Persians, Sudanese, and Indians. All of these diverse cultures had to fit into the community of faith, the Umma. And within that community, Muslims have differed, though not always peaceably, over political, social, ethical, economic, legal, philosophical and theological matters. The capacity to accommodate different opinions and tendencies and even to find in them a source of enrichment is one of the strengths of Islam. Let me suggest to you that in reality the only difference between TawHid and Islam is a perspective on theology. This is not to minimize its complexity nor simplify the difficulties in bridging the “gap”, but it does say that TawHid may be most appropriately the “sixth” school of thought in Islam. If this is close to a probability, then we “orphans” or “rebels” or whatever other label pleases you will have to wake up to the fact that Islam is our parent religion and that parent deserves our highest esteem. Indeed, if we are to sow the seed of true faith we must recognize that the plant that will emerge is one whose root is Islam and whose blossom is TawHid but nevertheless one plant.

### **Theosophical Precepts in TAWHID**

**By Abdallah E. Najjar**

It happens to all men and women at some period of their lives to ask the questions whence have I come? Whither do I go? Sometimes also, if they have suffered much, they will ask: Is all life mere chance? Does justice rule the world? Does God exist?

The great religions provide answers to these questions; some answers are provided also by modern scientific theories. However, not all men find these answers completely satisfactory. If the answers satisfy the intellect they fail often to satisfy the heart – the mind often remains unconvinced. Thus it happens that in every land, in spite of the solutions offered by religion, philosophy or science there are men and women who are seeking a more logical and more inspiring solution. It is for these that Tawheed has a special message as it offers the following logical and inspiring theosophical principles:

**First**, that the universe is not just a place where nature's forces operate by chance. Directing it, there is the Cause of Causes – God. **Second**, that we are immortal souls and the nature of God resides in every man and woman. Our bodies that perish are only garments which we wear for a while and then cast aside. **Third**, it is not possible to realize the divine nature in us (i. e., attain true Tawheed) by the experience of one lifetime. So, we incarnate again and again. **Fourth**, as we live and act, sometimes we succeed, sometimes we fail. We do good, and we do evil. The evil we do must be undone by new good. It is the process of sowing and reaping. **Fifth**, all of us high or low, ignorant or wise make a chain of brotherhood in spite of every difference – of birth, capacity, environment, of race, creed, sex, caste or color. **Sixth**, religion, philosophy,

science, the arts, commerce, industry, and philanthropy – all these are channels along which the Divine descends to reveal of itself. Our humanity ascends to Divinity by growing in the virtues of these channels and in life's endeavors. **Seventh**, our pursuit of Tawheed clarifies our understanding of man's unique relationship with God, a relationship that manifests itself in the loving action of the divine Wisdom (Al-Aql), the divine Soul (Al-Nafs), and the divine Word (Al-Kalimah).

As Druze (Muwahhidūn), we continue in our attempt to liberate the spirit of Islam from its confinement in tradition. In this context we take issue with those who claim to have all the answers and those who do not allow questions.

# 1990

## **THE DRUZE MINORITY IN THE ARAB WORLD**

By Dr. Foazi El-Barouki

Due to the important role that Druze enjoy in the Arabic political, social, economic and cultural arenas of the Middle East, a close look on their background is worth examining. I must admit that I hesitated before tackling this sensitive subject but, because of my national and cultural responsibilities as an Arab and as a Druze, I found myself in a position to share my knowledge with many of my colleagues, of Arabic and non-Arabic origins, who are thirsty to learn about this particular sect.

The following primarily deals with a general familiarization of Druze history, society and traditions. It is intended that some of the speculation and misconceptions regarding Druze identity be clarified.

I began my research with an old article I found when I was a student in Cairo written by the Egyptian journalist, Sayyid Nassaar, and published by al-Akhbar Newspaper of Cairo, June 9th, 1970. I also relied on some old and new references written by Druze and non-Druze scholars hoping that my efforts would be considered an introduction to other studies focusing on minorities of the Arab world.

The Arabic origin of the Druze goes back to early Arab tribes of Tayi, Tamim and Tanoukh. The Druze faith however, came into being in the year 408 A.H. (1017 A.D.) during the reign of the sixth Fatimid Caliph and Imam, al-Hakim bi Amrillah. It originated from the Ismaili faction of Shi'a Islam and a major contributing factor was the intellectual ferment within the various philosophical and theosophical schools of thought that had emerged in Islam. The movement was headed by Hamza ibn Ali (al-Aql) and assisted by four functionaries: Ismail ibn Mohammed at-Tamimi (al-



Nafs), Mohammed ibn Wahab al-Qurashi (al-kalima), Salama ibn Abd al-Wahhab as-Samirri (as-Sabiq), and Ali ibn Ahmad at-Taii(at-Tali) known as al-Muqtana Bahauddin.

During the rule of the Fatimids, the Shia promoted allegorical interpretation of revelation according to the needs of individuals and their readiness for esoteric knowledge and the Holy Quran was being allegorically interpreted according to the needs of the time. Therefore, the process of interpretation has contributed to pave the way to the true understanding of the divine message of Islam namely the knowledge of the unity of God (Tawhid). Tawhid - the knowledge of the One, the knowledge of Truth, the knowledge of existence - became the meaning of the Druze message and the call of Hamza ibn Ali and his four functionaries.

Soon after the Tawhid movement came into being, a missionary named Nashtakin ad-Darazi drew attention to himself by claiming that he should be the Imam rather than Hamza. When he was denied by Hamza, he took the vow himself and started propagating the new call by using intimidation, threats and other corrupt and unethical means to gain favor for himself. Consequently, some people followed him and were under the mistaken impression that he represented the whole movement. Accordingly, people who considered Nashtakin ad-Darazi a heretic began calling all followers of the movement "Daruz", a nickname which wrongly is still used today. The true name of the followers of the movement then and today is "Muwahhidun" which comes from Tawhid and is translated in English as Unists.

Ever since the Druze sect came into being, historians, scholars and writers have admired the background of the followers of this sect but are puzzled by the secrecy of

the movement. Knowledge of Druze religious thinking stayed secret until some of their sacred books (Hikma) containing messages from Hamza and his associates leaked out. Only then did people begin to know about this sect.

Although the Druze headquarters were in Cairo during the Call (1017-1043 A.D.), and after the movement went underground, the Muwahhidun settled in some areas known today as Mount Lebanon and the anti-Lebanon range, in Northern & Southern Syria, in and around Damascas, in Jordan and in Northern Palestine.

During the sixteenth century and beyond, some of the Druze of Lebanon and Northern Syria (Aleppo) migrated to Mount Hawran, called today Jabal al-Arab, which until recently was called Jabal al-Druze, (The mountain of the Druze). In addition, there are about 50 thousand Druze now living in various parts of the world, particularly the U.S.; Canada, Australia, West Africa, Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Chile, Colombia and Central America. Furthermore, there is a disguised Druze tribe known as Bani Isa living in Morocco near the city of Talmasan.

The Druze movement based its philosophy on a spiritual doctrine with no rituals involved. This doctrine has taught every believer how to approach God and how to experience Him. When believers looked at Him they found nothing but their ownelves realized. In Him they were, and in them He was. This spiritual practice is a clear link to God and knowledge. It directs the spirit to the Malakut of Allah (The Irfan Path). The Malakut is an ancient spiritual behavior related to Alhurmusia philosophical doctrine which was drafted by the prophet Idris (developed later by the Greek philosophers) then reached its perfection during the era of Islamic spiritualism (Sufism). Consequently, the Tawhid philosophy took its concepts from the heart of

Islam and agreed in principal with the Sufism movement in terms of the relationship between God and Man and the love of God which leads to happiness. Similarly, the Tawhid Faith agrees with the Islamic (Mutazila) movement which calls for the unity of God, as well as, it agrees with the Ikhwan as-Safa teachings which emphasized a mixture of Islamic laws with Greek philosophy.

Spiritualism has played an important role in the Druze classification of society. The Egyptian writer Sayyid Nassaar quoted the Druze scholar Mustapha Galeb referring to the structure of the Druze community as being divided into two main classes: Spiritualism (Ruhanioun) and no-spiritualism (Jismanioun). The Ruhanioun are those who represent the spiritual heads of the movement and its secrets (ar-Ruasaa): al-Uqqal - those who deal with the internal organization - and al-Ajawid - those who deal with the outside relationships with other sects.

Non-Spirituals (Jismanioun) however, represent the non-religious class of people such as national leaders (Umaraa), political figures (Zuamaa) and the common people (aamma and Juhhal). These classes of people are not permitted to perform religious duties or to enter the mosque (Khalwa) unless they have been initiated into religious practice. Religious practice cannot be accomplished without undergoing stages of spiritual development that involves lots of patience, endurance and subduing of lust. Only after the individual has achieved such discipline can he participate in a covenant called “the covenant of Haymows” or “the covenant of Waliy iz-Zaman” qualifying him/her to practice religion. A person can gradually climb the ladder of perfection until he reaches the spiritual (Ruhanioun) stages.

Sayyid Nassaar quoted the non-Druze scholar, Dr. Mustapha Shakaa as

saying in his book “Islam Bila Mathahib (Islam without Sects)” that Druze religious traditions are not that different from traditions of the mother religion of Islam.

However, Druze judges have applied some Sectarian Laws that are based on the philosophy and the teachings of Hamza ibn Ali as it was presented in the early Call of the Movement. Some religious traditions are summarized as follows:

1. Man cannot marry more than one woman unless he divorces the first. This means that there is no place to polygamy in Druze traditions.
2. A Druze may only marry a Druze. In certain cases however, some immigrants and non-immigrants ignore this tradition.
3. After divorce, the divorcee cannot go back to her husband.
4. Inheritance is not limited by a third but may be by any amount and to anybody of either gender.
5. After the close of the Call in 435 A.H. (1043 A.D.) missionaries stopped their activities. Since then tradition states that nobody can enter into the Movement or exit from it.
6. To the Druze, reincarnation means that the soul can only have a human body and is the basis of existence.
7. Man has freedom of choice in life.
8. The Druze believe in God and Mohammed as the prophet of God. They greatly admire the companions of the prophet Mohammed in particularly, Salman al-Farisi, Ammar ibn Yaser, Abu thur al- Qafari and al-Muqdad.

As far as the pillars of Islam, the Druze doctrine has gone beyond both the literal and the allegorical interpretation of the religious laws. These pillars were

consequently developed by Hamza ibn Ali from their literal implications and allegorical interpretations to their real meanings. The development of these pillars as Dr. Sami Makarem says: "...only meant to relieve the true believers from their ritualistic constraint and from their literal and inner implications, not from their real significance."

The pillars of Islam as they are prescribed in the religious law of Islam are Seven: "The first is to testify that there is no God but God and Mohammed is His Messenger. The second is to pray five times a day. The third is to give alms. The fourth is to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. The fifth is fasting during the month of Ramadan. The Shi'a branch of Islam, from which the DRUZE Movement historically sprang, added to these five ordinances two more, namely Allegiance to the Imam (Walaya) and Strife in God's way (Jihad)." The real meaning of these seven pillars later on, became the main constitution of the Druze religious traditions that differ somewhat in their implications from the original religious traditions of Islam.

Some Druze scholars however, did not see a difference at all. The famous Druze poet and rational thinker Shakeeb Arsalan asserts that the Druze are 100 per cent Muslims as well as Arabs. He addresses himself with a question of Druze identity. Then he answers: "If you were asked about your identity say: My religion is Islam, Mohammed is my prophet, Quran is my book, Kaaba (the Muslim shrine in Mecca) is my way of direction and all the Muslims are my brothers."

On the other hand Muslim authorities of the highest caliber appreciate the Druze and their beliefs. Sheikh Mohammed Shaltout, the highest authority of Islam in Egypt, Imam of the oldest University in the world - the great Mosque of al-Azhar -

once in a welcoming remark addressed his speech to me and my fellow Syrian students who were selected from different sects to study Islam and Arabic studies at al-Azhar University, saying, “I have no doubt at all of your belief because you are the true Muslims.”

As a Druze feeling proud of my Arabic heritage, religion and social traditions, I am for the idea of minimizing differences between the Druze Faith and the Religion of Islam.

# 1992

## **TAWHID IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE**

**By Abdallah E. Najjar**

I am privileged to stand here today between East and West, between old and new and between right and left, holding selectively onto precious values that I acquired during my formative years in the hills of Lebanon, values that stood the test of time and place.

T. S. Eliot said “what we call the beginning is often the end and to make an end is to

make a beginning and the end of our exploring will be to arrive where we started - --”. How reminiscent it is of the concept of ‘cyclicality’, what we call reincarnation as the same spirit repeats itself in a continuous cycle of life death and rebirth. It implies an ethic of being the custodian of the continuity of life instead of being a one shot plunderer, during man's episode of mortal splendor.

As Americans or Australians, as Lebanese or Syrians but particularly as Druze let us focus today on our future in the MAHJAR and on ways I perceive as necessary to preserve and propagate a noble heritage, a cultural identity and a spirituality which is threatened by attrition in our adopted lands.

The Druze community in the U.S.A., for example, more than any other Arab sectarian group, is sparsely scattered and still striving to have its transplanted spiritual heritage sink its roots in a country of highly organized institutions and constantly changing ideas and mores; in a country where the only constancy is the constancy of change.

We are no longer a closed society insulated from outside influences. We, and I assume that you too live in a society in which exists well-established cults, sects and



other alternative “ways to God”. Ways, some of which are dogmatically pursued by zealous adherents who presume monopoly on the TRUTH and who use the latest Madison Avenue techniques and cosmetics to propagate it.

We also live in a global village where openness, encounters, and interactions are occurring dally in all fields of endeavor - the commercial, the intellectual, and the spiritual.

It is an environment in which people want the free flow of information more than ever. They request full access to the facts, for, like all legitimate human rights the desire for the truth is spiritually based. It hints at the deeper desire to know God, the Supreme Truth.

However as you look in depth at this modern society where technology, science and sophistication have reached unprecedented heights you will note, that instead of liberating man and lifting his spirit, it seems to be breaking man into a collection of chemical impulses, and pushing him toward the morally bankrupt doctrine that material pleasures are the sole or chief good in life. In such societies today the most essential questions and issues are religious and moral dealing with personal ethics and ultimate values, questions that are not being answered. The inner city of modern society has become little more than an urban jungle harboring a resentful underclass with no stake in the present and no hope in the future. Schools produce students who are illiterate and crime is commonplace. Hopelessness, which we used to read about in cities like Calcutta is now evident in our capitol city.

When we used to hear the word ‘crack’ we thought of the hard ball hitting a bat rather than a drug that frazzles the brain and destroys life. The arrogance of power, the

emphasis on the “I” and the “me”, and the evil of consumerism are ganging up to tear the fiber of our human relationship and hasten moral decay.

In such a setting our cultural heritage and spiritual support system beckon us to hold to them fast but also to rethink old ways and to summon forth our underlying vitality and the love we possess for our legacy to help it take root in the new land. The decade of the nineties may be the most dangerous period in our history. We are being tested as never before. Our dilemma has been in the making since we set foot on these shores and will not be solved soon unless our commitment to necessary change acquires the capacity to deliver - under the patronage of AL-AQL, AL-NAFS, & AL-KAL I MA.

In a land where assimilation (melting in the pot) is common, natural Druzism may not survive with its classical emphasis on ethnicity alone. Accordingly a spiritually and ethically based approach needs to be tested as a springboard for permanence and universality of the Tawhid faith.

To quench the spiritual thirst, that we and our children feel, we must continue to drink from the original fountain whose source remains in our ancestral lands but must insist on its filtration to make it palatable. The pursuit of reform will undoubtedly generate shock waves that may obscure the signs of progress and the reformers’ deep faith in the theosophy of Tawhid. Let me assure you that it is only the packaging, the marketing and the adaptation to this time and place that are our concern and not the essence of the message of Tawhid. We are not trying to re-invent the wheel but rather to balance it.

We have been on the defensive for too long. It is time we come out from our fortress of isolation and take the offensive on behalf of a unique doctrine the world is in

need of again. Today in America many leaders in the fields of science, education and theology are re-examining some of their long held beliefs; and are coming around to share our own. They see that man has reconstructed the tower of Babel and it is a television antenna. From it emanates thousands of voices in which every one's opinion is put forth regardless of substance or intent. They communicate with everyone and more often than not say absolutely nothing.

After more than half a century of cross-fertilizing ideas and cultures I am now more than ever convinced that all I really needed to know I had already learned as a kid in that one school house, in the village square and from the wisdom of almost illiterate kinfolks and genuine neighbors back in Lebanon.

AL-AQL (the universal mind, reason or wisdom), assisted by ALNAFS will continue to separate with amazing facility truth from falsity and through the KALIMA will propel us toward an era of spiritual enlightenment. Surely there is still far more light to come from the Infinite and happy shall be the age that will perceive it and take another bold step forward in religious understanding.

There is hope and optimism in the air, and we in the U.S.A. are proud to proclaim the ADS as one of the innovative standard bearers of Tawhid, in its dynamic form. We learned the hard and bitter way that there is more to preparing our children for a meaningful life that is beyond the superficial freedom and easy pleasure, which may never materialize and most certainly will never last. We had better prepare them for reality -- a reality infused with moral laws in which they come to understand the fundamentals of Tawhid and put them to practice. These are the ethical laws that tell them also there is no consumption without production, no freedom without responsibility,

no self fulfillment without self discipline and no self government without persons who govern themselves. These laws emanate from the values that no science can quantify and modern society seems to ignore: piety, truthfulness, our brother's keeper, contentment, chastity, modesty & decency, magnanimity, gallantry, hospitality and honor.

We live in techno-industrial societies whose inadequacies and limitations are manifest. It is here that the application of the Tawhid theosophy is most needed - the belief in the unity of being, in the spiritual eco-system and the power of AL-AQL AL-KULLI and its four universal Limitaries.

In Tawhid we discover that science alone cannot now and perhaps never will be able to give us a complete account of our ultimate nature and destiny. So many breakthroughs in science turned out to be at the expense of the human and spiritual aspects of life. Tawhid is not in opposition to the accelerating changes and discoveries in the physical world but welcomes new ways of thinking characterized by diversity and openness.

We are commanded to speak the truth to the tyrant, to power, to both capitalism and socialism under whose auspices humanity faces the crisis of consumerism and dehumanization. It therefore behooves us, if we are to maintain our "amore propre", to weed our garden and to prune the vine, not only out of obligation but rather out of love of the beauty and the worth the fruit.

There have been ages and places where our witness meant suffering and dying; there have been ages and places where our witness meant withdrawal from the world. In this age and place our witness is TO BE, to be in our strong convictions and in our abiding faith; to be through education and knowledge linked to a noble spiritual legacy.

My brothers and sisters in the faith if the flames of our religious witness glitter only faintly, our progeny will go elsewhere seeking other sparkling bonfires.

In 1926 Gibran Khalil Gibran, writing in a New York newspaper called the Syrian World, sent a message to fellow young immigrants from our native lands. His message could well have been addressed to the young generation of Australians of Syrian and Lebanese descent in particular and to Arabs in general assembled here today: “I believe you have inherited from your forefathers an ancient dream, a song, a prophecy which you can proudly lay as a gift of gratitude upon the lap of ‘Australia’. I believe you can say to the founders of this great nation “here I am, a youth, a young tree whose roots were plucked from the hills of Lebanon yet I am deeply rooted here and I would be fruitful.” You can also say, “in my veins runs the blood of the poets and the wise men of old and it is my desire to come to you and receive, but I shall not come with empty hands. I believe that even as your fathers and mothers came to this land to produce riches you were born here to produce riches also by intelligence and by labor. It is to be proud of being an Australian, but it is also to be proud that your fathers and mothers came from a land upon which God laid his gracious hand and raised his messengers.”

If we are to be able to put together the pieces of the ultimate puzzle of our existence, Tawhid will teach us to look inward to discover and understand God and the harmonious unity of the cosmos beyond time and space as life continues to recycle and to evolve to newer and higher plateaus, to make change a means to perfection and thus unity with God. In closing I summarize by saying that productive ideas and deeds must take the place of fruitless longings and regrets of times past. With knowledge and faith wedded together life takes on a sparkle and as we sharpen our spiritual sense we can

witness the constantly unfolding good that is ours - an expression of God, 'Allahu Jalla  
Jalalahu'.

Peace be unto you!

# 1994

# 1995



**TAWHID AS I UNDERSTAND IT****Abdallah E. Najjar**

I believe in One God Almighty, unborn, un-created and beyond human comprehension.

I believe in the prophets who found themselves anointed to the high task of spiritual revival. I also believe they were conceived and born in the usual manner.

I believe that all of us suffer under various types of tyrants and dictators in our lives on this earth; that we all get symbolically crucified before we die.

I believe that we all descend into hells of our own making but the resurrecting power of the Spirit of Love over Death overcomes and reappears again to reassert itself. It continues to seek the universal faith that transcends ritual and myth.

I believe deep within my soul that eternal life is a life in harmony with the true order of things (a spiritual eco-system) and thus life in God.

“FOR WE BELONG TO GOD AND UNTO GOD WE RETURN”

## LET US DISTINGUISH!

**By Samah HeLal**

Abortion and euthanasia are related issues. What does HIKMA dictate?

How we live morally in a changing society is the struggle of existence (jihad).

Each generation is presented with fresh moral dilemmas, but are we to wallow in the same ethical morass as “others”? Life is difficult for the person of conscience!

How many of you know or care about God’s will as we face such challenges? Is there a right and wrong way for us to make decisions? Let's begin with the presumption that we are “free” agents of the Existent One. Does ultimate unity with the “One” condition what we ought to do? Does it condition our responsibility to help “others” understand what they ought to do?

“Pelagius described human freedom as the capacity of a neutral agent to make choices without constraints.” Augustine denied the view of neutral selves. He postulated that human choices are conditioned by natural endowments, culture, and experience. Therefore, free will is not absolute. Today, our culture seeks to maximize our freedom and in so doing forms determinate features to our common lives.

CORA, several years ago, reached a conclusion that only the mother can decide whether to terminate a pregnancy and only when the mother’s life is at risk. The sanctity of life is the operating principle, but how do we decide between two lives?

If God created life, then life is one of the “goods” in this existence and therefore one of HIS causes. We cannot turn against this “good” without turning against the cause

of God. Death and suffering are not to be intended and not to be chosen. But is the gift of life the ultimate good? Life is not only difficult, but involves risk as well.

Can we distinguish between a) allowing one to die and b) assisting in one's suicide? There **is** a difference in the right not to have one's dying interfered with from the right to have assistance in suicide. If our culture provides the option to choose death, it closes another option: that of staying alive without having to justify one's existence.

Our culture tends toward the paradigm to maximize individual autonomy. While euthanasia provides a choice, the burden of justification will be hard to bear for those who simply do not want to be a burden! How will **wisdom** dictate?

## WHAT'S IN A WORD?

**By Samah HeLal**

Monistarian = muwahid

Soul = person; psyche; entity

The recent din I have been hearing has more to do with labels than with nouns, but it proves that names are important to people. Our God gave us five boundaries within which to build our understanding of REALITY. For the last several years our focus has been on **MIND**, but the time has arrived when it seems appropriate to dwell on the principle of **WORD**.

A considerable amount of space has been given to defining **MIND** and **GOD**, but we have been silent on the meaning of soul and because of a lack of precise definition the articulation of our “theory” of reincarnation has been less than impressive. An exception has been CORA’s devotional and their avoidance of the word “transmigration” in discussing the subject. In their latest publication CORA made a distinction in the English use of the words “Limitaries” and “Luminaries”. Such distinctions are helpful.

I want to be the first to coin the word “monistarian” as the English equivalent for Muwahid or Muwahidi. To those whose first language is English it is less forced than “unitist”. There seems to be a need, imagined or real, to distinguish Muwahidun from Unitarians. While monism and monist are terms common to philosophy, their use in theology is cryptic and awkward to use in the faith dimension. What's in a word? The essence of distinction!

Tawhid (Monistarianism?) has its unique composition of reincarnation. Among Muwahidun the understanding is not uniform and perhaps essentially different. Until we know what we mean by **soul**, what we mean by **reincarnation** leads to unwieldy interpretation(s). I am not convinced that the **GREEK** meaning (the basis for our theosophy) is the same as the **HINDU** meaning and I believe it is a mistake to lump the two together in discussion and analysis of the phenomenon and/or doctrine.

It's time for our scholars to step-up to this task. If when HIKMA speaks of "soul" it does not in fact mean **person**, our entire concept of reality will require restructuring and explaining. There is a distinction between energy and essence. Energy as emanation is not the same as indelible identity. I can think upon either, but my faith is grounded in one. For Hikma to be the **path** of **wisdom**, we need balance in emphasis on our **five** Limitaries. For us this balance is in the **sixth** dimension, **existence**. It is here where we must capture it.

# 1996

## **THE ROLE OF THE ADF**

By Anis Obeid

Greetings from the ADF to all members of our community and congratulations to the ADS on its 50th anniversary. As the only organization with open membership for all the Druze, and one of the oldest Arab American societies in the United States the ADS deserves our respect, allegiance, and support materially and morally. The Foundation and its Board of Directors are proud to be among the supporters of the ADS and what it stands for.

The Druze community is faced with enormous challenges both here as well as in the native lands. As the name implies both the ADS and the ADF are primarily concerned with the welfare of our community and its survival in the West. This does not mean that we should divest ourselves from our roots in the East, nor ignore the plight of our people back home, for they too are going through their own trials and tribulations. The difference is that we do not suffer from the constraints that they have on the ability to think about crucial issues and the conduct of public and candid discussion and debate of these issues. In fact they often look to us for welcome signs of innovative ideas and the promise of rehabilitation and revival.

At the risk of oversimplifying the complex issues facing us, or engaging in repetitions and redundancies (a practice that takes place any time we meet) we can conceptually identify three requirements in our quest for substantive remedies to our beleaguered state:

1) Requirement of knowledge. We are painfully deficient in information that pertains not only to the basic tenets of our faith, but also to the social and historical forces that impacted on this faith from its inception to its birth and its aborted growth and development. The meager trickle of learning by osmosis from the generation of old patriots is fast drying up, and would never be acceptable to the Western mind. Alas there is no substitute and more ominously no mechanism to provide a substitute. We cannot teach what we do not know, and we will not know when the resources are meager to nonexistent. This is not to belittle the efforts of those who have attempted to fill the gap, sometimes at considerable personal risk and sacrifice, but to emphasize the magnitude of the deficiencies. We cannot and should not assign the blame to the religious leaders (Sheikhs) exclusively, for they are more of a religious order anchored in piety and Sufism rather than in scholarship and learning. A good share of the responsibility falls on those of us who, blessed with the opportunity to learn and prosper, have ignored issues of faith and religion relegating them to low priority in our lives. There will be no meaningful progress in the absence of meaningful involvement by the intelligentsia of our community.

2) Requirement of definition. Concomitant with and as a consequence of the quest and acquisition, dialogue and dissemination of knowledge a profile will emerge by which the Tawheed faith and its followers can be defined. An identity will emerge declared and defined by consensus from within, and not imposed by others from the outside. The traditional profile of a warrior or esoteric type sect closed to the outside world and barricaded in rugged mountain villages is no longer applicable in fact nor compatible with modern life. Paramount in our collective thinking and planning is a clear and candid



definition of our relationship with our Islamic roots and with other sects and religions. We owe it to ourselves and equally to our relatives in the Islamic Religion to clarify the sometimes deliberate ambiguities and erase the covert suspicions that have surrounded our mutual relations despite the protestations of the Apologists on both sides to the contrary. With fear from no one and malice towards no one, we can at last enter into a meaningful dialogue with fellow humans of whatever persuasion.

3) Requirement of structure. We pride ourselves on the simplicity of our practices and the absence of rituals and intermediaries in our relationship with God. This wonderful asset becomes a tremendous liability once one is cut off from the homogeneity of his or her ethnic surroundings. In the diversity of cultures, mobility, and individualism, severing contacts and connections, the need for structure becomes compelling. Most of us have not reached the stage of contentment and spiritual evolution to be self sufficient and independent of institutional support. Only a small minority are likely to survive without the help of intermediaries and a functioning support system. Consequently survival and revival of our faith will be critically dependent upon the presence of an organized structure to keep it together. Thus a place(s), for regular gathering, standardized book(s) of worship, format(s) of service etc. all have to be developed and tailored to the western born and raised. A tall order perhaps, but not beyond reach, if we deem it crucial enough for our continued existence as members of the Tawheed faith.

It is precisely with these challenges in mind that the American Druze Foundation came into existence. Our hope and indeed our expectations that the foundation, by acting as a trustee would be able to raise the necessary funds to stimulate interest and sponsor research and resolution of issues that are crucial to our being. Solid financial resources

are obvious prerequisites for such activities, and we hope that the ADF will eventually be able to play that role. In this endeavor we ask for God's guidance and your understanding, support and involvement.

## **PUBLIC WITNESS FOR THE BELIEVER**

**By Samah HeLal**

Inevitably, neighbors in immigrant countries extend the hand of fellowship to us from a variety of motivations ranging from missionary zeal to sincere friendship. There are those who wish to “convert” us, (hopefully out of love and respect) and those who want to accept us (hopefully out of love and respect). The height of compliments is when you are invited to attend a “religious function” for this is a sharing of values that link us in community. How does a Muwahhid characterize his beliefs to neighbors? How does he maintain his identity outside the community of brethren when community is NOT with brethren?

Be advised that the fellowship of “true” monotheists is commended above all others. In the “global village” where we are destined to be a minority (due to the Diaspora) community usually means without other Muwahhidun. What can we say publicly that is non-defensive, accurate, and strikes accord with other monotheists?

I suggest the following conciliatory declaration. When asked “What do you (Muwahhidun) believe?”, you may reply : “ I believe that

Jesus is my Messiah,  
Muhammed is my Apostle,  
Wisdom is my Path, and  
God is my Sovereign”.

Now let us analyze what such a public declaration means.

The declaration is implicitly monotheistic. Organized Religion is NOT mentioned. It is a “faith” statement, not a creed or doctrine. Because it is generic (implicit rather than explicit) it is not alienating nor threatening. On the contrary it is intriguing to the monotheist though somewhat exclusive to the person of “eastern” faith(s). It may strike a note of syncretism to the zealot, but when we explain that proselytizing is not a tenet (self imposed?) of our faith even the zealot should be at ease.

True, it carries a hint of “taqiyya”(dissembling), but we are not being hypocritical. We are respecting what is familiar to the neighbor rather than intentionally prevaricating or being misleading. We are accentuating the positive and avoiding the negative. It is always incumbent on us to be truthful, but we maintain our tradition of politeness, thoughtfulness, and tolerance. The emphasis is on “commonality” and our respect for differences. An extended conversation should move to the other common ground of morals and virtue and it is here where we strike the common chords of togetherness with our monotheistic brethren.

What do we mean when we say “Jesus is our Messiah”? We are acknowledging a Judaic idea of promise (covenant) and a Christian idea of the “Logos” (Reason) while associating our understanding of our First Limitary in what we state. Jesus (Luminary) is the incarnation of “Universal Mind”.

What do we mean when we say that “Muhammed” is our Apostle”? We are implying that the Quran is our source of inspiration rather than the epistles of the “Apostle to the Gentiles” (Saul of Tarsus, commonly called Saint Paul). Our roots are Islamic, though there is kinship with Judaism, Christianity, and Bahais!

What do we mean when we say “Wisdom is our Path”? We are making a statement of identity. The path to WISDOM (Hikma) is the path to unity (Tawhid). While the previous two statements provide a common ground they may appear to be contradictory until wisdom is introduced. We are open to all sources of “TRUTH” while acknowledging that we consider all truth as one (unity). We share the truth with our neighbors. We recognize their truth. We do not impose our understanding of truth on other “believers” in God. We know that truth is reflected on the mind of persons based on their innate capacity. This is our basis for respect and tolerance.

What do we mean when we state “God is our Sovereign”? We are implying that we do not obey worldly authority in the spiritual realm nor are we subject to interpretations (of others) of revealed authority. Each of us is his own intermediary, with freedom of conscience, and answerable to his personal calling of what is divine, holy, and sacred directly to God. Our God is the historical God of all monotheists and we live for the purpose of being in union with HIM. May it always be so!

We should feel at home in the company of monotheists and in the Diaspora we should seek their community. Often there is tension between denominations and “theologies”. We, as advocates of one universal “TRUTH”, should facilitate and ameliorate such tensions by accentuating what is common among all who love God. We are co-dependent socially, economically, and frequently psychologically and politically. We need neighbors, but we need never hide our enthusiasm for virtue nor our love of God.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Q) Is it permissible for Muwahhidun to worship with other monotheists?

A) Weddings, funerals, and holidays cause a mutual association in the workplace, school, and neighborhood. We “safe-guard” these institutions and participate as a civil duty. When God is glorified and exalted we need not fret the form in which his creatures participate. What is conscionable is an individual decision. Only God knows the heart’s true intent even among those of the same profession of faith.

2. Q) Is it permissible to enroll our children in sectarian schools?

A) A high priority for Muwahhidun is to acquire knowledge. Until we know the best of what each “religion” offers, we cannot appreciate the nobility of Unity’s Path (Wisdom). Our choice of education should be predicated on the needs of the child and the offerings of the institution. The emphasis should be on the quality of teaching/developing the “ability to think”.

3. Q) Should Muwahhidun take sides in religious debates?

A) Not if the debate aims at stereotyping individuals. Our posture must be dignified, conciliatory, and objective as when we stand up for truth on any subject. It is important that Muwahhidun never make a derogatory statement toward a member of any faith/religion. Our position is that God’s love, mercy, and providence is all inclusive. Beware of members of our own faith who mistakenly advocate that only “we” are blessed.

4. Q) What do we say and do when neighbors express an interest in becoming a member of Muwahhidun?

A) This is a most difficult question and requires some discussion. Tradition tells us that twenty-five per cent of the world's population are Muwahhidun. Who and where are the others, since Druze and their descendants number about a million? Speaking traditionally, how do we know that the neighbor approaching us has not already committed to the covenant of unity and is being led by God back to the fold? We have no place of worship for the interested person to visit, we have no priest with which to confer, and our scripture is not available except in the Arabic language. We do not want to discourage any true seekers after truth nor do we want to communicate a sense of unworthiness on their part. To "join" is a personal commitment that the neighbors take upon themselves. We can be supportive to close friends, but we can hardly advise the random seeker. We may point out publications and other sources of information, but we do not have a recipe for "conversion" (yet). We are confronted with a dilemma: if our truth is universal, why is it not universally available? It is a "cop-out" to show that it was at one time and assume that the inquirer missed out. This traditional answer may work in a homogenous community of Muwahhidun, but in the global village we who uphold intelligence must use reason AND "ijtihad" to provide a better answer. Others are welcome to journey with us when they share the same commitment. It is incumbent upon us to implement how best to provide the "welcome".

In your life time, before the millennium anniversary, we should reconsider (ijtihad) and extend the "Call" to **TAWHID**. Are we willing to take the initiative? I have been an advocate for the past twenty years. We have nothing to fear but fear itself. It may not be easy, but it is do-able! And the ADS is the organization to do it.

5. Q) When a Muslim or Christian insist on knowing how we are different from them, what else can we say and remain conciliatory?

A) Tell them that we have “common” morals with monotheists but follow a different “discipline” under which our “paradigms” are conditioned by our “school of thought”. A summary of the priorities in our “school of thought” are contained in our creed (proposed) as follows:

***“Creed of Unity”***

We believe in God, the ONE and ***ONLY***, who has from primordial time revealed His Will to humanity. God, blessed be His name, has evolved revelation to the level where angels, prophets, judges, kings, priests, apostles, and vicars (Imams) are no longer required.

We believe that divinity reflects directly on the mind of the supplicants based on their mental capacity to understand. This is the significance of the “***CALL***” to Unity.

We believe the “***CALL***” to Unity is a personal choice.

We believe in the Five Limitaries\* from God through which we are afforded a personal link with divinity and can thereby grow spiritually and achieve tranquility in mind, soul, word, emotion, and deed as we move toward our objective of being ***One*** with God.

\*functional attributes understood best as emanations from God.



# 1997

## THE DRUZE AND THEIR CURRENT IDENTITY CRISIS

**By Dr. Salah D. Salman**

The Druze faith dates back to the time of the Shi'ite Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt, early in the eleventh century. It is an independent creed that evolved out of what was originally intended to be a movement of reformation, enlightenment, and purification in Islam. Its founders were influenced by ancient Egyptian, classical Greek, Hellenistic, and Asiatic thought. Their interpretation of the Islamic dogma was not orthodox, and did not conform to the thinking of the Sunnis and the Shi'ites at that time. Religious and political realities then, forced its initiators, missionaries and followers to go underground to safeguard themselves and their faith. Unfortunately, secrecy has remained a very strong, although often detrimental, Druze tradition ever since. No serious and sustained attempts at eliminating it have been made since those early days of persecution and insecurity.

Most of the scholars who have published on the Druze were not Druze themselves, and therefore had no complete and easy access to the original sources, a standard requirement for objective and scholarly writing. Consequently, misinformation, misconception and misinterpretation have been particularly abundant in Druze scholarship.

The sacred scriptures of the Druze that serve as their religious guides are known as the "Letters of the Enlightened and the Wise" or the "Books of Wisdom" and are handwritten in Arabic calligraphy. Their sacredness derives from their contents, rather than from the people who wrote or transcribed them. The principal author of the letters was Hamza ibn Ali, the vizier of the sixth Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim (996/1021

AD.), and the acknowledged chief architect of the faith.

The term “Druze” that has generally been used for the followers of the faith is a misnomer. It makes the Druzes followers of Nashtakeen ad-Darazi, the head missionary to greater Syria, who was later assassinated for insubordination and for proclaiming himself a prophet. The faith is also known as the “creed of reason” (math'hab al-aql) and the “unitarian creed” (math'hab at-tawhid). Its followers have been referred to as the “family of wisdom seekers” (ahl al-Hikmah), “the unitarians” (al-Muwahhidoon) and also "Bani Mar'ouf" (the courteous and generous people).

Many Druzes today seem to prefer the appellation "Unitarians". This may be due in part to their eagerness to dissipate imputations of paganism, for example the accusation that they worship the calf, that have erroneously been associated with them for a long time. It could also be an attempt to emphasize the monotheism and the universality of their faith.

The label "Unitarian" underscores the Druze belief in the absolute oneness and universality of God, i.e. the belief that God, the self-revealing Supreme Being, who has manifested differently at various times in different parts of the world, remains the one and only God. "Unitarianism" also suggests universality because Unitarian beliefs have been found throughout history, and in a variety of religions.

The "creed of reason", however, seems to be a more appropriate appellation. It brings out the distinctive tenets of Druzism and the uniqueness of its message. It also reduces the possibility of confusion and misinterpretation. There are a number of groups, in both Christianity and Islam who call themselves "unitarians" or "muwahhidoon". The Unitarian Church is one case in point; the Wahhabi Sunnis,

whose very strict conservative beliefs and practices govern Saudi Arabia today, are another. They too, call themselves "muwahhidoon".

The essential differentiating beliefs in the Druze faith are the tenet that God is Universal Intelligence and that reason and the enlightened mind or wisdom, rather than formal religious practices, are what ensure the attainment of higher levels of spiritual fulfillment. It is, in other words, the synthesizing of faith and reason: piety is the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom. The pursuit and the development of wisdom, according to Druzism, necessitate very strict ethical and behavioral codes that the believer is required to adhere to. Purity of thought and conduct, truthfulness, modesty, compassion, and communal solidarity are values and practices that the Druzes are commanded to follow and for which they are known. Another distinctive feature of the Druze doctrine, as originally presented, is its belief that the profession of faith should be a personal covenant with God (*al-mithaq*), undertaken voluntarily by adults of sound mind and body, and a covenant in which the true believer bears witness to the oneness and supremacy of God and at the same time declares an absolute readiness to give up all previous beliefs, whether religious, personal, or social, that are not in line with the dictates of "Reason."

Clearly, with such ideals, principles, and values, the Druze faith is well-suited to the world of today and to the needs of the world of tomorrow. The general trend, particularly in the West, is surely towards secularism, if not agnosticism.

It must be recognized, however, that, as is the case with many doctrines throughout history, Druze practice today has deviated to some degree from its original tenets. Paradoxically, modern-day Druzes are considered Druze only by birth, not by

free choice or conversion, and most of them are denied access to the sacred books, or even instruction in the rudimentary principles embodied in these books. These books are present in major libraries and are accessible to those who really want to study them.

The Druzes live mostly but not exclusively, in Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine-Israel. During the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, starting around 1860, many Druzes, along members of other religious minorities in the region, emigrated to other parts of the world. As a result, one can now find Druze presence in many countries. Pockets of "closet Druzes" are said to exist in other parts of the Middle East, in North Africa, and even in China. The exact number of the Druzes is not known.

One may wonder about the reasons of the survival of the faith and its followers for so many centuries, despite the absence of formal institutions and structured religious education, and in the face of unfavorable political and religious climates. Family, tradition, high standards of morality and conduct, together with the rationality and universality of the doctrine, are the main reasons for its persistence. Another reason, well stated by the late Kamal Jumblat, a prominent Lebanese political leader and scholar, is the fact that the Druzes, though a minority, have no minority feelings. They traditionally and deliberately assimilate in behavior to the customs of the majority with whom they live and do not experience therefore the handicaps often suffered by minorities. What Jumblat was referring to is the Druze principle of "at-taqiyyah" or "dissimulation", whereby believers can conform to the prevalent social and political realities without renouncing their true beliefs.

The Druzes are today struggling with a serious identify problem that threatens not just their religious independence and uniqueness but their very

existence. In the Lebanese mountains, they consider themselves belonging to an independent religion. The traditional political sectarianism of Lebanon classifies the Druzes as Muslims, but their religious tribunals for marriage, divorcee and inheritance are separate from the Muslim tribunals. Those living in countries like Saudi Arabia or the Arabian gulf states tend to regard themselves as mainly Muslims. In Israel, the Druzes are considered different from the rest of the Arabs. In the United States, some members of the Druze community view Druzism as a rich and valuable cultural heritage worth adhering to, rather than as a faith. They see no conflict, therefore in joining a Christian church, for example.

In the Middle East, there has been a growing movement lately to bring Druzism closer to Islam, which seems to be motivated more by political and economic realities than by "at-taqiyyah" and historical accuracy. Recent publications by Druze scholars on Druze doctrine promote an interpretation of the Druze texts that permits the classification of Druzes as Muslims. Recent declarations and actions of some Lebanese Druze politicians also seem to point in that same direction. One Druze who is a former member of the Lebanese Parliament, for example, was reported not long ago as praying in a Sunni Mosque, which is entirely against tradition and practices of the local Druze community.

One should be very careful about encouraging the political expediency of altering basic core values. Political alliances need not involve, nor do they require a denial of religious principles. Moreover, if some Druze scholars and politicians think that these practices are justified by the principle of "at-taqiyyah", they ought to be reminded that the principle was instituted to protect and maintain the purity and

integrity of the faith under persecution. It was not intended as a license to alter fundamental tenets, especially at a time when religious freedom has become an accepted fact and a legal right. Indeed, the time may have come in this day and age to discard "at-taqiyyah" as an altogether outdated tradition that has become an unnecessary shield. The clarification of the Druze identity, whatever it proves to be, is an absolute must.

In light of the contemporary movement towards the Islamization of the Druze faith, the time may also have come to ask Muslim clerics and scholars what they think of this one-sided rapprochement. Do they, or are they willing, to accept the Druzes as Muslim? Until today some Muslim theologians have denied the Druzes the recognition bestowed on the "People of the Book", that is the Jews and Christians. The logic of this movement brings to mind the old anecdote about Jeha, the legendary simple-minded Arab who informed his family in all seriousness that he had decided to marry the king's daughter. All he needed was the approval of the king, the queen, and the daughter!!

Islam and Druzism certainly share common ground, but there are also basic differences that cannot easily be written off and should not be ignored. Druzism emerged out of Islam and belongs to the same family of monotheistic faiths as does Islam. They both share the fundamental belief in the supremacy of God the Creator, in His absolute oneness (He is neither born nor begetting), and in his successive revelations through the ages. They both maintain that God can be approached directly without an intermediary such as a priest or a saint, that He is merciful and compassionate, and that He condemns injustice and requires from mankind truthfulness and trust. They

both emphasize collective and communal morality, such as justice, brotherhood, solidarity, compassion and forgiveness. Nevertheless, one should not as a result of these common denominators (also shared with other religions to a greater or lesser degree) disregard or write off major doctrinal differences that separate them.

By virtue of historical evolution every faith incorporates elements from earlier doctrines and presents itself as developing and completing its predecessors. That is how Islam stood in relation to Judaism and Christianity. The Quran refers to Islam as the religion of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Jesus, and other prophets, and as God's last and final revelation. Does this imply that Islam is not a new or an independent faith? Does this make Islam Judaic or Christian? In short, where and how does one draw the line in distinguishing different faiths and in asserting their respective independence from one another?

We generally differentiate between two faiths on the basis of the incompatibility of their tenets or their required religious practices. A closer look at Islam and Druzism seems to bring out a significant number of differences. Islam for example asserts that the Prophet Mohammed and the Quran are the final all-encompassing divine revelations. Druzism does not agree. For Druzes divine revelation is an open possibility for the wise and enlightened and continues to be a promise for the future.

In order to be a true Muslim and to be saved, Islam requires the performance of five principle duties known as “the Pillars of Islam”:

1. Bearing witness to God, and the recognition that Mohammed is his messenger and prophet (shahada). This is the core pillar.



2. Ritualized individual prayers five times a day, and one communal prayer in the Mosque on Friday noon (salat).
3. Religious tax, or the mandatory payment of a certain percentage of one's income to the state (if it is a Muslim state), or to the Muslim community, to be used for the collective welfare and for the needy (Zakat)
4. Fasting from dawn to sunset during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, when the Prophet Mohammed received the first revelation (sawm).
5. Pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in one's lifetime, if possible during the twelfth lunar month of "Dhul-Hijra", for repentance and God's forgiveness (hajj).

Druzism, in contrast, considers those formal religious duties and practices neither required nor sufficient for spiritual fulfillment and salvation. The enlightenment of the mind transcends such precepts. The only exception the Druze faith makes is with regard to the testimony of faith: it too demands of every true follower the acknowledgment of God as the one and only deity, as the Supreme Absolute Being and Supreme Intelligence, and the Creator of the Universe and mankind. The Druze testimony of faith, however, unlike the "shahada" does not include a reference to Mohammed as the last prophet except in public ceremonies (marriages and funerals), and to the Quran as the final divine revelation. Evidence to that effect is in the Druze "Mithaq" or covenant referred to earlier.

Prayers in the Druze faith are not ritualized nor regulated. They are performed

by personal choice in time, manner, or place. Even communal prayers held on Thursday night (not on Friday noon) in the "Majles" or Khalwa" that can be anywhere the group chooses, are not religious obligations rewarded by God. They are meetings for recollection, meditation, and mutual enlightenment with no imposed rites. Alms giving and charity towards the needy are meritorious and praiseworthy, but voluntary and not imposed; the same is true of fasting. Fasting, whether complete or selective, is not regulated. Fasting is considered by Druzism to be a matter of individual discretion, and is not limited to the month of Ramadan.

The Druze deviation from Islamic practices is most marveled with regard to the required pilgrimage to Mecca. The only religious holiday the Druzes observe is the Feast of the Sacrifice, the "Id al-Adha", which marks the end of the Hajj in Islam. They do not require the pilgrimage itself, however, nor do they endorse the religious significance of its rituals. In Islam the pilgrimage derives from God's mandate to the Prophet to build the first temple of worship in Mecca, namely the Holy Mosque that houses the "al-ka'ba" (the sacred black stone), and the rituals established emphasize the repentance which results in forgiveness by God. In its observance of "al-Adha", Druzism focuses primarily on Abraham's testimony of faith and on remembering the less fortunate and the dead.

Another important difference is the respective attitudes of Druze and Islam toward women and their rights. In Islam, women are considered spiritually equal to men and share in all religious duties, but they do not share an overall equality with men. Not all rights and privileges available to men are available to women, especially in questions of personal status, such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Polygmy is

permitted. In divorce, the man has the advantage over the woman. Modern legislation and interpretation of the Shari'as has, at least partially removed some of the more traditional handicaps on women.

In the Druze faith, on the other hand, women are considered equal to men, in both spiritual, personal and social matters. They share all rights. Polygamy is taboo. Women have the right to initiate divorce and no man can terminate his marriage without proper legal procedures, and without the wife's opportunity to express her views and to consent to divorce. In modern Druze communities women feel equal to men. Indeed a number of Druze women have been able to attain very high levels of prominence and leadership in more than one walk of life as well as in social work and politics.

Islamic laws strictly define and regulate inheritance. Wives and daughters can inherit only half as much as sons, and if there are no sons the women in the family have to share the estate with other male relatives. In the Druze faith, personal wills have no restriction whatever, and are strongly encouraged and strictly executed. Wives and daughters can inherit as much as, or even more than, sons, if the father or mother so chooses.

Finally, another equally significant difference between the two faiths is with respect to the separation of the state and religion. Islam recognizes no difference between the religious and the secular. In Islam, the Shari'a is of divine origin, transmitted from God through the prophet; it governs every aspect of the life of the believers and to a certain extent of nonbelievers living under Muslim rule. The Druzes have no problem with separating religious and secular powers and have no

problem, living in a secular state, in fact most of them prefer it, believing that faith should not be touched by the laws of the land. Even when the Druzes were in power and had the opportunity to introduce their own laws, they did not impose any religious laws on their subjects. A case in point is Fakhreddine, the Lebanese Druze emir, considered the father of an independent Lebanon. He is credited (or blamed by cynics!!) for encouraging Maronite Christians, another minority, to emigrate to Mount Lebanon where they could practice their religion freely.

Clearly, therefore, any attempt at "a quick-fix" Islamization of the Druze faith is not a possible endeavor. Such an attempt may simply be symptomatic of the malaise and the crisis of identity among Druzes today. They continue to experience malaise and a serious identity problem which are results of several factors, including the strict conservatism of the Druze religious leaders in the Middle East, the strong tradition of secrecy, the closed membership of the Druze community, the absence of structured religious instruction and the current unstable political climate in the Middle East. These factors also discourage the objective and scholarly research, open discussion and debate, which are necessary for the resolution of their crisis. Understanding the true principles and values that the faith embodies, namely rationality, universality and modernism, will undoubtedly give the Druze both as individuals and as a community a renewed and strengthened pride in their faith.

The Druze intelligentsia should assume a greater responsibility in initiating the study and revitalization of the Druze doctrine, in dissipating the ambiguities that pervade the Druze community, and in correcting the misinformation that traditional secrecy has helped to spread. The very conservative religious leaders who consider

themselves the only custodians of the doctrine, should be made aware of the necessity of this study to conserve the core values embodied in the doctrine.

The liberal intellectual climate in the United States has encouraged the beginning of a timely Druze renaissance movement. The Committee on Religious Affairs of the American Druze Society has already published several booklets on the Druze. The American Druze Foundation formed recently purport to revive the Druze heritage, and to generate a greater interest in, and an understanding of the Druze doctrine among Druzes and non-Druzes alike.

In a world which is growing smaller and in which people are drawing more closely together, a rational and unitarian faith should be encouraged. Perhaps it would help stop or curtail the bloody religious conflicts that continue to curse humanity. Extensive scholarly work and a multireligious commitment are needed for this purpose. Its goal will cease to appear quixotic and may even become attainable if different religious communities become involved and exert pressure on their leaders to help bring mankind together.

# 1998

## **THE DRUZE YOUTH:**

Social and Religious Challenges

**By Anis I. Obeid**

### **I. Introduction**

The twentieth century is drawing to a close, ending an era that marked one of the most turbulent of the entire history of the human race. The First World War began the process of destruction of a way of life that took centuries to evolve and mature; and the Second World War completed the job. What followed continues to be a breath taking process of exponential growth in materialistic and technological advances that are unmatched by the ability of human societies to adjust and keep pace with this rapid change. The primary reason for the discrepancy is the difference between exponential growth in technology on the one hand and the linear growth in social development on the other. As the gap widens it gives the impression of social regress, though this impression may in fact be mistaken. What is certain, however, is that despite or perhaps because of the phenomenal growth in the standard of living in the industrialized world, the era we live in is characterized by turbulence, dissonance, and social disease. The evidence is all around us; in life styles, visual arts, music, architecture, dress codes (or the lack of), humor, politics etc ... Furthermore all indications point to more of the same or even faster changes in years to come. Humanity can no longer take a moment to catch its breath.

However this is not the whole story nor can it be. Science as the Nobel Laureate Sir Peter Medawar points out (*The Limits of Science*, 1984) is meant to answer the questions that science is able to ask and to tackle. It is not able nor can it be asked to

answer questions that delve in what is before or what is in the after life. These are and will remain in the domain of spiritual spheres; which brings us to the subject of religion.

Throughout history human societies have marveled and pondered on issues that are beyond human control, eventually ascribing them to supernatural forces. The concept of religion evolved hand in hand with that of human awareness of the supernatural. Religion therefore in one way or another will remain an indispensable factor in human life unless and until the supernatural is completely subjected to human understanding and subjugated to human will; an assured impossibility.

Although at a young age one frequently passes through a phase when religion is rejected as a form of myth, or as a divisive force in human life, the passage of time brings with it changes in outlook and attitudes. The prospect of an end is too threatening and awesome to pass notice, as the count down for the hour of reckoning begins with advancing age. In addition the evolution of the human race took place within the context of clan and family and not as solitary individuals in a jungle of primordial existence. Coalescing into larger units made possible the development of larger communities without which the process of civilization would have never begun. The point to keep in mind is the absolute dependence of human beings on belonging to and identification with other human beings in some sort of communal existence. Within the complex mechanisms of natural selection a group identity emerged whose destiny depended on shared norms and values. Religion as we shall see later was and remains one of the cornerstones of group identification and group behavior.

## II. Identity



There are several features that form the basis of group identity, two of which are relevant to our topic and will be briefly addressed in this communication. The first is the ethno cultural component, the most influential elements of which pertain to commonality in language, history, traditions, food, dress and general lifestyle. In most instances it also involves different levels of shared national aspirations and allegiance, with or without political realization of such yearnings. Thus shared ethno cultural values may occur in politically separate States, and different ethno-cultural values may exist in the same State. In most instances, however, the State eventually forges enough of shared commonality in real life to create significant overlap and reduce ethnic barriers among different communities.

The other major feature of group identity pertains to religious identity. In this setting people of common religious background share a common belief in metaphysical phenomena of (before and after) and a common vision of how these beliefs impact their daily lives. The primary concerns with the hereafter are reflected in the daily conduct of the here and now. Thus distinctive features of behavior become a characteristic of a religious group as much as their basic metaphysical beliefs. The impact of religion on upholding and promoting moral and ethical values is too obvious to require elaboration. However, in the extreme, religion-based groups may eventually acquire enough solidarity and fanaticism in religious affiliation to override other allegiances to nation and culture or even to basic human values. In fact, some of the most heinous crimes in history have been committed in the name of and to uphold religion whose very essence is that of preparing human beings to meet their maker in peace and virtue. It is this human failing of debasing the Sublime that have turned many people into condemning religion as a

divisive force in human lives. This type of religiosity is described by a scholar in the field as a “retreat from God and a devotion to a new form of idolatry”. (Karen Armstrong, *A History of God*, 1993).

Yet human beings have not come up with a substitute for religion and no human society has existed without some form of religious expression, “Man created God in his image”, (Sir Peter Medawar). If religion is here to stay, it follows that rational people will seek religious affiliation as a matter of choice based on how a particular form of religious expression can address their needs for security and enhance their coping mechanisms in daily life. In Western societies we find that many people do just that as they select a certain religious affiliation regardless of the religion at birth. We can label this type of practice as (religious mobility) which is exercised with relative ease and freedom from serious societal repercussions. . Thus it is not uncommon for individuals to adopt a certain faith as a matter of selective preference or for practical reasons such as marriage. In the East, however, people generally remain in the religious fold into which they were born and raised. Religious affiliation in the East is, with few exceptions, predetermined at birth and remains as a birthright in perpetuity. When we add to this the current state of intolerance of Eastern societies to defiance of social norms or to political and religious dissidence it becomes clear why people of the East do not usually change their religious affiliations. The appreciation of these differences are crucial in the analysis of challenges that face our people in the West and in the East.

### III. Challenge of the future

For religion to survive and flourish it must help people in the hour of need and in their daily lives. When religious ideas lose relevance or become an impediment in every

day life they are discarded and replaced by other ideas that are more meaningful to the time and place in which people live. The nobility of the message or the depth of the philosophy alone are insufficient to maintain allegiance to any religion when it becomes disconnected from the reality of peoples lives. Modernity and the associated stresses add an even greater burden on religion to rise to the task or face the inevitable. Against the backdrop of this challenge, how do we assess the fortunes that are in store for our youth in the West and in the East.

To begin with the whole question of the youth and then their concerns is, to the best of my knowledge, a phenomenon of the West. I personally do not recall that concern for religiosity of the youth in Lebanon was ever raised outside the practices and way of life of any given family. One learns on the job by apprenticeship so to speak and not in any formal or didactic manner. Nor are there any institutions that are designed for the enlightenment of the youth. This is not surprising in a faith that is based on asceticism and personal quest on one hand, and secrecy and closed doors on the other. Up until the modern era this approach was at least sustainable by relative isolation and strong communal ties. The cataclysmic changes of modern life, however, have dramatically altered the equation such that the traditional approach to issues of faith is losing ground and relevance. The Druze youth are bearing the brunt of the burden, as they can no longer defend secrecy in open societies of the present and the future. We cannot ask the Druze youth to adhere to religious practices when the very foundations of these practices are unknown to them or are beyond their reach. The Druze youth know they have something they are proud of, because this thing, to a large extent made them who they are. But they are frustrated because they do not relate to the old order, and there is nothing in

replacement. They are angry, confused and under tremendous pressure from peers, friends and colleagues whose religious beliefs and practices are open, established, and inviting. This spiritual vacuum leaves our youth with a sense of being somehow diminished to an extent that cannot be compensated by claiming the high grounds in chivalry, generosity and bravery in battle. It is indeed a crisis of identity in a faith whose practices are not relevant to the lives of the youth and not supportive of their aspirations. Furthermore, practical issues such as mixed marriages, the nature of services in these marriages and the identity of the offspring continue to be a source of conflict and erosion. Above all the relation to mainstream Islam (outwardly professed but inwardly confused) needs urgent and clear definition, a procedure that can hardly be carried out in a doctrine that is closed to most of its adherents and all the outside world. In the current mood of Islamic anger and rigidity the task is daunting indeed. It is clearly not an easy task for the Druze communities in the East to address these issues and arrive at a resolution. Their lives are too complicated and they cannot endure to undertake risky steps (that such as religious reform would entail) without breaking at the seams. In addition a sizable segment of the Druze youth have opted to follow the path of fundamentalism. They along with most of the traditional religious establishment (Uqqal) will surely consider any effort at reform as heretical or treacherous.

While much of the drama of the Druze youth is enacted in Lebanon, the community in Syria is as large and equally important. The challenges they face are similar, but not as acute due to the different demographic and political nature of the two States. The clear Arab character of Syria made it easier for the Druze community in that country to highlight their ethno-cultural identity as the vanguard of Arab nationalism, and

soft pedal the religious challenges. But it is only a matter of time before the problems of religious identity will have to be addressed. The Moslem majority in Syria is already exerting pressure on the Druze to declare openly their religious identity and where they stand in relation to Islam. The heat is on in the rest of the Arab and Moslem world.

The Druze community in Israel tried to adjust in a somewhat diametrically opposite manner to the Syrian community. Being cut off from the large Arab environment, the Druze in Israel could not rely on ethno-cultural identity for support and sustenance and they became more attached to their faith. However, it is an attachment of community solidarity rather than that of religious reform and development. However a growing number of the Druze community in Israel are beginning to recognize that reform and change are imperative for long term security and survival.

This is a brief sketch of the situation in the East. The trials and tribulations have begun, but the communities in the East are not expected to come to grips with substantive issues of faith any time soon. The risk is that by the time the Druze communities decide to do something it may be too late as the opportunity to regain the initiative may have long slipped by.. Bleak, (yet not hopeless) is probably an accurate description of the future in the East, and the challenges for the Druze youth are correspondingly enormous.

The Druze youth in the West face a set of challenges that are peculiar to life in the West. Some of these challenges are similar to those faced by the youth in the East and some are totally different. The lack of institutional framework, educational material, clear definition of the basic tenets, as well as the closed nature of the faith, are common to both societies. The acute awareness of the need to address these issues is also shared by both

communities. However, there are at least two distinctive aspects of life in the West that are not featured in Eastern societies.

The first feature is the absence of close-knit community consisting of large extended families within a small geographic area, where traditions can be maintained and communal bonds strengthened. On the contrary, life in the West is built on personal mobility, risk taking and rugged individualism. Personal concerns and ambitions are goals that supercede clan solidarity and the welfare of the extended family. Urban life resulted in reconfiguration of communities based largely on shared interests and values and to a lesser extent on blood links. Furthermore many of the functions that are traditionally carried out by the extended family and clan are now in the hands of the State. Care for the elderly, social welfare and disability support are few of the examples that we can cite. Bonds of extended family become loose and steadily deteriorate with the passage of time and the separation of distance. Some communities have been able to maintain a considerable degree of ethnic integrity in pockets of dense population, where both ethno-cultural and religious identities are preserved. The Druze do not fall into this category, due to the small numbers, wide geographic scatter and the closed doors for potential newcomers. In the West social forces are strongly in favor of the Druze (melting) in the larger pool of the dominant culture. The reality on the ground attests to the validity of this conclusion. For the Druze youth of today to meet this challenge, they must be better equipped than their predecessors were. The ADS has done a marvelous feat in keeping the community tied however tenuously, but it is clearly not enough. Newer organizations and groups such as the American Druze Foundation, the Druze council of North America, the Young Druze professionals and others are hopeful signs of

concern and activism. However, the forces are not evenly matched, and the melting process will continue without more radical changes in how the Druze community relates to its faith.

The second aspect that is characteristic of life in the West is that of intellectual and political freedom. This goes beyond the mere ability to express opinions without fear of retribution. It rather defines an atmosphere where nothing is taken for granted or can escape the scrutiny of probing and curious minds. There are no taboos to inquiry and no acceptance of authority on face value. Even religion, which, by definition, is an act of faith, does not escape the dissecting voice of the critic and the defiance of the intellectual. Children will as a matter of fact challenge and often openly reject dogmatic statements by parents and elders if the statements do not make sense. What would be considered rude and possibly dangerous behavior in the East is accepted and expected behavior of the youth in the West. The Western mind is not accustomed to living in the static glory of the past, but the dynamic creativity of the future. Above all the Western mind shuns closed systems, and the defensive strategy of hiding. It also looks with disfavor on practices of exclusion and discrimination. Where does the Druze faith fit in this briefly sketched landscape of the West, and specifically the United states?

The answer to most of us is on the surface not very reassuring. Our community in the West has to deal with the religious deprivations that are common to all plus the added burdens of the individualistic life in the West. However, there may be a small but definite silver lining that provides a hope and a challenge.

It is only in the West that challenges can be met head on, and the issues judged on the merit of the case and not on the tenacity of traditions. Dogmatic attitudes that have

kept the Druze faith for centuries in hibernation almost from its inception in the East cannot impede progress in the West. We simply do not carry the same baggage as our coreligionists in the East. It may be considered ironic that the creed of reason should be denied the fruits of reason for so many centuries.

The essentials of the Druze faith are universal, evolutionary, personal and transcendental. They represent the culmination of the pilgrimage of the human spirit to the Sublime. As such this faith should be in synch with the demands of modern life since its practices do not encumber the individual with form and ritual. It considers the Universal Mind as God's first and most exulted creation, and therefore considers knowledge as a prerequisite for faith. "What we are today will evolve to become a single universe-wide mind, so that every particle in space will be within the cosmic consciousness---free, but aware. Every particle of which you and I are made will ultimately be reconstituted in this universal mind...." These are not the thoughts of some Druze sage, but of an internationally recognized molecular biologist from Australia who recently passed away just before his book was published, (Darryl Reanny, "After Death", 1991). Tawheed is a process that accompanies human development across the expanse of eternity, seeking but never reaching the Absolute Truth. Yet in the hands of the Druze it is as frozen as the polar icecap. It is in bringing it back to life that the challenge resides. It is in having the courage, the will and the intellectual honesty to emphasize the nobility of the doctrine and discard the distortions. The questions that we must ask may be as painful as the conclusions that must be drawn. We must be ready to integrate the essence of what we have with the mainstream of the religious cultures of the rest of mankind, and with the evolutionary demands of life in general. We must openly and irrevocably declare that we



hold no one in low esteem and that we do not think ill of other people or of the faiths they espouse. We must finally arrive at a clear definition of who we are and what we believe in, not in arrogance but in humility and self-control. Tawheed we are told is a pilgrimage to the Ultimate Truth. In this quest we are surely not alone, we are not the first nor will we be the last. "What is important in this view is not absolute truth, probably inaccessible at our level of development, but the search for truth." The statement is from another noted scientist (Christian De Duve, *Vital Dust*, 1995).

Where do we start is the question, and this we should pose to ourselves any time these issues arise. To this I will respond with no hesitation that I do not have the answer. I do, however, know that a heightened state of awareness is a prerequisite for any new endeavor to succeed. We are now at a level similar to that described for the state of Islam in general (Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, 1957), "...the problem is the degree to which those in the fullest sense know that, religions have largely lost contact with the modern world, and those genuinely oriented to modernity have largely lost contact with their religion." The challenge for the youth is to reestablish the tenuous contact before it is totally severed. They may find out on critical examination that it is worth their efforts to revive and develop the philosophical and ethical principles that their faith espouses and not remain bound to the static dogma of secrecy and exclusion.

## **THE FAITH DIMENSION**

**By Samah HeLal**

Did you know that **TawHid** is a universal faith and that as members of the American Druze Society we are committed to promote its **universal** teachings? I do not know what words come to *your* mind when you hear the adjective “universal,” but for *me* it means:

- 1) one God,
- 2) one humanity, and
- 3) one spirituality.

Don’t you find irony in the fact that this “universal” faith is exclusive? How **do** we reconcile secrecy and exclusiveness with truthfulness and universality? Doesn’t truthfulness demand openness? And isn’t truthfulness our first commandment?

Today, I want to explore the dimension of **faith** with you and I believe I can do so, in spite of a fog of inconsistencies regarding TawHid. I will begin with the broader category of **religion** and then proceed to the sub-categories of **faith** and **spirituality**.

A prerequisite for exploration is that we ask the right questions of **religion**. Scientifically, we will never be able to prove or disprove “God”, at least to most people’s satisfaction. Science helps answer the questions of *what* and *how*. Religion helps answer *who* and *whose*. Science addresses our natural state. Religion addresses relationships. Often a *subjective* answer doesn’t fit well in an *objective* environment. Faith questions belong in a *subjective* environment and we often mistakenly expect objective answers.

Is the Qur'an correct in placing humans into either of two classifications: believers or non-believers (in "The God" i. e., Allah)? Should non-believers join the discussion of faith?

Toward the end of his book, The Prophet, Khalil Gibran has a priest request of the departing Almustafa "Tell us about **religion**". And the protagonist replies "Have I spoken of anything else today?". When we examine the subjects he had discussed, we find included: love, marriage, children, time, laws, pain, friendship and prayer. So Gibran infers that **life** and religion are the same. Additionally the reader recognizes that Gibran is addressing the *subjectivity* of living. It is this subjectivity that speaks to us and allows each of us to identify our own personal life's experiences with the message of the departing "prophet". The subjectivity is the endearment.

There are words in El-Hikma to the effect that "life is a continuous prayer". However, life is personal and subjective, and because this is the case, "**life is difficult**". We may undertake the same journey with others and while we may share events together along the way, we each experience them differently, at least to a different emotional level.

In our (Druze) tradition there is the metaphor of the "complete age" (umr kamil). And one of our Luminaries is quoted as saying "I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly". Both statements denote a life fully lived.

This brings us to a great **truth** that impacts our understanding of **reality**: *God is the creator of diversity*. No two people are exactly alike, even identical twins. And it is this basic diversity that prompts the question: "Who am I?". This, in turn, presents us

with a paradox known as the “**unity/diversity dilemma**”. How can we have *one humanity*, when every person within it is unique?

It is the pursuit of answers to such questions that has given rise to the disciplines of philosophy and theology. It is to be hoped that, after this presentation you will be more comfortable with what these disciplines tell us. We need not regard these disciplines as absolute, however.

Let me introduce you to a tool known as the “unity/diversity” pendulum. We will have need to refer to it in this discussion. It recognizes the tension in opposite forces impacting individual freedom and institutional rigidity. It allows us to arbitrarily define **wisdom (Hikma)** as the ‘right’ balance between the extremes of the pendulum. This balancing act is an art, NOT a science. With this concept now visualized let’s proceed with the discussion of religion.

In her book, A History of God, Karen Armstrong correctly identifies this history as the search for a *personal god*. I appreciate that members of our community have done considerable research on the *transcendental* God and have intellectualized concepts that have been published in Our Heritage and presented in these conventions. But the transcendental *unknowable deity* is only part of the equation that we must evaluate. It is but one piece of an intricate puzzle. I want to comment on the emotional side of the equation, i.e., the *knowable god* and that is my purpose for this presentation. Up front let me state that God is knowable only in the **faith dimension**.

By necessity intellectualization must be impartial. Reason and objectivity are cold and uncaring. They are lacking in forgiveness, compassion, and love. It is the latter that are the essential part of our humanity. At least that is *my* conviction. We need not

focus so completely on the Universal Mind (intellect) that we neglect to also account for the Universal Soul (person) and Word (relations).

Birth and death are *personal* experiences. The person (nafs) is *alone* and longs to belong. It wants to know why it was born and why it must die. It is searching for its meaningful place in a changing world. It is lost and looking for a destination or some purpose for living.

Captain Eddie Rickenbacker of *World War I* fame as a fighter pilot commented on this condition when he said, “Get your experience of God and you will never be lost”. To those of us who were caught up in the folly of war we understand the adage, “there are no atheists in foxholes”. Are we lost? Do we know *where* we are going? Do we know *who* we are, or *whose* we are? Are we asking the right questions from ourselves and our heritage? Can we determine God’s purpose for our **life**, personally?

Eleven years ago at our 41st Convention in Colorado, I emphasized three points in a keynote address that I titled, Is America Ready for TawHid:

- 1) God loves us
- 2) He is always available (omnipresent, ubiquitous)
- 3) He created us free (agents)

These conclusions under-gird the proposition that the **faith dimension** must be **personal**. You can be led to spiritual waters but *only you* can drink. Only *you* know when your thirst is quenched. By extension it is our belief that ultimately the *individual* soul will be judged by God. It is not revealed how a *community* ultimately fares. A creed can be recited in *community*, but faith must be experienced *individually*. An understanding of the “unity/diversity dilemma” helps us deal with these juxtapositions.

A word that means the opposite of faith is *fear* and what we usually fear most is uncertainty. One definition of **faith** is: “the *assurance* of things hoped for”. So faith, then, infers certainty. But certainty in what or whom? In my opinion, it is in things that we CANNOT prove, but for which we have an intuitive answer! **Faith** is an *attitude* toward life. It is NOT scientific determinism, NOT cause and effect. It is the quality of the many relationships that we *experience* in living. It is seeing the invisible! It is knowing God! It is feeling His presence. It is *spiritual*!

Who of us can prove, scientifically, that our parents loved us? But many of us are *sure* of that love. Are you following my logic, i.e., that faith is inevitably linked to *personal experience*? Then do we follow the good Captain’s advice and “go get our experience of God” in our quest to *live life fully*? How do we do this? We obviously need help **here**, at the personal level, where living becomes reality; where the “rubber hits the road”.

Rhetorically speaking, if life is a “continuous prayer”, “who will teach us how to pray?”. If “faith is the *assurance* of things hoped for” what **should** we hope for? How do we answer the faith questions asked by our children? How do we explain the purpose of **life** (religion)? How do we advise on the spiritual aspect of living? How do we incorporate *spirituality* into our *reality*?

In my address of eleven years ago, I emphasized the need for the Druze of the Diaspora to become independent of the Shaykhs who are traditionally rooted to their communities. My observation is that once we leave the “village” we need to find our own faith, our own experience of God. The *real* test of faith is outside the “village”. To ask someone else to do this for us seems to me to be a betrayal of one’s trust in God. Do

we ever stop to think of what it *really* means to believe that God reveals “of Himself” to each of us based on our innate capacity? In TawHid and in Islam we depend on God alone. To depend on another puts the other in the potential role of tyrant, which directly contradicts our fourth commandment, the rejection of tyranny. Here we have another inconsistency. And do not think that our children are not bright enough to pick up on such in-congruency. This is one reason why we lost one generation of progeny to other faiths. The manner in which we portray our faith leads the American born, non-Arabic speaking progeny to think it *dumb* rather than *brilliant*.

Emotion is stronger than reason. Our brains have a dual design and our minds function in bipolar activity, one pole intuitive and one objective. We need to have both sides or poles working optimally. Faith originates on the intuitive side. Harmony comes when the two sides work together. Wisdom (Hikma) is the discipline for achieving harmony. Our tradition calls this harmony *el-ridha*. Christianity calls it *salvation*. Islam calls it *taslim*. When the two sides of our mind oppose each other we get neurosis. We may need to ask ourselves whether we are neurotic people. The yearning for truth, the pining to belong, the emptiness that demands filling are all symptoms of this opposing friction (lack of harmony) that we *personally* experience.

How many of you read my article in Our Heritage titled Public Witness for the Believer (in TawHid)? How many of you agree with me that our “path” in life (religion) is “wisdom” and it is the striving after *wisdom* that distinguishes us along life’s journey? Let’s go back to the paradox posed by the “unity/diversity dilemma”. By definition life must be lived at the *personal* level regardless of the community in which the soul finds itself. Supposedly in our tradition, **wisdom** is the *modus operandi* through which we

reconcile the **objective** world with our **subjective** relationships. Our ‘path’ or ‘school of thought’ for wisdom is the discipline found in the “noble interpretation” (El-Hikma) of the “Noble Recitation” (Qur’an). Wisdom is NOT synonymous with knowledge. Knowledge (irfan) is merely a tool of wisdom (Hikma).

So, if **religion** and **life** are the same, how **do** we achieve “abundant living” or “umr kamil”? How **do** we commit to the path of wisdom?

There are many who purport to tell us how. There are gurus, institutions, and cults, public and private, within and outside our tradition. But how do we know what is best for us? Can we spend the rest of our years sampling each offering just to see which fits best. I think not! However, in my opinion *any* choice **consciously** made is better than *none*! Paraphrasing Tennyson, “Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all”. Do not let yourself become shortchanged by default! Get your experience of God *anyway* you can honorably get it!

Now, wouldn’t it be desirable, reasonable, and responsible to try to get that experience beginning with our own tradition? Logically, shouldn’t we already be **striving** toward that end? At this juncture we may ask, “Is there a **criteria** by which we can know what to do and not to do, what is true and what is false, and what is good and what is bad?”. I think there is and it can be used as a foundation for REFORM!

In 1968, the keynote speaker at the annual convention, Abdallah Najjar, made the following assertions that I will paraphrase:

- 1) Our *spiritual* heritage is at stake
- 2) *Reform* is needed
- 3) We should proceed immediately on a *faith/knowledge* axis.



Today, I can do little more than echo that lucid conclusion and observe that thirty years later the arguments made are **still** relevant. Today, I am merely suggesting a methodology for proceeding with REFORM.

Firstly, we choose from our *own* tradition that which is true, consistent and universal. But then, we are **obligated** to add to this base those principles that are true, consistent, and universal from *other* traditions. This follows our understanding of how wisdom evolves within humanity. And because we must resolve the “unity/diversity dilemma” we must ask, “Do we do this as *individuals* or do we do this as **community?**”. Who will help us determine the “right” balance (harmony)? Isn’t that one reason why the American Druze Society was formed? Isn’t, the ADS the **community** to do this? Have we lost our principal focus or even recognized it?

Let’s continue our exploration by depicting our **faith** in a formula to make it easy to analyze. This will give us a point of departure so that we can return visually with some ideas that our exploration may define.

My premise is that our religion (din) is Islam, but our faith (iman) is TawHid. I know all of you will not readily agree with this. However, the Qur’an makes a distinction between religion and faith, and I wish to follow that model. **Sufism**, **Monism**, **Holism**, and **Revelation** are the major components of the **faith** formula:

$$T = \underline{\mathbf{S + M + H}} \quad \text{where “k” is irfan, the} \\ (\mathbf{k}) \mathbf{R} \quad \text{dynamic knowledge factor}$$

**Sufism** is difficult to describe. Historically it bridged the gap between the intellectual and ‘official interpretation’ of Islam and Christianity. It is a spiritual philosophy that views all existing religion as utterances of a single underlying Truth that

can only be experienced. The Sufi master never believes that it is possible to impart his conceptions of truth to any save those who by similar training are prepared to receive it. (This may help explain the divide between the Uqaal and Juhaal; and why the two shall never agree.) At this mystical level, to experience Truth is to experience God. It is the Sufis who pioneered the inner interpretations of the Qur'an. Our 'noble interpretation', El-Hikma, follows their lead. They see the conditions of humanity ranging from Nasut (ordinary or corporeal) to Lahut (divine or transcendental). We borrow these concepts from their work.

**Monism** is the term describing the influence of Greek thought on interpretations given to **revelation**. It is the basis for the concepts of the immortality of the soul and reincarnation. It synthesizes the teachings of various philosophers and is the philosophical equivalent of monotheism. For many centuries it was difficult to separate philosophy from theology. It is the logical or "provable" influence in our 'school of thought'.

**Holism** is a concept of Semitic origin that links spirit (ruH) and body to the understanding of how the soul (nafs) functions; i. e., spiritual growth is not possible without a physical body. The Five Limitaries seem connected to this concept of being, even though the doctrine of emanation, itself, is influenced by Neo-Platonism.

**Revelation** is tied to a unique understanding of *history as a process*, probably associated with Sufis' understanding of *evolution*. It advocates God's nurturing plan that allows humanity to evolve *spiritually*. For our purposes, it is the Qur'an as it exists in its original state in heaven. It is "true islam" as conceived by God for humanity, prior to the birth of the Apostle Muhammad, PBUH. It is God's will for humanity from the

moment of creation. It is here where we derive our objective of being at one with God. Revelation is the Word of God as it is made known to humans. Traditionally, we have associated it with the Sufis concept of Nasut (God's revelation of Its-self).

The dynamic knowledge (irfan) factor is the evaluation of the constantly changing fund of facts and information that causes each generation to re-think its theology.

EL-Hikma is the result of the confluence, overlap, and priority given to these components and it seems to be driven by a concept of **ideal** humanity. It is my opinion that Hamza is the thinker and architect of the discourse. Hikma is built on his understanding of *universal* truth. I envision Hamza as the advocate who tried to institutionalize the very individualistic Sufi approach. He tried to intellectualize a subjective **reality** and the Hikma is the *partial* result of his effort. How can we tell whether he is right? As *free agents*, are we able to agree or disagree? Do we have to accept the whole "ball of wax" or can we pick and choose? He assuredly did! How successful **was** he in harmonizing **objective** and **subjective** living? Can we fairly judge from the status of today's Druze worldwide? Is TawHid really a universal 'school of thought' or just another ethnic cult?

A **reality** that we must face is that of a world made up of varied allegiances. Where does the **allegiance** of the Druze community lie? We are going to be divided or united based on how and what we choose. That is why it is important to know *who* and *Whose* we are. Proclaiming the words of Hamza to be divine is NO solution. We have to decide what the "holy community" means to us. We have already voted for the "sacred individual", whose allegiance is to God alone. The premise here is that the *holy* community is better (necessary?) for the *sacred* individual to achieve *personal* harmony.

Has Hikma failed us or has it been our **interpretation** of Hikma that has failed? If we are NOT convinced that TawHid as defined by Hikma is superior, why **should** we give it our allegiance? So you see our selection of **criteria** is not only important but **essential** to the efficacy of the whole *process of reform*.

For the sake of getting you involved in the discussion, I am going to list a **necessary** seven and contrast them with our own seven traditional **paradigms** expressed in modern English:

- |                 |                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1) Truthfulness | A truthful tongue, i.e. veracity in speech: nobility                                                                     |
| 2) Fellowship   | Cultivation and protection of the brethren: reality                                                                      |
| 3) Perfection   | Excision of fallacies and falsehoods: progressive revelation                                                             |
| 4) Freedom      | Rejection of the villain and aggressor: free choice                                                                      |
| 5) Worship      | Continuous adoration of God: universality (and, not or, function)                                                        |
| 6) Positiveness | Cheerful acceptance of unalterable situations: balance/proportion                                                        |
| 7) God-focus    | Spontaneous submission to His will, but means consistent with ends: emphasizing responsibility instead of predestination |

What I am proposing is that we institute **reform** of our practice, discipline, or “school of thought” based on these seven criteria. I will argue that the criteria be self authenticating, but not absolute due the “k” factor.

With a new millennium approaching, I want to highlight the opportunity waiting to be seized. I add my voice to the urgency for **reform**. I further justify the urgency by taking poetic license in translating into English a traditional adage: **The invitation (Call or Da’wa) will be reopened before a thousand years pass by**. In **my** mind this will take the form of a *universal spiritual movement*. I cannot accept that Hamza ever meant

to permanently close off this view of **reality** from humanity. I do NOT believe every soul in the universe had a chance to endorse his covenant (mithaq). I am tired of the apologetics preached by our leaders. I am of the opinion that by 2017 we will either witness the resurrection of a **reformed faith** or the demise of a fossilized one. We need a Phoenix to arise from the ashes better than ever before.

I openly admit my **theistic** biases. I do not apologize for my American 'can do' attitude. I find it unconscionable NOT to move forward. I think it a **tragedy** to have waited thirty years to begin. I, for one, do NOT want to be counted with those who waited. It has cost us one generation, already. Are we going to sit idly by and **lose** another generation? "Oh ye of little faith" let's "**Just do it**"! together, and **now**!

# 1999

## **THE SEMITIC CONNECTION;**

### **Our Arab Heritage**

**By Samah HeLal**

I will begin my dissertation by reviewing some political realities.

In 1948 the United Nations (U. N.) decided to partition the British Mandate of Palestine into a Jewish Homeland and an Arab State. What seemed to be expedient on the political level actually ushered in a clash of “rights” between two cultures. At stake was the identity of two peoples with diverging views as to what constitutes legitimacy in claiming those rights. Within the context of international law and world opinion, the U. N. has been looked to as the ultimate arbiter. However, the motivations driving those claims are religious and my presentation explores the “divine” justification for those motivations.

My exploration relies on the writings of the Judaic/Christian/Islamic traditions. Let me clarify my reason for doing this. My premise is that prior to the advent of the Apostle Muhammed (PBUH) the history of Judaism and Christianity is a necessary prelude to the revelation of the “Noble Recitation” (EL-Qur’an El Karim). Putting forth the same idea in different words, the history of Judaism and Christianity is the early history of ISLAM. And for this audience a correlation is to be noted: the history of Islam is the early history of the “Call to TawHid” though TawHid itself claims beginnings ante-dating all three traditions and is intrinsic to them.

Because the Druze did not enter recorded history until the eleventh century, tracking the ancestry of strict monotheists and the notion of monism to its beginning may be impossible, simply because records are not available and there are significant gaps in

the records that are available. My treatment, therefore, is based on a theory of continuity and assumptions derived from that theory.

The media calls the protagonists in the former British Mandate Arabs and Jews. It is more correct to use the terms Arabs and Hebrews, so I will use the latter. Because we are Arabs, it follows that Arab heritage is also part of the Druze heritage. By extension the heritage of the Arabs and Hebrews is part of a common **Semitic** heritage.

Biblically speaking, Arabs and Hebrews are the descendants of the **Semitic Race** and this is the underlying reason for my choosing the title for this presentation. In World War II Nazism gave new meaning to the political term “anti-Semitism”. However, the term had previous existence primarily in intellectual circles involving theology and in the pronouncements of various religious organizations.

So some of the questions requiring explanations are: Who are the Semites? How can opposing cultures claim the same ancestral roots? Why does *revelation* enter the exploration? Who has the better insight into God’s Will?

Let’s hear what the scriptures of these protagonists say.

Islam makes the claim that the original texts (scripture) of the “people of the Book” were “changed” prior to the revelation of the Qur’an. The “Book”, of course is **The Bible** which is composed of a First and Second Covenant (Contract or Promise). The First was canonized in 99 A. D. and the Second in 386 A. D. The Arab Prophet (PBUH) was convinced that the original “message” from God had been changed. Since the original languages of the Bible are Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek any other language rendition is technically a change. The Qur’an tells us that the **same** message was revealed to successive Prophets, but these were corrupted over time. From the standpoint



of the devout Muslim this claim can be taken at face value, but from a non-Muslim perspective qualifications are in order.

That the scriptures were changed is a recorded verity. That changes are inherently “corruptive” begs the question. Many Muslims who accept the *literal* “Word” of the Qur’an as *absolute* rather than the “guide” that the Arab Prophet (PBUH) proclaimed understand ‘change’ as a pejorative term. This discussion is not meant for individuals of such persuasion. But to the Muslim who thinks *critically* such analysis merits pursuit. A next logical step is to see how the “Book” (Bible) was written.

In the ninth century B. C., an un-named writer wrote down for the first time the history of his people that had been handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation, a process called the “Oral Tradition”. He was documenting events that occurred seven centuries earlier i.e., the faith of Abraham.

This documentation of the history of the Hebrews happened after the kingdom of Solomon (Sleiman) was divided into the monarchies of Israel to the north and Judah to the south. At this time the word “Jew” was not in use and both kingdoms referred to their people as Hebrews. However, these lands contained other peoples including the original inhabitants. It is interesting to note that the word ‘Hebrew’ has its origin in the Semitic root word *ibri* meaning to follow a perimeter (probably from the other end of the Euphrates) while the word ‘Arab’ comes from the root word *arbah* meaning to cross over (probably following oasis). Both indicate the influence of a nomadic civilization. Arabic and Hebrew both belong to the Semitic group of languages.

There probably were some written fragments available to this unknown author, possibly stories of the Garden of Eden, the Flood, the Tower of Babel, and the Ten

Commandments. Over the four following centuries other writers contributed to the written history. After the return from Exile (539 B. C.) what is now recognized as “The Torah”, (At-Torat), was relatively complete. The Greek name is “The Pentateuch” meaning five books. Jesus referred to these as the “Law”. Tradition gives Moses credit for being the author of all five, but as I have just explained that isn’t the case though Moses may have written one or more fragments.

There is no intent to be irreverent here; any criticism is toward human error, not divine prerogative. We should note that during this interval Assyria conquered Israel (722 B. C.) and dispersed its people throughout its empire. The Hebrews involved in this exile (beginning of the diaspora) are referred to as the “ten lost tribes of Israel”. Later, Judah was conquered by Babylonia, (586 B. C.), and a large portion of its population was taken captive to Babylon. It is there that the exiles were first called Jews, meaning from Judah.

The name Palestine is the name that Rome gave to the land in recognition of the coastal city states established by immigrant Island People known as the Philistines. From the earliest known beginnings the political geography of the land and people has undergone continuous change. It is these lands and peoples that form the basis for the twentieth century claims over the land. Arabs and Hebrews claim that God *promised* this land to them NOT that they were the *first* people there. Basic to our quest is how humans understand the “Will of God” and how they interpret His revealed Word. We shall look at these claims critically using “revealed” scripture.

We start with the story of Noah (NUH). Muslims regard him as a prophet while Jews view him as a patriarch. In Islam all prophets are equal while the Judeo-Christian tradition ranks the authority/revelation of the prophets.

Monotheistic legend as part of the “Oral Tradition” has a wrathful God (Jehovah or Yahweh) destroying all life except for those saved in the Ark. I think most of us are familiar with the story of the deluge (flood). However, most of us don’t think of the story as beginning a “Promise” or “Covenant” between the Creator (God) and His human creatures. Neither do we recall the creation of the rainbow as a sign of this covenant (contract) to never again destroy humanity (civilization?) with water. (Is it with that promise that the idea of punishment by fire had its beginning?)

Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Therefore according to Scripture, all of humanity descended from these three Sons and their wives. And by extension humanity can only be composed of three races. One son must have married an Asian, one an European, and one an African. In the ‘western’ perspective, the assumption is that Shem married the European.

The descendants of Shem are traditionally known as Semites and according to “The Book” Abram (Ibrahim or Abraham) proves to be most illustrious from the perspective of faith. Again, Abraham is regarded as a prophet in Islam and as a patriarch in Judaism. He is recognized in both as the ancestor of Arabs and Hebrews. He is the original monotheist of record. It is with Abraham that God makes his next “Covenant” which names the land that “I will show you”. More specifically in the first Book of the Bible, appropriately called Genesis, God tells Abram:

“I will make you a great nation and will bless you;

I will make your name great and you will be a blessing.”

When the “Lord” appeared to Abram several years later he promises;

“To your descendants I give this land,  
from the river of Egypt to the great river the Euphrates...”

When his wife Sarai (Sarah) does not conceive, Abram marries his house servant, an Egyptian named Hagar who readily becomes pregnant. Upon being mistreated by a jealous Sarai she runs away into the wilderness. There, she is confronted by the “Lord’s” angel who promises;

“I will so increase your descendants that they will be too many to count.

You are now with child and you will have a son.

You shall name him Ishmael (Ismail) for the Lord has ‘heard’ your affliction.”

Ishmael is born when Abram is 86 years of age, but because Abram will live to the age of 175 this is mid-life for him.

At age 99 the Lord appears to Abram again and says,

“I am God Almighty,

walk before me in innocence and I will confirm my covenant

between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.....

No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham

(Ibrahim)

for I have made you an **ancestor of many nations**.....I will

establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants

as an **everlasting** covenant to be your God and the **God of your**

**descendants** to whom I will give the whole land of Canaan.”

Then God defines Abraham's obligation,

“Every male among you shall be circumcised.....This will be the **sign** of the covenant...”

He changes the name of Sarai to Sarah and promises a special covenant with the son to be born from her and to be named Isaac (IssHaq). Further, he says to Abraham;

“And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. I will surely bless him;  
I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers.  
He will be the ancestor of twelve **rulers** and I will make him a great nation.”

Ishmael was 13 years old at the time. Then the covenant is sealed with the (blood of) circumcision of Abraham and Ishmael. Thereafter, the **people of God** would be identified by that **sign**. All without the **sign** would be called Gentiles.

The clash of the contending cultures has its root in these core passages.

For the Druze chapters 18 and 19 in the book of Genesis are especially interesting for it provides a non-Druze source for documenting a visit of the Five Luminaries. The first three visit Abraham and Sarah at their campsite and the last two visit Abraham's nephew, Lot, in the adjacent city of Sodom. So far God has appeared to Abraham in a theophany, in a dream, through an angel and now in human form. This is my rendition of a Gnostic interpretation of what is written.

When he dies, Abraham is buried by both sons (Ishmael and Isaac) next to the tomb of Sarah in Hebron.

The descendants of his nephew, Lot, populate the land across the Jordan River known as Moab. King David will be one of the descendants through marriage.

Ishmael lives to be 137 years of age. His descendants populate the area between Egypt and Syria bordering Canaan to the south. It is implicit that they have chosen a nomadic way of life as opposed to becoming farmers like the descendants of Isaac. The Romans called this land Nabatea and the Greeks called it “Kedar” recognizing Ishmael’s descendants.

Isaac marries a Syrian named Rebekah who bears him twin sons; Esau and Jacob. King Herod during the lifetime of Jesus is a descendant of Esau (and Ishmael’s granddaughter). Esau becomes the father’s favorite and Jacob becomes the mother’s favorite. Esau is the older and is in line to inherit Isaac’s estate. Rebekah tricks her husband into passing his inheritance to Jacob and Jacob fearing his brother’s wrath runs away. When he returns 14 years later, Esau has become an Emir in his own right and has prospered. Esau graciously forgives his brother’s conniving and welcomes him back to the “promised land”. On the night before Jacob meets his brother, he has a divine encounter and his name is changed to Israel. He is to become the ancestor of 12 tribes similar to Ishmael.

The Biblical land of Edom, called Idumea by the Romans, is populated by Esau’s descendants and will become related through marriage to the future King David.

In summary the biblical lands of Moab, Ammon, and part of Edom are now in Jordan. Samaria, Judea, Galilee, Philistia and part of Edom are in the former state of Palestine. As time moves forward inter-marriages complicate rights and boundaries. It is interesting to note culturally that the Hebrews identify with the descendants of the mother and the Arabs identify with the descendants of the father.

Blood lineage should not detract from the religious aspect of Monotheism and I will share with you the research I have done to highlight events that may have some bearing on who we are. I will focus on one tribe called the Kenites, which I have established to be our spiritual forebears. Please do not confuse Kenites with Canaanites, who were the ancestors of the Phoenicians.

The book of Genesis ends with the story of Joseph, the youngest son of Israel (Jacob) who becomes the Prime Minister of the country of EGYPT. And that brings up historical research not documented in scripture, but helps us to assess the credibility of some of the happenings that are recorded. Let me now introduce the people known as HYKSOS. This **Semite** Dynasty ruled Egypt from the 18th to the 16th century B. C.

The story of Joseph, which incidentally is almost identical in the Torah and in the Qur'an, increases in credibility when we appreciate the fact that **Semites** were ruling EGYPT. This accounts for the prominence given to the caravans of Ishmaelites and for Joseph being readily assigned to the palace staff. It also helps explain why "dream lore" was equally acceptable on both sides of the Suez at that time. It helps us understand why Joseph was able to move up the ranks to the position of Prime Minister.

When a seven-year drought is experienced, Joseph brings his entire tribe to Egypt and this sets up the background to the story of Moses. Joseph marries an "Egyptian", and the question evolves whether she is Hamitic or **Semitic**, and it is probable that the storyteller is trying to make a connection to Hagar, the mother of Ishmael.

The Torah says the tribe was in the land 400 years and mentions a Pharaoh who did not know Joseph. This accounts for lower Egypt being re-claimed by the Hamitic

peoples and their amalgamation with the Hyksos. For undisclosed reasons the Hebrews are not amalgamated, probably due to their status as sheep-herders.

Most of us are at least familiar with Hollywood's version of the story of Moses (Musa). We know he leads almost a million people into the Sinai Wilderness, where they become nomads for 40 years. I want to emphasize that not all of these people were Hebrews, but they were probably **Semites**. The clan of Caleb is an example.

After 40 years of wandering, the Hebrews want to move into the "promised land". They send ten spies to assess the political situation. Guess who comes back with the only favorable report? NOT a Hebrew! It is Caleb. Later, two descendants of Caleb (Abigail and Ahinoam) become wives of King David. They also become related to a tribe of Arabs recorded as Kenites through inter-marriage. The Kenites are connected with the Midianites and the Qur'anic lands of Madyan. It is probable that during the time of Joseph, the Kenites separated from the Midianites who became "camel nomads" and would later oppose the Hebrews being led by Moses

I hope this amount of detail is not boring you while I establish the connection of the Druze to the Kenites. Now I introduce the Nabi Shu'aib, who is called Hobab and Jethro in the Torah. The reference to his name as Reuel links the Kenites to Midianites. The Kenites were skilled metal-workers, craftsmen in mining and metallurgy, which caused them to be esteemed by all tribes in the Near East. They later elected to become farmers in Israel than continue as nomads with their cousins the Midianites. The records are very clear that they are monotheists.

The story of Jethro tells how they became associated with the Hebrews and how they moved into the "promised land" with them. Now, when you read the Bible and you



find mention of the Kenites you will know you are reading about your **Arab** ancestors. Without the Kenites the Hebrews would never have made it to the “promised land” and the Israelis of today know this historical fact.

I now want to emphasize the divine nature of the promise and how it is perceived by the descendants of Abraham, the Hebrews and the Arabs. When you read the scriptures you need to understand “Hebrew” when you read “Israelite” and you need to understand “Arab” when you read all the other tribal “ites” such as the Ken-ites and Ishmael-ites.

Why did the Hebrews forget their God during their stay in Egypt? Why did the Arabs remember their God in the desert? Why does Jethro have to indoctrinate Aaron into the cult of Yahweh (Jehovah)? Why does it take an Arab to re-establish monotheistic worship among the Hebrews? And the question is begged as to whether God is carrying out his will through the Arabs or through the Hebrews. Remember it is a Hebrew who is telling the story and he must find it bitter irony that he owes so much to a perceived opponent.

And the irony bites deeper. The writer has to document that Moses marries a Kenite, who later saves his life from the *hand of God*. He has two sons, Gershom and Eliezer. The grand son of Moses (Jonathan the son of Gershom) becomes the priest to one of the twelve tribes (Dan) of Israel, (who settle in the area we know as Wadi-at-taym at the foot of Mt. Hermon).

An interesting question is whether the Iraqi tribes transplanted into Lebanon absorbed the existing population of Wadi-at-taym. I am conjecturing that they were.

Remember, this discourse is attempting to clarify competing claims of Hebrews and Arabs, the descendants of Abraham, the heirs to “the” covenant (promise).

So far we’ve established that some of Moses’ and David’s descendants are Arabs. We’ve established that the Kenites are related to both lines of descendants, and are spiritually connected to the priesthood. We’ve established mixed relations due to inter-marriage. We explained the promise in the original covenant and later restatements in such a way, that the only “proof” we have of God keeping His word is the advent of Christianity and Islam. And here comes the “clincher”: their advent is to the descendants of Ishmael, i. e. the Arabs NOT the Hebrews. God HAS worked His Will, as he promised through the **SEMITES (Abraham’s descendants)** who are now quarreling over what the covenant means. **In conclusion, God has completed the covenant he made with Abraham by blessing humanity** (Hebrew, Arab, and Gentile) **with Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.** Since the reign of El-Hakim, the followers of TawHid have known that divine truth is inherent in all three religions regardless of contending claims.

In the year 99 A. D., Rabbis and Jewish Scholars met in Alexandria, Egypt and canonized the First Testament of the Bible. It included all the writing we have discussed. You may wish to know that two of the books are named for Arabs: the book of Ruth is named after a Moabitess and the book of Job is named after an Edomite. This lends some credibility to the writer(s) and helps us understand what is meant by “inspired” words.

The Bible does not document any connection between Job and the Kenites. However, Job (Ayoub) is religiously significant to both Druze and Jews.

Before opening the forum to questions, I want to summarize for you the story of Jael (Chapter 4 in the Book of Judges) because her story reminds me so much of the “lady of faith” in Druze History who disposes of the usurper Sukayn. Recall he was fleeing from Emir Mi’thad’s forces when he had to stop from exhaustion in the village of ‘Irna. Thinking that he had befriended a woman of the village he let himself fall asleep only to have the woman roll him over into a burning pit in the village bakery.

In the Biblical parallel the Prophetess Deborah has asked Barak to move against the polytheist General, Sisera. When Sisera’s forces are defeated he runs for his life and is pursued by Barak’s forces. He comes to an encampment where the clan of Heber (a Kenite) resides. Here, Jael, the wife of Heber recognizes him but pretends to befriend him. Like Sukayn he lets himself fall asleep. Because there are no men in the encampment, Jael drives a tent peg through him and thus disposes of an enemy of God.

I could not help seeing Jael as the proto-type of the Druze village woman. I will now open the floor to related questions on the contents of this presentation.

# 2001

## **THE DRUZE: Past to Future**

**By Anis Obeid**

Many will question why I selected for the title of the Druze for this presentation rather than followers of Tawheed.. Let me state at the outset that this was not a slip of the tongue, but was intended to focus our attention on one particular ethno-religious community that embraced the concept of Tawheed during the last call about a thousand years ago. Following the dramatic act of acceptance of the call to Tawheed the Druze community kept the doctrine in safe custody away from the probing eyes of friends and foes alike. This tradition committed the doctrine, in addition to protection, to a state of prohibited development, and arrested evolution. Partly for reasons of safety and more so by default, a caste system was gradually institutionalized, dividing the community into two groups:

The first consisted of those who were exposed to the tenets of the faith and became its custodians and guardians turning the whole enterprise into an order that they monopolized. This group is known as the Uqqal (The Wise). They are nowadays recognized by a special attire and an informal yet highly organized system of communication and hierarchy based on strict moral standards, codes of behavior and level of piety. The standing of the individual member within the group is arrived at by a subtle process of consensus and peer recognition. Individually and as group the Uqqal with few exceptions have not placed significant emphasis on learning and scholarship. Nor have they attempted to disseminate what was in their custody to all members of the community or to establish centers for religious education or training. Despite these

glaring drawbacks, the Uqqal continue to exert a major influence and moral authority on the affairs of the community to this day. The titular position of Sheikh Al-Akl is based on moral authority and no more. In defense of the Uqqal, their ranks are open to any one who seeks and who desires to join on a strictly voluntary basis. And upon earning acceptance the new member will be eligible to worship with them and to have full access to their deliberations.

The second group consisted of all the other members of the community who do not belong to the class of the Uqqal, and are collectively known as the Juhhal (The Ignorant). This has nothing to do with the level of education, degree of interest or contribution to the welfare of the community. It simply means that the Jahil (singular for Juhhal), has not fulfilled the unwritten requirements, and has not sought to join the caste of the Uqqal. The appellation carries a symbolic meaning that indicates religious deprivation and estrangement for more than half of the Druze people. For the most part the Juhhal did not choose to seriously challenge this arrangement, and were content in avoiding the cumbersome task of religion and of religious reform. The Juhhal were only marginally exposed to the tenets of the Druze faith and many had absolutely no exposure whatsoever. This anomalous way of religious practices became entrenched with time and accepted as the norm in the community at large. A *modus vivendi* evolved between the two segments of the Druze community, the Uqqal and the Juhhal, each respecting the breathing space of the other, in a strange combination of mutual tolerance and non-intervention. One secular Druze leader recently admitted that he did not know how many books we have while another was afraid even to open one of the books in his custody and never dared to read one word in that book (personal communication).

We do not need to belabor the general state of the Druze community in the countries of origin in the Middle East. Except for brief periods of solidarity and heroism in times of war, the Druze story over the past two centuries is that of dwindling numbers and shrinking influence, and of course more recently, intolerable religious pressure. The Druze religious establishment (the Uqqal Caste), by its very nature and traditions, has been unwilling and unable to admit let alone deal with the state of near bankruptcy, within a system that defines its very being. The twin forces of modernism along the secular front and strident fundamentalism on the religious front leave very little room for maneuvering on the part of a closed system that lacks resilience and innovation. The Juhhal, who are considerably more exposed to modernism and secular influences were not interested in taking the initiative in religious matters since this was not in the traditions of the community. The recent attempts by a vanguard of intellectuals to venture into this field are an indication that the pattern may be changing under the crushing pressure of religious vacuum in which the majority of the Druze live. However there are too many constraints in the East for meaningful reform to take place. Therefore, if we are looking for leadership and guidance from the East we will have to wait for a long time; a time that we can ill afford when our "Rome" is afire.

The Druze situation in the West is clear for all of us to see. The pressures on the community, differ somewhat from those in the East, but are no less intense. Dissolution by default has been the only option left to a community that has not developed a viable alternative. The human need for religion has always been compelling. The secularists, bolstered by the gigantic strides in the sciences, enjoyed a brief period of ascendancy in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and many felt that religion can be safely relegated to the

background. It was an illusion that we see shattered every day. The growth of fundamentalist movements in virtually all of the major religions and in all corners of the globe is an indication that religion cannot be discounted from human life and from human societies. No wonder that one of the most renowned authorities on religious history has coined the term *Homo Religiosus* to the human being (Armstrong, A History of God).

At this point I would like to highlight a profile of the basic tenets of the Druze faith and present it within a historical perspective. I also will point out how this movement relates to the concept of Tawheed in general. Tawheed as we shall gradually realize is a concept that is universal in scope and timeless in duration. It is a concept that is rooted in evolution and committed to growth and renewal. Although Tawheed was embraced by the Druze sect, it is by no means a monopoly of that sect, nor is it confined to the narrow definition that has been implanted in the minds of many of the Druze by tradition and common usage. Since our concern is with the Druze constituency of Tawheed I shall briefly outline the historical backdrop of the Druze

#### **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:**

Following the death of the Prophet, many in the budding Islamic community felt that succession belonged to Ali, cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet through marriage to Fatima. Ali was bypassed and the Caliphate went to Abu Bakr and then to Omar and then to Uthman. All the while Ali's supporters were seething, but were kept at bay by the dignity of Ali and his high moral caliber. Out of loyalty to Islam and veneration for the Prophet Ali put the interest of the Umma above his own and did not mount a challenge. The violent death of Uthman finally propelled Ali to the Caliphate, but it was more bitter than sweet, and Ali recognized it. Muawiya the Umayyad governor of Damascus and



Uthman's cousin mounted a challenge that eventually toppled Ali and culminated in his (Ali's) assassination. Ali's supporters known as Shiat Ali (Shia), became more devoted to his memory in death than they were able or willing to sacrifice when he was alive. The guilt complex was under way.

Ali's martyrdom was later surpassed by the martyrdom of Al-Hussein, along with most of his brothers and family members in the infamous battle of Kerbala. One of Hussein's sons (Zein El-Abideen) lived to carry the seed, but the fight for worldly power was for the time being over for the Shia. They, instead, concentrated on learning, piety, mysticism, literary and philosophical pursuits, waiting for the Redeemer who will return and redress the plight of the aggrieved. Meanwhile, the Caliphate had turned into an imperial institution under the Umayyads and later the Abbasides. The Shia maintained their allegiance to the Imamate (reposed in the seed of Ali), which grew in stature with each succeeding generation.

By the time of the sixth Shia Imam (Ja'afar El-Sadeq), the Shia split into two main groups: The Ismaelis who believed that the Imamate should pass from Ja'afar to the progeny of his eldest son Ismael, hence the name. The reason is that Ismael died before his father, Ja'afar. The other group believed that since Ismael died before his father, the Imamate belonged to the second son of Ja'afar, (Musa), and thence to Musa's progeny. They became known as the Twelver Shia, when they stopped at the level of the twelfth Imam, who disappeared to reappear again and redeem the world. The majority of the Shia belonged (and still do) to the Twelver group.

Although the Shia as a whole continued to be the object of suppression and persecution by the dynasties of the day, the Ismaeli group was particularly targeted and

hunted down by the machinery of the state. This forced the Ismaelis to protect a succession of Imams by a system of dissimulation and decoys, whereby a stand-in Imam acted as surrogate of the real Imam. Meanwhile the real Imam who was only known to a handful of trusted followers continued to be a source of inspiration and moral leadership. The intense pressure by the state and the saga of survival added an extra halo around the person of the Ismaeli Imams, to the extent that these Imams began to acquire a measure of Divine status. Eventually they were able to stake a foothold in North Africa, and from there blossom into the Fatimid Empire with Cairo as its Capital.

The central figure in the Druze school of Tawheed is the sixth Fatimid Caliph Al-Hakim Bi Amr Allah. By the time Al Hakim assumed the Caliphate, it was almost 350 years since the death of the Prophet. The widely flung Islamic realm had undergone considerable metamorphosis, and was in turmoil, on all fronts, politically, militarily, intellectually and socially. Politically there were revolts in different parts of the Empire which had by now split into at least 3 major fragments; the Abbasides in Baghdad, the Fatimids in Egypt and most of North Africa, as well as Syria and Arabia, and the Andalusian Empire to the West. More significantly, the great cities of Islam had become the hot bed of intellectual activity and philosophical discourse. Philosophers indulged in the translated works of Greek Philosophy and pondered on how to reconcile philosophy and religion, while a growing body of mystics tried to reach the ultimate truth by intuition and transcendence. Mystical practices were imported mostly from the far East but also from the Jewish and Christian mystical traditions. The Fatimids were great patrons of philosophy and science and made it a policy to attract and subsidize talented scholars from all over the known world. The scholars regardless of religious or philosophical

persuasions were accorded full freedom of expression. There in lies a lesson for us who live in a pluralistic society protected by the freedom of speech and of worship.

It was in this milieu that Al-Hakim wrestled with the idea of uniting Islam under one banner and integrating it with the rest of humanity on the basis of a bold series of concepts that were radical in scope and revolutionary in content. A young Persian scholar by the name of Hamza Bin Ali, who was of the same age as Al-Hakim became the chief architect of the movement and the call for Tawheed was publicly declared. The year was 408 H or 1017 CE. Meticulous preparations preceded the public activity, with careful grooming of the staff (Dais), and selective acceptance of converts. They had to be very cautious not only because of the boldness of the message but also because the Fatimids were a minority of a minority in Islam governing a Sunni majority. It was with discretion, diplomacy and tact that the call was initiated with no coercive tactics or strategy. Besides coercion was against the grain of a Doctrine that is rooted in the principle of free choice. In addition the Ismaelis in general and the Fatimids in particular believed the deeper meaning behind the written message is not for the public at large but for a chosen few who are specially gifted and properly groomed.

After one year of public activity the call was suspended for almost one year, and then resumed in full force for 2 more years. At that point Al-Hakim mysteriously vanished . At about the same time Hamza and three of his coworkers disappeared from public view. The only one left to carry the burden and bear the brunt of the backlash was the fifth Luminary Al-Muktana Baha'Uddin. A man of great intellect and iron will he single-handed held the fort during the years of persecution and massacres until the fury subsided. Although the call resumed for over 20 years under Baha'Uddin, it had to be

done with great caution, due to the risk from renegades and apostates who acted as a fifth column. Eventually Baha'Uddin felt that his mission had been accomplished, or had reached a dead end; and therefore he bid farewell to trusted followers and retired from view. With that the Druze enterprise in Tawheed came to an abrupt halt, where it remains in a state of suspended animation to this day.

The Druze interpretation of Tawheed is codified in 111 Epistles, enclosed in 6 books known as the Books of Wisdom (Kutub Al-Hikma). The most important Epistles were written by Hamza, who laid the foundations of the faith, while the majority were written by Baha'Uddin. In addition to the six books there are at least two others that were recently discovered but have not achieved wide acceptance. It is noteworthy that the converts to the new faith were mainly in the Syrian provinces of the empire and not in Egypt. The restive population of the mountains of Southern Syria evidently were more receptive to brave new concepts in Islam than the more docile and traditional Sunni population of Egypt. What is the gist of the new concept that emerged at this fateful time in Islam. To the believers it is known as Tawheed or more accurately a novel definition of Tawheed, since Islam in essence is built on Tawheed.

### **THE TAWHEED DOCTRINE:**

The Druze Doctrine of Tawheed is a philosophical and mystical Doctrine based on three main concepts: The concept of God, The concept of creation and the concept of Reincarnation. The synthesis of these concepts defines a philosophy in life and existence that is unique in religious thought. For lack of time only a brief outline will be presented:

### **1): The Concept of God:**

God in Tawheed is both transcendent and immanent. The transcendent God is the absolute abstract (Lahut) that is indefinable and unknowable. The totality of the universe is but an expression of His will and an indication of His majesty, while His essence is and will forever remain totally outside human recognition. However, a just Creator would not expect His creatures to worship what they can never know or even conceive of. Therefore, God in His grace undertook to reveal of Himself in the human medium for humans to witness and believe. The revealed Image (Nasut) is not that of God but a manifestation of His divine presence and an indication of His majesty. These revelations involve periodic and dramatic emergence of a central figure in human form repeatedly across the span of human existence. Thus, the message of Tawheed is as old as existence and will continue forever. The last of these revelations in the Nasut was in the person of the Imam and Fatimid Caliph Al-Hakim Bi-Amr Ellah. However, while the Nasut is the mirror that reflects the majesty of the Creator, it is also the mirror that reflects the spiritual purity of the seer, i.e. the individual human being. This provides a direct connection so to speak between the one and the One. Al-Hakim in the last cycle can be considered as the Archetype of the Nasut, while each and every one of us is an individual recipient of God's Nasut, but only to the degree that one can witness and comprehend. The majesty of God is expressed through the sanctity of man, in whom the purpose of God's creation is fulfilled. But it is for man to actively seek the Truth, to choose the righteous path out his own free will, and to internalize and express the belief in Tawheed in his daily life. Through Tawheed the transcendent God becomes an immanent reality in human life.

## **2): The Concept of Creation:**

In Tawheed God's creation began with the Universal Mind, the ultimate in perfection. God admirably bestowed upon the Mind His blessing and His praise. Reflecting upon himself the Universal Mind became aware of his primacy in God's creation and became filled with pride and a sense of omnipotence. This slip into arrogance resulted in the creation of the Antithesis, representing negation and darkness. Recognizing his error, the Mind reflected back upon God begging forgiveness and pleading for assistance and the request was granted. The Universal Soul was next in line followed by its own Antithesis. This set in motion a cascade of opposite poles representing the dynamic forces in life and in existence. The forces are equally matched allowing the exercise of free choice. The Universal Soul was followed by the Word, then the Precedent then the Follower. This constitutes the five Luminaries of Tawheed or the five (Hudud). We should keep in mind that thus far we are still outside the framework of space and time and the physical universe which has not yet emerged into being. This concept bears strong resemblance to the realm of Ideals in the philosophy of Plato. It was from the Follower that God willed the emergence of the universe and all that constitutes physical existence. The concept of Tawheed, which was virtually nonexistent in the dim past of antiquity, was already laid down in the scheme of creation. Man's emergence in due time will serve to activate the concept of Tawheed and bring about its evolution across the long span of human life. In this endeavor man is constantly guided by God's revelations as well as by Prophets, Messengers, and other people endowed with God's grace and latent divinity. This then is the purpose for man's quest for knowledge and for perfection through the long process of Tawheed which is the path to God.

### **3): The Concept of Reincarnation:**

In the Druze interpretation of Tawheed, Reincarnation plays a vital role complementing the first two concepts. In Tawheed the soul and the body coexist in an obligatory relationship, that dictates interdependence. The soul, however, is immortal while the body as we all know is mortal and subject to the physical laws of nature. This means that upon the physical death of the body the soul instantly inhabits the body of a new born, and thus reincarnates. The soul therefore passes from one body to the next in a relay like fashion without interruption. In Tawheed, unlike most of the oriental schools, Reincarnation is always from human to human. We are not told if there is gender specificity, nor are we told that a Druze is always incarnated into another Druze. We are told that Reincarnation offers the chance for an individual to grow in the understanding and perception of Tawheed and to activate traits of latent divinity in man. Reincarnation, and not death, is the great equalizer in a system built on divine justice. A lifetime of eternity provides ample time for the exercise of free choice and ample opportunity for making the right choice.

### **4): General Commandments:**

Supplementing the three basic tenets of the faith are seven commandments that followers of Tawheed are committed to uphold and practice in their daily lives. The gist of these commandments can be condensed and summarized as follows:

- 1) To tell the truth. As the first commandment truthfulness is a cardinal prerequisite of faith. Thus the significance of truth by far exceeds abstinence from telling lies, and goes to the fundamentals of the faith.

- 2) Preservation of brethren in faith and by extension fellow humans. Since Tawheed puts a high premium on the human being body and soul, care for fellow humans is a prerequisite of faith..
- 3) Renunciation of idolatry, apostasy and worshipping of false gods. This in essence opens the path to purity and righteousness.
- 4) Belief in Tawheed and commitment to live by its principles.
- 5) Acceptance of and submission to God's will, whichever way it is manifested.

These commandments have played a major role in shaping the behavior of the Druze through out their history. Together with the basic tenets, they should constitute a recipe for success and for applicability to the modern world. Time does not allow me to expound on the suitability of the Druze doctrine to modern life and the concordance with modern scientific thinking. Suffice to say that the Druze interpretation of Tawheed offers the best combination of Logos and Myth, of reason and intuition, and of the ideal and practical, that I have come across in the spectrum of religious beliefs.

#### **GENERAL PERSPECTIVE:**

When I look at the core principles of our faith, I am astonished at the degree of compatibility of these principles with the level of thinking in the modern era. This covers a wide spectrum that ranges from scientists to mystics. A small sample will illustrate this point. For example we read from the eminent physicist Sir James Jeans on The Mysterious Universe:

‘ “The stream of knowledge is heading toward a non-mechanical reality; the Universe begins to look more like a great *thought* than a great machine. **Mind** no longer



appears as an accident intruder into the realm of matter; we are beginning to suspect that we ought to hail it as the creator and governor of the realm of matter.”

In the same vein from the pen of another physicist, David Darling:

“What we are here today will evolve to become a single *universe-wide Mind*, so that every particle in space will be within this cosmic conscience free but aware. Every particle of which you and I are made will ultimately be reconstituted in this **Universal Mind** along with every thing else.”

Paul Davis in *The Mind of God* states:

“We are all children of the Universe-animated star dust- can nevertheless reflect on the nature of that same universe...How we have become linked into this cosmic dimension is a mystery. Yet the linkage cannot be denied.”

The late and distinguished molecular biologist Darryl Renney deals with the concept of immortality in his book After Death. In relation to human immortality and broad aspect of reincarnation he states:

“...You were there at every stage. There never was a time when you were not there. The vital being that is cosmos, aroused and brightened into consciousness in you, in one process real and ongoing...In truth, in reality nothing is separate, everything is united in the four-dimensional dance of becoming. The one exists in all and the all exist in the One....”

From *The Bhagavad Gita*:

“The image of God is found essentially and personally in all mankind. Each possesses it whole, entire and undivided, and all together not more than the one alone. In this we are all one, intimately united in our eternal image, which is the image of God...”

And from the famous mystic Ibn El Arabi:

“Thus God is the mirror in which you see yourself, as you are His mirror in which He contemplates His names; now his names are not other than Himself, so that the analogy of relations is an inversion.”

And from more modern times, we hear from Professor Gershom Scholem on God- man relationship in his own version of mystical vision:

“At opposite poles both man and God encompass within their being the entire cosmos. However, whereas God contains all by virtue of being its Creator and Initiator in whom everything is rooted and all potency is hidden, man’s role is to complete this process by being the agent through whom all the powers of creation are fully activated and made manifest... What exists seminally in God unfolds and develops in man...”

On the subject of reincarnation, we are no longer in the minority opinion. A small sample to illustrate the point:

“I think immortality is the passing of a soul through many lives or experiences, and such as are truly lived, used, and learned, help on to the next, each growing richer, happier, and higher carrying with it only the real memories of what has gone before... We do not remember the lesser things... and we carry only the real experience.” (Louisa May Alcott.)

“In contrast to reincarnation and Karma all other views appear petty and narrow.. Only the profoundly conceived idea of reincarnation could give me my consolation, since that belief shows how all at last can reach complete redemption.” (Richard Wagner).

“...And who can claim that one lifetime, however long it may be, is enough

to learn and apply all that can be learned, let alone a lifetime of only a few years, hours, or minutes. And so the lifetime that spans the entirety of existence...is not merely the same as the one limited by one cycle, from the cradle to the grave.” (Mikhael Naimy).

The extent to which modern and philosophical thought is consistent with the core concept of Tawheed as articulated in most of the Epistles of the Druze Hikma is truly amazing. It is doubtful that the few of many scientists and thinkers quoted above had any inkling of Druze scriptures.

### **CHALLENGE OF THE FUTURE:**

Armed with such powerful tools as the Tawheed Doctrine provides, the Druze Faith should be a thriving enterprise both in the countries of origin and on a global scale. After all the message of Tawheed is a universal call that is encoded to varying degrees in all religions and faiths. How can we then explain or justify the failure of what should have been an eminently successful endeavor. How can we accept to be so ill informed, and ill led that we let this doctrine wither and disintegrate in front of our eyes and not lift a finger to at least see if it is worth saving in the first place. Those of us who are in the know bear the responsibility for the tradition of silence and the erosion and neglect that our faith has endured virtually since its inception. It does no one any good to criticize and lay the blame on others, or to mourn our lot in resignation and despair. We must face the situation honestly and squarely; the time is now the place is here.

The search for remedy should start with evaluation of what went wrong in the first place. Again for lack of time I shall try to highlight briefly the major stumbling blocks and attempt to grope for possible solutions.

The first stumbling block is in my opinion the closed nature and secret traditions of the Druze Faith. Barely three years from inception, the central figure in the faith along with the principle architect disappeared from public view. The movement almost stalled at take off and never regained the momentum after that. Although Baha'Uddin resumed the call for almost 20 years, he was wary and circumspect ever on the look out for danger. His departure was interpreted as the end of the mission and the closure of the doors. I have not seen any written edict that clearly supports total and permanent closure of the doors to Tawheed. On the contrary there are numerous references that the process of Tawheed is ongoing and that God never closes the doors of His grace from those who genuinely seek Him. The tradition, however, is set and will need to be addressed.

The second stumbling block relates to the precise position that Al-Hakim occupies in the Pantheon of Tawheed. The Epistles leave no doubt that God is exalted beyond all definition, description, images or attributes. Al-Hakim, therefore, cannot be equated with God. Yet the veneration with which he is held is more than that accorded for an Imam. Besides, Al-Hakim's title includes Bi Amr Ellah meaning the ruler in the name of God. Al-Hakim Bi Amrihi would then be reserved for the Lord Almighty, hence the confusion. A clear position on this issue will help in defining the identity of our faith and the position it occupies in relation to other faiths. Most pointedly we need to define our position with respect to mainstream Islam, particularly the Shia faction, with whom we share a common heritage.

The third stumbling block relates to the negative connotations in different parts of the Epistles concerning other religions and faiths. Contradictory statements are seen side by side in the same Epistle, ranging from accolade to damnation. The veracity of the

derogatory statements is questionable, since they do not fit with the universality of the doctrine nor with the evolutionary concept that stipulates the latency of Tawheed and its passage through all religions and faiths. *“Islam is the gateway to Belief and Belief is the gateway to Tawheed” is documented in more than one place in the Druze Epistles.*

Baha’Uddin warned the faithful in several places to be aware of potential sabotage and the insertion of false information in the text of the Epistles. Then there are the long years of neglect and ignorance to add to the confusion. In any event what is present in the Epistles at this time is there and should be properly dealt with in the spirit of reform.

The fourth stumbling block has been alluded to in part before, but bears emphasis. It relates to the total absence of institutions for religious training and the absence of any form of catechism and methods of worship for the entire community. Likewise there are virtually no rituals and barely one holiday, whose meaning is also unknown. Social bonds and blood lines were and continue to be the main bonds for the Druze, and these are under relentless attacks in the countries of origin. In the West they are impossible to sustain. I do not remember a single ADS convention when the brief picture outlined above was not discussed, dissected and beaten to death. I do not believe that there is much disagreement on the diagnosis. The issues to discuss are whether the situation is fixable and if so how.

### **IDEAS TO CONSIDER:**

To start with I see no way for us in the West but to take the initiative and decide whether, and how we are going to survive. In essence we have to start from almost zero and create the structure that will address the roadblocks mentioned above, and will clear the way for rejuvenation and evolution. This includes but is not limited to starting a program (s) of formal training in the tenets of the faith and in services that any religious community needs. An Institute of religious studies will give rise to a cadre of professionals and scholars who would keep the faith alive and fit for modern life. It includes a process of rebirth of our faith based on the core principles of its tenets and not on the limitations of past practices and worn out traditions. It includes organization of a congregation with all that it entails of tenets, catechism, rituals, and modes of relating to and interacting with other faiths with an open mind and a warm heart. It means combining the assets of the Mind as the logos with the mysteries of revelation and transcendence. A thousand years ago Al-Hakim initiated Dar El-Hikma in Cairo to rejuvenate Islam; could our community of today rekindle the initiative, in the land of the free. Could we apply the principle of reincarnation to the faith itself, as the old body is no longer able to sustain its life. I believe we can give a try, since paradoxically we have nothing to lose. It is quite evident that there is a great deal of compatibility between core tenets of the Tawheed faith and the evolving human thought particularly in modern times. The question is can we liberate the Druze faith in Tawheed from the shackles that have been imposed on it almost since inception . Isn't it about time that we begin the process of rehabilitation to the extent that it becomes an asset in our lives and not a detriment to our future!!!

## **PROGRESSIVE REVELATION**: The Legacy of TawHid

**By Samah HeLal**

The call to **Oneness** (TawHid) is a call to Nobility. Webster defines *nobility* as “the quality of being noble in character”, and the adjective *noble* is defined as “lofty” or “elevated in character and spirit”. So when we speak of nobility we are talking about possessing **superiority** in mind, character, ideals, and/or morals.

If embracing the nobility of the Ten Commandments makes me a Jew, then I am a Jew.

If embracing the nobility in the teachings of Jesus makes me a Christian, then I am a Christian.

If embracing the Qur'an as the “Noble Recitation” makes me a Muslim, then I am a Muslim.

**Wisdom** dictates that I do nothing less!

Because “Wisdom” is valued in Druze tradition, we often discern an element of “human” fallacy in what formal Religions proffer to be the “absolute” truth. So in embracing nobility the issue becomes whether we accept their claims through *blind* faith or whether we insist their claims be *informed* by “Reason”. And of interest to us is the role that “reason” plays in “**wisdom**”.

It should be obvious to thinking people that the three “great” Monotheistic Faiths can't **all** be right when each claims to possess the **only** exclusive truth from the “same” one God. Did you know?

The word **Jew** is not found in the Torah!

The word **Trinity** is not found in the Gospels!

The words “**Five Pillars**” are not found in the Qur’an!

Yet these ‘metaphors’ have become doctrine in these respective religions and are passed on publicly as truisms. Well, respectfully, we “**know better**” than to accept them as absolute.

However, before *we* get the “**big head**”, our own “Book of Wisdom” does not contain the word Druze and there is no such thing as a “Druze” religion!

I have phrased these opening remarks to maximize their shock value and to get your attention. Having done so, it’s time for us to cogitate on what our faith in “Oneness” **really** means.

There is something intolerant, suspicious, and threatening in “**absolute**” claims. **God** alone is **Absolute** and I don’t know of **any** living person who can *exclusively* speak for Him! Too often an “interpretation” of the truth replaces the founding *revelation* and interpretations are **NOT** absolute regardless of their utility.

In appealing for our allegiance Religions abrogate, abolish, nullify, and prohibit **any** “other” interpretation. Our acceptance gets framed as an “**or**” function, where it has to be either this way “**or**” **no** other way. Today I want to emphasize that there is an equally valid “**and**” function that plays an important role in how we examine truth claims.

In 13<sup>th</sup> century Europe a controversy was adjudicated between followers of Thomas Aquinas who embraced the new translations from the Arabic philosopher Ibn Rushd and followers of Saint Augustine who embraced the new translations from the Arabic philosopher Ibn Sina! These Muslim philosophers performed their work during



that tumultuous period in the golden age of Islam when philosophy and theology were inseparable disciplines. What was the arguing all about?

Simply stated it was whether “Revelation” was to be understood for collective humanity or for the individual person. **Every** culture, society, civilization, and institution wrestles with this “unity/diversity” dilemma.

Imagine, if you will, a pendulum that moves in an arc, one end representing the “sacred individual” and the other end of the arc representing the “holy community”. The fulcrum of the pendulum represents the station (maqam) or locus of divine revelation. Extremism confronts the theologian at either end of the arc. The extreme case for the “**sacred**” individual could very well undermine the individual’s welfare with chaotic anarchy. At the other extreme the “**holy**” community may overwhelm the individual by suppressing self-expression. Wisdom provides the right balance between the two extremes that allows the individual to live a “**full**” life achieving self-realization. Our tradition contains the metaphor of “complete age” (**umr kamil**) for this “**full life**” and conditions our understanding of God as “The Existent **ONE**”.

The concept of periodic cycles under-girds our notion of historical revelation. Our history includes the history of Islam, the history of Islam includes the history of Christianity, the history of Christianity includes the history of Judaism, and the history of Judaism includes the influences of Zoroastrianism. So based on our method of accounting for the great cycles of revelation we witness the messages in the Avesta, the Torah, the Gospel, the Qur’an, and the Covenant (Mithaq, which we consider to be the “seal” of revelation). In conventional terms we can speak of Christians as “latter day” Jews, Muslims as “latter day” Christians and MuwaHHidun as “latter day” Muslims.

To view revelation as cyclic and progressive (invoking the “and” function) is in remarkable contrast to the exclusivity option that abrogates all earlier revelation (a result of the “or” function). The notion of process is directly tied to the changing fund of knowledge that we can comprehend. With “ijtihad” we become faithful to the Qur’anic imperative to use revelation as a “guide” instead of dogma.

We, the ‘Druze of the Diaspora’, have the opportunity to make a valuable contribution to civilization if we have the **courage and will** to do so. Any institution that we propose to function as the “Holy Community” must be “reformed” if it is to reflect our striving for nobility and our living the **full** life. Just as we know that the appellation, Druze, is a misnomer given to us by the public ‘outside the tribe’ we must prove that Juhaal is an even greater misnomer ‘within the tribe’. We have the opportunity and advantage of not repeating the doctrinal “truisms” made by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. We owe it to the world to share our legacy of **progressive revelation**.

Change, of it-self, is neither good nor bad. The “goodness” is in the **quality** of the change. Our faith needs to be adequate for today and relevant for tomorrow. As people with ‘**free will**’ we are responsible **individually and collectively** for controlling change and insuring the quality!

I suggest, therefore, that we establish “**quality criteria**” for reform and move forward with the **original** intent of Oneness, a universal faith open to all. We should appreciate TawHid’s perspective for reconciling the “unity/diversity dilemma” and make it our mission to complete the work that the five founders formulated in Dar El-Hikma (College of Wisdom)! Indeed, when we think of the long term we need to re-institute “Dar-el-Hikma” as the beacon of our understanding of bi-polar “Reality”! We have little

choice but to establish the sixth “school of thought” within Islam which must be recognizably superior to the other five existing schools. Are we up to the challenge? What I am proposing is that we **reform** our practice, discipline, or “school of thought” based on selected criteria that we,-- Druze of the Diaspora, the Juhaal,-- find relevant to living the **full** life in this changing global village. I will argue that the criteria be self-authenticating, but not absolute. We need to avoid dogmatism and be open to new “truths”.

With a new millennium beginning, I want to highlight the opportunity that awaits us. What a wonderful gift it would be to humanity if on the one thousandth anniversary of our **Faith** (2017) we opened it to all who are *sincerely* seeking the truth! This “new” institution in “exile” will be independent of, but complementary to the Uqaal and be pastoral /educational in nature.

I’d like to quote from an English translation from the Sunni Muslim theologian Ibn al-Arabi (1165-1240) when he gives the following advice:

“Do not attach yourself to any particular creed *exclusively*, so that you may disbelieve all the rest; otherwise you will lose much good, **nay**, you will fail to recognize the *real* truth of the matter. God, the omnipresent and omnipotent, is **not** limited by any one creed, for, He says, “Where-so-ever you turn, there is the face of al-Lah”. Everyone praises what they believe; their god is their own creature, and in praising it they praise themselves. Consequently they blame the beliefs of others, which they would not do if they were just, but their dislike is based on ignorance.”

How appropriate that advice is for today and for our destination!

Now that we are informed and assuming that we are together at this point in the presentation, what shall we say about our “reformed” religious identity? When publicly asked what is your **religion**, you will answer Islam. When asked, “what do you **believe**”, you will answer, “I believe that

Jesus is my **Messiah**

Muhammad is my **Apostle**

Wisdom is my **Path**, and

God is my **Sovereign**.”

This affirmation satisfies our legacy of **progressive revelation** and establishes that our “school of thought” is different from the existing classical five of the Ummah. It is up to us to establish its *credibility*. We will provide ‘fresh’ insight to our paradigm “Islam is the entry to Iman, and Iman is the entry to TawHid. Stated alternatively, “Submission to the will of God is the entry to Faith, and Faith is the entry to Oneness with God”.

Our focus on practice will be informed by our mission as we wish to define it. As we grow in numbers and dedication the Uqaal will benefit from a laity experienced in applied theology and comparative monotheism. We must decide that such reform is worthy and make the required sacrifices to insure its continuity.

I conclude this essay with this blessing; “may you begin as searchers after Truth and may you finish as servants of Truth!”

## **ORAL TRADITION:**

### **Origin of Human Dignity and the Meaning of the Festival of Sacrifice**

**By Samah HeLal**

Before humans were able to document their thoughts they passed on their wisdom/values by word of mouth. Because survival and identity was linked to the tribe, “pow-wows”, campfire circles, and winter encampments were the occasions for passing on the “myths” of tribe origins/experiences. Anthropologists and Sociologists tell us that only humans have the capacity to worship, so it is not surprising that the pass-me-downs focused on near miracles and super-natural experiences. The unexplainable is always attributed to divine intervention. This pass-me-down process is known as “Oral Tradition” in theology.

We can only speculate as to why the Semitic tribes were “more” universal in the appeal of their myths to humanity. It was about 800 BC that “someone” decided to place in writing the myths that here-to-fore have been passed down by word-of-mouth. That person(s) was of Hebrew loyalty and told the story to honor their tribe. We therefore get “their” version of how they recall the story in the Torah (El-Torat). The story of Abraham is one of those hand-me-downs.

As is evident the Monotheistic Religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are established on the record of this patriarch/prophet’s experience with the “**ONE**”. It is the continuity of that experience that makes monotheism unique and impervious to other “logical” alternatives.

In about 600 AD the documentation of this story from the word-of mouth process as remembered by person(s) of Arab loyalty paralleled the former with one notable exception: the personality of the “sacrificial lamb” that was offered to the Semitic Deity (God). Was it **Isaac** according to Hebrew tradition or was it **Ismael** according to Arab tradition? And at issue is the trustworthiness of the “Oral” process in recording religious history.

From a faith perspective the West embraces the Hebrew tradition and believes Isaac to be Abraham’s “only” son. In the Near East the Arab tradition is more prevalent and the focus is on the **first** son of Abraham, Ismael (note that I am using the Arab spelling for ‘Ishmael’). Isaac is the son of Sarah and Ismael is the son of Hagar.

The priestly/faith perspective is that only the **first** son is worthy of sacrifice and the argument prevails as to who (in the eyes of God) is the first son of Abraham; the one supported by chronology or the one based on promise (or both). Torah (First Testament) records Isaac (with a noticeable “editing”) in a flowing story. Qur’an continues the normal flow by recording Ismael and goes on further to state that Abraham **and** Ismael built an altar to commemorate the event. Further, the altar’s location is marked by the venerated “Ka’ba” in Mecca. However, the Qur’an also documents the “promise” of God to Isaac and to Jacob. It is strangely mute on the Torah’s birthright controversy between Esau and Jacob. (Esau, Isaac’s son weds Ismael’s daughter.)

The revealed “Word” of God in Christianity is the Christ. In Islam, the revealed “Word” of God is the Qur’an. So scripture alone will not resolve the spiritual “birthright” of God’s blessing upon humanity through Abraham. Is it possible that either/both records contain error? Is bias inherent in “Oral” tradition?

The irony of it all is that in today's world the argument still prevails in the Israel/Palestine (Hebrew/Arab?) conflict. It may be far-fetched for us to link the demise of the "twin-towers" to taking sides with myth/tradition, but the sub-conscious "justification" for such radical acts goes back to the Isaac/Ismael controversy (and human arrogance for "claiming" to know the "Will" of God). The resolution lies NOT in choosing sides but in honoring both. TawHid (belief in the absolute ONENESS of God) does this! Understanding "EID" as culmination of the journey to the "House of God" has an esoteric interpretation that resolves this dilemma. Strange that this detail has been "lost" to the conventional wisdom and seemingly goes "over our head" today.

EID El-Adha in the Islamic calendar is the "festival of sacrifice": the event, when according to **both** oral traditions, God "revealed" that human sacrifice is **NOT** acceptable to "HIM". How perverse it is to kill over which son God saved in order to "claim" this revelation? It gives fresh meaning to throwing the baby out with the bath water.

At least the Islamic calendar honors this human/divine encounter and calls attention to the notion that every individual is worthy (of dignity) in the sight of God.

May God grant us the wisdom to be agents of His peace and **TRUTH!**

EID Mubarak!

## **DO WE HAVE FIVE GODS?**

**By Samah HeLal**

Literally? Yes! Really? No! And this is a reason for the reluctance of the initiated (Uqqaal) to “read” in the presence of the un-initiated (Juhaal) who are not prepared for such perplexing mental gymnastics.

If you are of the opinion that “common” logic will lead you to an understanding of the Five Limitaries (Hudud) you may as well stop here and read no further. On the other hand, if you are willing to open your intuitive capacities and listen with the “ear of faith”, you may be able to glimpse the Truth of what TawHid proclaims.

The concepts of deity and humanity in the Arabic language are opposite poles. Deity (Lahut) is ineffable (unknowable) by definition. Then how do we know “of” It? **Only through God’s graciousness and then only as a reflection of His image on our conscience.** TawHid proclaims that He does this through a “portal” (station) of His choosing. Our theosophy highlights seven “special” epochs in which this has happened. The portal is the interface between the transcendental (divine/heaven) and the corporeal (material/earth) or said another way (at the personal level) between God and humanity. The mind (intuitive/spiritual conscience) understands this image in five modes: intellect, attitude, language, initiative, and result. (In language of a thousand years ago these are called mind, soul, word, precedent, and follower.) Think of these as five wavelengths of God’s pure light. Through the portal (Nasut) the Five Limitaries became manifest in human form (tajalla) and are referred to as Luminaries. How this is done is one of our



divine mysteries. To grasp the concept it may help you to look up the definitions of theophany and epiphany.

It is not totally wrong to associate our five senses with the five modes even though it is through a “sixth” sense that we perceive the image i.e. experience God’s presence. We sometimes refer to each of the five as “Lord” (Mawla). So to a casual observer it may “seem” that we have five deities. Think of God’s pure radiance (enlightenment) as containing five wavelengths that are being reflected on our conscience by which the unknowable is revealed. We apprehend “divinity” via “inspiration” which is a ‘spiritual/intuitive/cognitive’ process. Thus we commune (pray, read, meditate, live) in any and/or all five modes.

When we use the term Allah (God) we mean both Lahut and Nasut (the unknowable and the revealed). What is important is that we become aware of His Presence (Light) and comprehend His Will for us personally. The language we use to describe this communion is less important than the Reality.

In our theosophy (TawHid) reality is spiritual. If you find it difficult to follow this discourse, do not fret. It takes a lifetime of searching for the Truth outside of yourself only to find out that it is within you. Start your journey now!

Sulallah ‘ala Al-khamsa!

**Progressive Revelation in Monotheism**  
**Is the Qur'an the Third Testament?**  
 A commentary on Islamic Theology by Samah HeLal

*I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and your  
offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting  
 covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.*  
*Genesis 17:7*

*Praise be to God, Who has granted unto me in old age Ismael  
 and IsHaac... Oh my Lord make me one who establishes regular  
 prayer and also raise such among my offspring...*  
*Qur'an 14: 39-40*

It is a gloss to say that 'all' Arabs and Hebrews are the descendants of Abraham, but for the purposes of this paper I will make this assumption. I also will assume that the *major* religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are in the Abrahamic tradition. Additionally, I will think of time *linearly* and revelation as a continuing process. It is with these assumptions that I approach the question: Is the Qur'an the 'third' Testament?

I need to establish what I mean by the “**Word**” of God, i.e., revelation and whether God is true to His Word. I will use “critical analysis” of scriptural texts to aid in this task. Further, I will use an eclectic approach in my theosophical commentary.

### Where to Begin?

I will begin with the legendary figure of Noah (NuH) because his son Shem (Sem) is the ancestor of all Semites, biblically speaking, noting that Hebrew and Arabic are Semitic languages. I emphasize that the “First Testament” (Torat) is in Hebrew, the “Second Testament” (Engil) is in Aramaic, and the “Third Testament” (Qur'an) is in Arabic; all Semitic tongues. Roughly speaking, my premise is that the Torat and Zaboor (Psalms) correspond to the “Old (first) Testament” and the Engil corresponds to the “New (second) Testament” of the Bible.

I will also take this position: since God is the Creator of all human languages (not only Semitic), His “Word” (revelation) is also created by Him for the benefit of His human creation. ‘It’ is a gracious (ar-riHman ar-raHim) God Who reveals of ‘Itself’ to humanity based on human

capacity to understand. Thus the purpose of “His Book” (or Tablet), containing these (at least) three languages, which exists with Him, is to communicate (relate) with humanity. Note that the characteristic mode of Monotheism in the Abrahamic Tradition is primarily that of “**hearing**” i.e., transmitted by words (language). Therefore, “in the beginning” revelation is heard. The Traditions themselves provide this evidence.

### What is the “Word”?

The canonized scripture which I call the First Testament is not what the Qur’an means with its term for The Torah, **at-torat**. It means the *original* message from God to Moses, not the Pentateuch of today, and similarly Engil (Evangel or Gospel) means the actual words (Aramaic) spoken by Jesus and not the canonized four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (Greek). The Bible (First and Second Testaments) of today is really a library of books by various known and unknown authors. While adherents to the Christian and Jewish religions may refer to the **canonized scripture** as the “Word of God” I will not be using the phrase in the same sense or context. Yet, I will assent to the view of some Jews and Christians in affirming that this very *human* record of events, The Bible contains the “Word of God” and I want to focus on that portion of the Bible where **God speaks**. In the First “Old” Testament it is the **speech** addressed to prophets; and in the Second “New” Testament it is the **words** spoken by Jesus. In both cases it is **Divine Revelation**. According to the Qur’an the previous messages are the same as its message, revealing the religion (din) of Abraham (Ibrahim), i.e., Monotheism (TawHid). My intent is to focus on those passages where it can be clearly noted that it is **God Speaking** whether it be directly, through an angel, in a dream, or through a messenger (nabi).

So it is God speaking to Ibrahim in the passage from Genesis quoted above and it is the Angel, Gabriel, speaking to the prophet Muhammad in the Qur’anic passage (above) even though he is quoting Ibrahim. A central theme of this paper is whether **Revelation** can be trusted. I want

to address the question as to whether God kept his promise (covenant) to Ibrahim. I intend show from scripture that it is self-evident that He did.

### **Revelation: Process or Event?**

Working chronologically (viewing time linearly) because I am reviewing the “history” of Monotheism, I note that the “first hearing” (and remembering) for humanity was the covenant with NuH (Qur’an 33:7, Genesis 9:9). This is arbitrary simply because I opted to begin with that event. It introduces the “**oral**” mode of perpetuating (hearing) revelation with all the frailties of the human condition. Neither will I ignore the “nomadic” culture of the Semites in the land Biblically designated as that between the “Brook of Egypt” (not the Nile) and the “great River” (Euphrates) (Genesis 15: 18).

I submit that this “**oral**” **mode** persisted for a longer period with the Arab tribes who continued their nomadic culture than it did with the Hebrew tribes who became settled in the land (farmers and city dwellers). I also submit that the story of Patriarch (Christian designation) and Prophet (Islamic designation) Ibrahim could vary in detail *if only* in the emphasis placed on the role of Ismael (Ishmael means “God hears”) and IsHaak (Isaac means “he laughs”). Hebrews make IsHaak the object of sacrifice in the testing of Ibrahim’s loyalty to God while Arabs make Ismael the object. I surmise that the *Scripture of both* intend the “First” born for the object. Genesis 22 emphasizes Ibrahim’s “only” son. Qur’an 37: 101 refers to a “righteous son” for sacrifice.

I take the Genesis writers/editors to task contextually to support this claim. In three places (verses 2, 12, & 16) they emphasize the “only” son. The natural condition in which Ibrahim has “only one” son is the situation prior to the birth of another (second) son. So the “only” son to whom God and His angel are referring *has to be* Ismael before the birth of his half

brother, IsHaak. Additionally, according to Hebrew priestly tradition “only” the firstborn is an acceptable sacrifice to God (YaHweh). Probably some editor in the process of canonization *intentionally or accidentally* substituted Isaac’s name. Also, chronologically Chapter 22 should follow Chapter 17 (another editing error?). I have used the Qur’an to correct information in Genesis and I submit that the nomadic “**oral**” tradition during Muhammad’s lifetime correctly retained the “facts” in the *original* story.

I find it interesting that such a momentous event is not retained in the Jewish calendar. However, in the Islamic calendar it is a major celebration, called “Eid al-AdHa” in Arabic that I translate as “Festival of The Sacrifice”.

Events, including religious history, happen in a sequence. God is independent from time and is its *originator*. At-Torat (theTorah) preceded az-Zaboor (the Psalms), which preceded al-Engil (the Evangel or Gospel), which in turn preceded al-Qur’an (the Recitation). All of these are ‘revelations’ carrying the same “guidance” from God according to the Arabian Prophet, Muhammad. All contain both a “universal” (inclusive) and a “covenantal” (exclusive) message. I submit, therefore, that revelation is an ongoing process and this position requires me to qualify what the Qur’an means in identifying Muhammad as the “last” or “seal” (Surah 33:40) of the prophets.

### **Sequence of Transmission according to Islamic Theology**

“God’s Book” (Word) is with God. The part revealed to Muhammad is “heard” by him. He hears the Holy Spirit (Gabriel) reading from the Book. The portion “read” to him over a period of twenty-two years is known in the Islamic World (Umma) as “al-Qur’an al-Karim” in Arabic that I translate as “the Noble Recital”. Now, if Gabriel is the ‘reader’, then **who** is the

‘writer’? Another angel? God Himself? I conclude that, directly or indirectly, God is the Author of “The Tablet” (Book).

Islamic theologians insisted over **centuries** of commentary and exegesis that “the Reading” is **God’s speech** and therefore of His essence, eternal with God. However, “God’s Book”, as indicated above, is written in a minimum of three languages which God *created*, so is it not evident the Book was written **after** the languages came to be or at least, if God does not write, then after He caused it to be (created the language sequence)? In reaching these conclusions, I am championing a group of Sunni theologians called Mu’tazilites who would support this argument, i. e., the languages preceded the revelation in those languages.

Following their lead I submit that within the overall context of “The Reading”: God is First, Languages are second, His Book is third, its reading is fourth, its hearing by Muhammad is fifth, and its writing (canonization?) is sixth. So, the sequence of transmission is a chain of at **least** five links before humanity hears it, memorizes it, and records it. The only way to assign it, as it exists in its bound form today, an eternal status is to claim that “time” was created **after** it; and that I am reluctant to argue. There is no assurance contextually that the ‘existing’ (canonized?) record (**al-Qur’an**) which is a human arrangement is in the *same sequence* that exists with God, i. e., in heaven (paradise?) on the Tablet (God’s Book). No human can be certain that verses (ayah) or words were not omitted in the process of committing to memory and recording for the first time.

### **Who is a prophet?**

It is the Hebrew prophets who moved the Hebrew “religion” from “henotheism” (tolerance of lesser gods) to monotheism (a single supreme Being) with Ibrahim in the vanguard. They were God’s spokespersons whose message “revealed personal (and community) religious

obligations (divine law) and ethical values (standards).” Interestingly, “The Reading” does not mention Second Isaiah, even though his message insists on God’s Oneness and moves the Hebrews toward a pure Monotheism from henotheism (also an Islamic understanding). Notably absent is any mention of the apostle Paul (Saul of Tarsus). Could this be due to the **oral tradition** being transmitted in Semitic tongues and Greek did not penetrate the nomadic culture(s)? Among the prophets The Reading cites Noah, Abraham, Lot, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Job, Elisha, Elias (Elijah?), Jonah, David, Solomon, Zechariah, John, and Jesus (Qur’an 6: 84-89). The Qur’an is different in claiming that these prophets received their portion of *revelation* as a “book”, i. e., the **heard** Word was written down. If this is indeed the case, I presume that these books, (portions of The Tablet), are lost to history. Prophet-hood in Islam denotes a level of perfection (inerrancy) higher than what is ascribed by Judaism and Christianity. All of the above mentioned Prophets are understood to be ‘**muslim**’, i. e., those who subordinate their will to Divine Will. So, a prophet is a messenger of divine selection, Islamically speaking, who will not err in transmitting God’s Word. He speaks it *exactly* as he **hears** it.

From a Judeo/Christian perspective God’s **Word** is revealed through the Prophets represented in the canonized First testament, then through Jesus as represented by various writers in the Second Testament. I submit that this is an *incomplete account* if we hold His revealed Word to be true according to His often-repeated covenant, i. e., to be God to the descendents of Ibrahim.

Circumcision is the “sign” of this covenant (Genesis 17: 10). We have continuity to the Hebrews and through them to the “gentiles” (non-circumcised) with the canonized First Testament, but what of the (circumcised) Arabs? God *is* faithful to His promise to Ibrahim and sends to the descendants of Ismael the Qur’an in their own “perfected” Arabic tongue,

**completing** His covenant and **fulfilling** His promise. Thusly, Muhammad is the last prophet of His Covenant (with Abraham). And correspondingly, religious historians and monotheistic scholars may view the Qur'an (or at least its Meccan Revelations) as the Third Testament. I would argue that the Medinan Surahs are obligatory only to descendants of Ismael, i. e., Arabs, and this is consistent with my overall theme.

*I will bless those who bless you and the one who curses you  
I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth  
shall be blessed.  
Genesis 12: 3*

*Oh mankind! We created you from a single (pair,) of a male and female,  
and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other  
(‘not that you may despise each other,).  
Verily,, the most honored of you in the sight of God is (he who is,)  
the Most righteous among you. And God has full knowledge and is  
well acquainted (with all things).  
Qur'an 49: 1*

I submit that the world (earth) **has** been blessed (spiritually and morally) through Abraham's seed, i. e., the Hebrews via Judaism, and the Arabs via Islam, both who are of the circumcised. I further submit that the “gentile” world has been blessed through the *extended covenant* via the missionary work of Christianity and Islam. This is what I meant by saying earlier that the fulfillment (completion) of the promise is self-evident. Accordingly, monotheism is the revelation of three books and “The Reading” is the “third” testament. About one third of the world's population is Monotheistic. So linearly, over time, God has been (is) true to his promises and revelation has been (is) a progressive process. This fuller (more complete) understanding will cause us to speak of a Judeo/Christian/Islamic tradition rather than only a Judeo/Christian one whenever we refer to “monotheism”.

### **Who are Believers?**

Orthodox Sunni theologians (representing about eighty five per cent of the world's Muslims) go so far as to claim that persons who do not embrace the notion that “God's Speech” is eternal, i. e.. not created, are **not** believers. Yet there are Qur'anic verses (Ayats) which state that



belief in the **One** (true God) will assure the believer's entry into paradise (Surah 2: 62, 82, 256).

In a pluralistic world where respect is shown for other believers, will the Sunni orthodox continue to embrace the notions of infidels, abrogation, and jihad which underlie their violently militant confrontation with other Muslims and with the "People of the Book" (usually meaning Jews and Christians)? How will believers (mu'mininun) share paradise when they cannot share one world?

A partial answer is to review contextually **all** of Monotheistic revelations as a progressive process and agree on an 'umbrella theology' that will allow each faith to be true to its heritage. This may entail agreement on the priority of *meaning* in revelation over that of its *literal* representation(s). Accordingly, abrogation must be understood as "taking priority" in lieu of "rescinding". In the West, accepting The Reading as a third testament is a positive step toward reconciliation of believers in any, some, and all of God's revelations.

*And unto thee have We revealed the Scripture with the  
truth, confirming whatever Scripture was before it, and a  
watcher over it. So judge between them by that which  
God hath revealed and follow not their desires away from  
the truth which hath come unto thee. For each We appointed  
a divine law and a tracedout way. Had God willed he  
could have made you one community. But that He may try you  
by that which he hath given you (He bath made you as you are,).  
So vie one with another in good works. Unto God ye will all return,  
and He will then inform you of that wherein ye dffer,  
(Surah 5:48*

Because no human can prove the sequence of the existing (official) Qur'an, the Ulama (theologians) must deemphasize the notion that later Surahs cancel out the earlier ones when there is a seeming contradiction. Contradictions are the lot of human endeavors not of God's

word.

### Two alternatives: the “or” versus the ‘and’

Too often our diverse communities impose upon us choices in the format of choosing one “or” the other of two proposals or selecting one from among several. Among Monotheistic communities we have to select from among creedal, sectarian, denominational, and cultural differences. We need an identity and highlighting differences allows us to claim belonging to something that helps define who we are. More than likely this is accomplished on an emotional/sentimental basis. Should the need for identity trump the search for truth?

On the supposition that we are **free moral agents** capable of intelligent choice, why does it have to be this “or” that? Why not this “and” that: or the best of this “and” the best of that or a synthesis of the two. In part we aspire to what is noble, true, good, and esthetic. Knowing that I am risking syncretism let me pose a specific example: A Proposed Prayer to the **One** True God

*In the name of God,*  
**Our Father who art in heaven,**  
*Most gracious, Who gifts mercy,*  
**Hallowed be Thy name.**  
*All praise belongs to Thee, Lord of the Universe.*  
**Thy kingdom come, Thy Will be done**  
*Oh, Convener of the Day of reckoning, You alone we worship*  
**On earth, even as in Heaven.**  
*And to You we turn for sustenance.*  
**Give us this day our daily bread and**  
*Guide us onto the straight path, the path of the blessed.*  
**Forgive us our sins as we forgive those**  
**who sin against us.**  
*Keep us from going astray and steer us from error.*  
**Shield us from temptation and deliver us from evil.**  
*So be it!*

I have taken poetic license to make my point. In this “excerpted prayer” I have used the most familiar scripture to Christians (in bold print, Luke 11: 2-4) and Muslims (italic print, Surah 1) to provide an example for asking questions. I may ask you to choose the most noble of the two, i.e., an “or” perspective. I may also frame the question so that you tell me whether the two

combined are more noble than either separately. The latter is the **“and”** perspective.

Why should we have to choose between God’s ‘periodic speech’ rather than **all** of God’s speech? Why should we choose *between* three testaments rather than embracing *all* three? After all as ‘Monotheists’ we believe in One God, One Humanity, and One Spirituality, “or” do we? Even when inspired, human effort poses limits to perfectly understanding revelation. Why **not** focus on how much we are *similar* than on how much we are *different*? I submit that there is a sense of arrogance in the “or” style of questioning and more of a sense of humility in the “and” style.

While we may not have access to the *original* “Word” sequence as it exists on God’s Tablet (Book), may we not have it in part, though imperfect, as **One** Record in its corporeal reality based on what is available? Such a **‘Record’** would contain the First, Second, and Third Testaments to the “Word” which Jews, Christians and Muslims consider **Holy**.

His Word is of Him, by Him, and from Him. It is only through his Grace that he allows us a glimpse of His Divinity, i.e., reveals of Himself. Should we (believers) not embrace every possible reflection of His light (guidance) to the maximum extent of our innate capacity?

I am not aware of any scholasticism directed toward a non-sectarian “monotheistic canonization” whereby **God’s Speech** is recorded linearly in time based on the three major dispensations (though perhaps the Bahais embrace this historical view), i. e., Jewish, Christian, and Islamic. Such a study would necessarily have to differentiate between God’s **“universal”** (inclusive) revelations for total humanity and His “covenantal” (exclusive) revelation to the successive Prophets regarding the context of their circumstances. This would necessitate a “process theology” and leave open God’s option to continue His revelation in any mode He

pleases. A criterion would be that His *universal truths* are not compromised and the “straight path” of His purpose(s) remains consistent. At issue is whether such an effort would allow the God of Ibrahim, IsHaak, and Ismael, i. e., of Moses, Jesus, and MuHammad, to be ‘true’ in His relation(s) to His human creation.

Such a ‘work’ would necessarily incorporate the world-view of the three major monotheistic religions and their ideals based on the common denominator of **one** God, **one** humanity, and **one** spirituality as revelation ‘and’ reason allow us to understand God’s Will for each person that He created. How exemplary that would be to the remaining two thirds of humanity!

In using Picthall’s translation of the Quran, I chose to use God where the Arabic “Allah” is retained. I also rendered Abraham as Ibrahim, Ishmael as Ismael and Isaac as IsHaak to emulate the Arabic.