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<u>Mansoor Saqi</u>
<u>Mahmood Hanif</u>
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Special contributors:

Amatul-Hadi Ahmad
Farina Qureshi

Proof-reader:

Abdul Ghany Jehangeer Khan
Shaukia Mir

Design and layout:

Tanveer Khokhar

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Muhammad Hanif

All correspondence should be forwarded directly to the editor at:

The Review of Religions
The London Mosque
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Editorial

By Fareed Ahmad

Several articles in this month's issue highlight the distinctive features of Islam – from the vast treasure of knowledge contained within the Holy Qur'an to specific aspects of Islam that are not found in other religions.

These timeless and global aspects of Islamic teachings were revealed to Holy Prophet Muhammad^(sa) over 1400 years ago, and his life was a practical example of how man should live. This is a struggle to channel material resources for the benefit of the soul. This does not mean that one should live in isolation or disengagement from the world but rather one should strive to inject a sense of spirituality into every aspect of life. In this respect the world is indebted to Prophet Muhammad^(sa) as his example, during both times of peace and war, of how to conduct

oneself in different capacities – as a husband, father, leader, statesman, General, judge to name but a few. They comprise a set of ideals to which we all must aspire. His every action was underpinned by serving and winning the pleasure of Allah. Undoubtedly it is this that holds the key for us even today.

Our deeds and actions do not happen without reason and only we can determine what that reason is. Indeed our thoughts and hearts are the source of our goodness or evil and they play a crucial role in moulding our soul. The emphasis in Islam of Allah's attribute of being '*al-Aleem*' i.e. the All-Knowing, is vital to our success as it reminds us of the objective of this life – to develop characteristics that bring us closer to Allah and so win His pleasure. If we are able to master our thoughts only then will we be able to truly benefit from the profound wisdom that underlies every aspect of the beautiful teachings of Islam.

The Essence of Islam: Allah the Exalted – Part 5

This series sets out, in the words of the Promised Messiah^(as) Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, a summary of his exposition of four outstanding topics: ISLAM; ALLAH, THE EXALTED; THE HOLY PROPHET^(sa); and THE HOLY QUR'AN. The original compilation, in Urdu, from which these extracts have been translated into English, was collated with great care and diligence by Syed Daud Ahmad Sahib, Allah have mercy on him and reward him graciously for his great labour of love. Amin. The English rendering is by the late Sir Muhammad Zafrulla Khan, Allah be pleased with him, and quoted from *The Essence of Islam, Volume 1*. All references throughout, unless otherwise specifically mentioned, are from the Holy Qur'an.



The founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community was Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(as).

In 1891, he claimed on the basis of Divine revelation, that he was the Promised Messiah and Mahdi whose advent had been foretold by Muhammad, the Holy Prophet of Islam (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and by the scriptures of other faiths.

His claim constitutes the basis of the beliefs of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community.

Four Principal Attributes of Allah

God Almighty has four principal attributes which may be called the mothers of all attributes. Every one of them makes a demand upon our humanity. These four are *Rububiyyat*, *Rahmaniyyat*, *Rahimiyyat* and *Malikiyyat* of the Day of Judgement.

For its manifestation, *Rububiyyat* demands nothingness, or a state resembling nothingness. Every form of creation, whether animate or inanimate, comes into being through it. For its manifestation, *Rahmaniyyat* demands the absence of existence and its operation is related only to animates and not to inanimates.

Rahimiyyat demands for its manifestation an affirmation of their nothingness and non-existence from the part of creation which is endowed with reason and relates only to man.

Malikiyyat of the Day of Judgement demands for its manifestation humble supplication and pleading and relates only to such of mankind as fall like beggars on the threshold of Unity and spread forth their mantle of sincerity in order to receive grace and, finding themselves empty handed, believe in the *Malikiyyat* of God.

These four attributes are in operation all the time. Of these *Rahimiyyat* moves a person to supplication and *Malikiyyat* consumes a person in the fire of fear and terror and gives birth to true humility, for this attribute establishes that God is the Master of recompense and that no one has the right to demand anything. Forgiveness and salvation are through grace.

[Ayyam-us-sulah, Ruhani Khaza'in, Vol. 14, pp. 242-243]

In Surah Fatihah, God Almighty has set forth four of His attributes, namely, *Rabb-ul-'Alamin*, *Rahman*, *Rahim* and *Malik-i-Yaum-id-Din*. The order in which they are mentioned is the natural order of these four attributes and they are manifested in this order. Divine grace is manifested in the world in four types.

The first is the most general grace. This is the absolute grace which perpetually envelops everything from the heavens to the earth without distinction of animate or inanimate. The coming into being of everything from non-existence and its fullest development is through this grace. Nothing is outside of it. All souls and bodies were manifested and are manifested through it and all were developed and are developed through it. This grace is the very life of the universe. Were it to be withdrawn for an instant the universe would come to an end; and had it not been for this grace, there would have been no creation. In the Holy Qur'an this grace is named *Rububiyyat* and by virtue of it God is called *Rabb-ul-'Alamin*, as is said at another place:

“THE COMING INTO BEING OF EVERYTHING FROM NON-EXISTENCE AND ITS FULLEST DEVELOPMENT IS THROUGH THIS GRACE. NOTHING IS OUTSIDE OF IT. ALL SOULS AND BODIES WERE MANIFESTED AND ARE MANIFESTED THROUGH IT AND ALL WERE DEVELOPED AND ARE DEVELOPED THROUGH IT. THIS GRACE IS THE VERY LIFE OF THE UNIVERSE. WERE IT TO BE WITHDRAWN FOR AN INSTANT THE UNIVERSE WOULD COME TO AN END.”

He is the Lord of all things.
(Ch.6: V.165)

everything whether animate or inanimate.

God is the Rabb of everything.

Nothing in the universe is devoid of His *Rububiyyat*. So the attribute of *Rabb-ul-'Alamin* is mentioned first of all in Surah Fatihah (the first chapter of the Holy Qur'an) and it is declared:

*All praise belongs to Allah,
Lord of all the worlds.*
(Ch.1: V.2)

As of all the attributes of grace, this has natural priority, both because it comes into manifestation before the other attributes of grace and because it is the most general in its scope, inasmuch as it comprehends

The second type of grace is general grace and the difference between this grace and the one previously mentioned is that the first one comprehends the whole of the universe and the second one is a special Divine bounty which is bestowed upon animates. In other words, the special attention of the Divine towards living things is called the general grace. It operates in respect of all living things according to their needs without their having any right or title to it. It is not the consequence of, or reward for, any action. It is by the blessing of this grace that every living thing lives, eats, drinks and is safeguarded against dangers and has its needs fulfilled.

Through it, all the means of life which are needed by every animate or its species for their own continuance, are made available. It is the consequence of this grace that whatever the souls need for their physical development has all been provided, and for those who in addition to physical development are in need of spiritual development, that is to say, they possess the capacity for such development, the Word of God has descended through eternity at the time of their need.

It is through the operation of this grace of *Rahmaniyyat* that man fulfils his millions of needs. He has available to him the surface of the earth for residence, the sun and the moon for light, air for breathing, water for drinking, all varieties of food for eating, millions of medicines for treatment, a large variety of garments for wearing and Divine Books for guidance. No one can claim that all this has been provided through the blessing of his actions, that he had performed some good action in some previous existence in consequence of which God has

bestowed these numberless bounties upon mankind. It is thus established that this grace which is manifested in thousands of ways for the comfort of all animates is an *ex gratia* bounty, which is not bestowed in consequence of any action but is a manifestation of Divine compassion, so that every animate should achieve its natural purpose and all its needs may be fulfilled. By virtue of this grace, Divine bounty provides for the needs of mankind and all animals and affords them protection so that their capacities should not remain in the realm of potentiality.

The existence of this Divine attribute is established by the observation of the law of nature. No reasonable person would deny that the sun, the moon, the earth, and the elements, and all other necessary things which are found in the universe, and upon which the life of all animates depends, are manifested through this grace. The name of this grace, of which everything that breathes takes advantage according to its needs, without distinction of man or

beast, believer or non-believer, good or bad, and of which no animate is deprived, is *Rahmaniyyat*, and by virtue of it God has been called *Rahman* in Surah Fatihah after *Rabbul-'Alamin*. The attribute *Al-Rahman* is referred to at several other places in the Holy Qur'an. For instance:

And when it is said to them, 'Submit to the Gracious God', they say, 'And who is the Gracious God? Shall we submit to whatever thou biddest us?' And it increases their aversion. Blessed is He Who has made in the heaven mansions of the stars and has placed therein a Lamp producing light and a moon that reflects light. And He it is Who has made the night and the day, each following the other, for the benefit of him who desires to remember, or desires to be grateful. And the true servants of the Gracious God are those who walk humbly and when the ignorant address them, they avoid them gracefully by saying, 'Peace!'. (Ch.25: Vs.61-64)

This means that: When the disbelievers, pagans and atheists are admonished that they should prostrate them-selves before the *Rahman*, they feel aversion towards the name *Rahman* and enquire: What is *Rahman*? The answer is that *Rahman* is the Blessed Being, Who is the perpetual source of all good and Who has made mansions in the heaven and has placed the sun and the moon in those mansions which provide light to the whole creation without distinction of believer and disbeliever. The same *Rahman* has made for all mankind day and night which follow each other so that a seeker of understanding should draw benefit from this wise arrangement and should find release from the coverings of ignorance and indifference and so that he who is eager to be grateful should render thanks.

The true worshippers of *Rahman* are those who walk humbly upon the earth and when the ignorant ones address them harshly they reply to them in words of peace and compassion.

That is to say, they offer kindness

in place of harshness, and in return for abuse, they pray for their revilers and thus they exhibit gracious qualities, for the Gracious One bestows the bounties of the sun, the moon, the earth and other countless favours upon all His creatures regardless of whether they are good or bad.

In these verses, it has been expounded that the word *Rahman* is used for God because His mercy encompasses all good and bad alike. At another place this mercy has been referred to in the verse:

‘I will inflict My punishment on whom I will; but my mercy encompasses all things’.

(Ch.7: V.157)

At another place it is said:

Say, ‘Who can protect you by night and by day from the Gracious God?’

(Ch.21: V.43)

Tell these disbelievers and the disobedient ones that were it not for the attribute of *Rahmaniyyat*, they could not have averted divine chastisement. In other words, it is

by virtue of *Rahmaniyyat* that He grants respite to the disbelievers and pagans and does not seize them quickly. At another place *Rahmaniyyat* is referred to as:

Do they not see the birds above them, spreading out their wings in flight and then drawing them in to swoop down upon their prey? It is none but the Gracious God that keeps them from falling down.

(Ch.67: V.20)

This means that the grace of *Rahmaniyyat* so encompasses all animates that even birds which seem to have little value, fly joyously in the current of this grace.

As this grace follows naturally after *Rububiyyat*, it has been mentioned in that order in Surah Fatihah.

The third type of grace is special grace. The difference between this and general grace is that in the case of the general grace, a beneficiary is not under obligation to make himself good, or to bring

THE ORDER IN WHICH THEY ARE MENTIONED IS THE NATURAL ORDER OF THESE FOUR ATTRIBUTES AND THEY ARE MANIFESTED IN THIS ORDER.

his ego out of the coverings of darkness, or to put forward any effort to take advantage of it. By virtue of general grace, God Almighty bestows upon every animate all that it needs according to its nature without asking and without any effort on its part. But in the case of special grace, striving and effort, purification of the heart and supplication, attention towards God and all kinds of appropriate efforts are needed. He alone receives this grace who seeks it and this grace descends upon one who works for it. The existence of this grace is also proved by observation of the law of nature. It is obvious that those who strive in the cause of God and those who are indifferent cannot be equal.

Without doubt, a special mercy descends upon people who strive truly in the cause of God and withdraw from every darkness and disorder. By virtue of this

grace, in the Holy Qur'an, God's name is *Rahim*. Because the attribute of *Rahimiyyat* is special and follows upon the fulfilment of certain conditions, it is mentioned after *Rahmaniyyat*, for *Rahmaniyyat* was manifested before *Rahimiyyat* manifested itself. On account of this natural order *Rahimiyyat* is mentioned after *Rahmaniyyat* in Surah Fatihah and Allah the Exalted says:

The Gracious, the Merciful.
(Ch.1: V.3)

This attribute is mentioned at several places in the Holy Qur'an. For instance, at one place it is said:

And He is Merciful to the believers.
(Ch.33: V.44)

This means that God's *Rahimiyyat* is confined to the believers and that a disbeliever and a rebellious

one have no share in it.

It is worthy of note that the operation of the attribute of *Rahimiyyat* has been confined to the case of believers, but *Rahmaniyyat* is not so limited. Nowhere is it stated that God is *Rahman* towards believers. The mercy which is specially related to the believers is always described as *Rahimiyyat*. At another place it is said:

Surely, the mercy of Allah is nigh unto those who do good.
(Ch.7: V.57)

The *Rahimiyyat* of Allah is close to those who do their duty to the utmost. At another place it is said:

Those who believe and those who emigrate and strive hard in the cause of Allah, it is these who hope for Allah's mercy; and Allah is Most Forgiving, Merciful. (Ch.2: V.219)

This means that His *Rahimiyyat* is certainly bestowed upon those who deserve it. There is no one who seeks Him and does not find Him.

عاشق که شد که یار بحالش نظر نہ کرد
اے خواجہ درد نیست وگرنہ طیب ہست

What kind of a lover is he towards whom the Beloved does not incline?

O my master, what is lacking is pain, for the Physician is available.

The fourth kind of grace is the most special one. This grace cannot be achieved merely by striving and effort. The first condition for its manifestation is that this world of means which is narrow and dark should be demolished altogether and the full power of the Lord of Unity should manifest its perfect brilliance nakedly without the intrusion of other means. This last degree of grace where all other graces end, is distinguished from other graces by being perfect in the sense that it is open and clear and there is no covertness or deficiency in respect of it. That is to say, there should be no doubt left with regard to the determined bestowal of this grace, nor with regard to

the reality and pure and perfect mercy of this grace. The generosity of and the rewarding by the Eternal Master, the Bestower of the grace, should appear as bright as the day. The recipient of this grace should know with certainty and should feel it as a matter which is patent that the Master of the kingdom is bestowing a grand bounty, and great delight upon him by His determination, attention and special power. And that for his righteous conduct he is receiving the reward which is perfect and everlasting, most clear and superior, most desirable and loved, and that there is no aspect of a test or trial involved.

To become the beneficiary of that complete, perfect, lasting and superior grace, it is necessary that the person concerned should be transported to another world from this defective, opaque, narrow, confined, mortal and doubtful world, because this grace is an experience of grand manifestations in which the beauty of the true Benefactor should be clearly seen and should be experienced as a certainty, so that

no stage of manifestation and certainty should be left out and no veil of material means should obstruct it. Every detail of complete understanding should come into operation in full force. The manifestations should be so clear and definite that God Himself should convey that they are free from every test and trial. This manifestation should carry with it high and perfect delights possessing so completely one's heart and soul and every spiritual and physical faculty to such a degree as could not possibly be exceeded.

This world which is defective in its essence, clouded in its appearance, mortal in its being, doubtful in its conditions, and narrow in its extent, cannot bear these grand manifestations. Pure lights and eternal bounties, and those perfect rays which are everlasting cannot be contained in it. For this manifestation, another world is needed which should be wholly free from the darkness of material means and should be the perfect and pure manifestation of the power of the One Supreme Being.

This most special grace is to some degree enjoyed in this very life by those perfect personalities who tread completely along the path of truth and, discarding their selfish designs and desires, lean wholly towards God. They die before their death, and though they appear to be in this world, they in truth dwell in the other world. Inasmuch as they withdraw their hearts altogether from the material means of this world, breaking away from the habits of humanness and turning away altogether from that which is beside Allah, adopt the way which is above the ordinary. God Almighty treats them in the same way and, in an extraordinary manner, manifests those lights for them which in the case of the others are only manifested after death. They experience to some degree this most special grace in this life.

This is a very special grace and is the ultimate end of all graces. He who achieves it arrives at the greatest good fortune and enjoys eternal prosperity which is the fountainhead of all joys. He who

is deprived of this grace is condemned forever to hell. By virtue of this grace, God Almighty has named Himself *Malik-i-Yaum-id-Din* in the Holy Qur'an. The recompense referred to in this juxtaposition is the perfect recompense, the details of which are set out in the Holy Qur'an. That perfect recompense cannot be manifested without the manifest-ation of complete Mastership. This is referred to at another place where it is said:

'Whose is the Kingdom this day!' It is Allah's, the One, the Most Supreme.
(Ch.40: V.17)

This means that: On that day God's *Rububiyat* will manifest itself without the intervention of material means and it will be observed and felt that everything besides the great power and might of Allah is non-existent.

Then all comfort and joy, and all reward and punishment, will appear clearly as coming from God. There will be no veil in between and there will be no room left for any doubt. At that time,

those who had cut themselves asunder from every-thing for His sake will find themselves in a state of perfect bliss which will envelope their bodies and souls, their outside and inside, and no part of their beings will be deprived of this great good fortune.

Malik-i-Yaum-id-Din also indicates that on that Day comfort or suffering and pleasure or pain, whatever is experienced by man, will proceed directly from God Almighty, and He will be the Master of all conditions. In other words, meeting with Him or being cut off from Him will be the cause of eternal good fortune or eternal misfortune. Those who had believed in Him, adhered to Unity and had dyed their hearts in His pure love, will experience the lights of His mercy clearly and openly; and those who had not achieved faith and love of God will be deprived of this delight and comfort and will be involved in painful torment.

.... It will thus be seen that the priority given to the attribute *Rahman* over the attribute *Rahim*

is necessary and is demanded by the rule of good composition. When the book of nature is studied, the first attribute of God which comes to notice is *Rububiyyat*, then His *Rahmaniyyat*, and thereafter His *Rahimiyyat* and finally His *Malikiyyat*.

Perfect composition demands that the order followed in the book of nature should also be kept in view in the revealed book. To reverse the natural order in composition is to reverse the law of nature. For a perfect composition it is necessary that the order of the composition should be in such accord with the order of nature as if it were its photograph in which that which is natural and in fact prior should be prior in description also. Thus in these verses the highest eloquence is displayed in which the natural order is perfectly observed. The verses follow the order which everyone possessing insight would observe in the order of the universe. Is this not the straightforward way that the order in which Divine bounties appear in the book of nature should be followed also in the Revealed

Book? To take exception to such an excellent and wise order is the characteristic of those blind ones who have lost at once both their sight and their insight.

چشم بد اندیش که برکنده باد
عیب نماید هنرش در نظر

*The eye of the ill-wisher,
wherever it lands;
Is prone to see evil even where
there is good.*

We revert to the subject and proceed to expound what is set out in Surah Fatihah from *Rabb-ul-'Alamin* to *Malik-i-Yaum-id-Din*. As expounded in the Holy Qur'an, it comprises four grand verities:

The first verity is that God Almighty is *Rabb-ul-'Alamin*, that is to say, that God is the *Rabb* and Master of all that which is in the universe. All that appears, is seen, felt or perceived by reason, is His creation, and that true existence belongs only to God Almighty and to nothing else. In short, the universe with all its components is created and is the creation of God. There is nothing in the compo-

nents of the universe which is not the creation of God.

Through His perfect *Rububiyyat* God Almighty controls and rules over every particle of the universe.

His *Rububiyyat* is in operation all the time. It is not that after having created the world God has withdrawn from its control and that He has committed it to the law of nature so that He Himself does not intervene in any way. It is not like the maker of a machine who has no concern with it after it has been made. The creations of the True Maker are not unconnected with Him. The *Rabb-ul-'Alamin* exercises His perfect *Rububiyyat* all the time over the whole universe and the rain of His *Rububiyyat* falls perpetually upon the whole universe. At no time is the universe deprived of the benefit of His grace. Even after the creation of the universe, that Source of Grace is needed every moment, without interruption, as if He had not yet created anything. As the world depended upon His *Rububiyyat* for its coming into being, it is equally dependent upon it for its

continuation and sustenance.

It is He Who supports the world every moment and every particle of the universe is kept fresh and flourishing because of Him. He exercises His *Rububiyyat* in respect of everything by His will and intent. It is not as if His *Rububiyyat* were exercised in respect of anything without His intent. In short, this verity means that everything in the universe is created and is dependent upon the *Rububiyyat* of God Almighty in respect of all its excellences and conditions, at all times. There is no spiritual or physical excellence which any created thing can acquire on its own without the determination of the Absolute Controller. Besides, it is latent in this and other verities that the divine attributes, such as *Rabb-ul-'Alamin* etc., are special to Him and that none else is associated with Him in that respect. The opening phrase of the Surah, namely, *Alhamdu lillah*, makes it clear that all worthiness of praise belongs to God alone.

The second verity is *Rahman*, which follows upon *Rabb-ul-*

'Alamin. We have already explained that all animates, whether gifted with reason or not, good or bad, have been furnished and continue to be furnished with all that is needed for their maintenance, preservation of life, and the continuation of their species out of the general mercy of God Almighty. This is an absolute bounty that does not depend upon anyone's actions.

The third verity is *Rahim*, which follows after *Rahman*. This means that, as demanded by His mercy, God Almighty brings about good results in consequence of the efforts of His creatures. He forgives the sins of those who repent. He bestows upon those who ask. He opens for those who knock.

The fourth verity is *Malik-i-Yaum-id-Din*. This means that God Almighty is the Master of all perfect recompense which is free from all test and trial and the intervention of beguiling means and is purified of all uncleanness and is free from doubt and defect and is a manifestation of His great powers. He does not lack the

power to make manifest His perfect recompense, which is as bright as the day. The manifestation of this grand verity has as its purpose to make the following matters clear to everyone as a certainty.

First, that reward and punishment are a certainty, which are imposed upon His creatures by the True Master as the result of His special determination. This matter is not possible of exposition in this world for it is not clear to the average person why and wherefore does he experience good or ill, and comfort or pain. No one hears the voice out of whatever he experiences that this is the recompense of his deeds, nor does anyone observe or feel that whatever he is passing through is the consequence of his actions.

Secondly, the exposition is desired that material means are irrelevant and that it is the Grand Being or God Who is the fountainhead of all grace and the Master of all recompense.

Thirdly, it is desired to expound what is great good fortune and

what is great misfortune. Great good fortune is that condition of supreme triumph in which light, joy, pleasure, and comfort encompass the inside and outside, the body and soul, of a person, and no limb or faculty is left out. The great misfortune is the torment which, in consequence of disobedience, impurity, distance and separation, is set ablaze in the hearts and envelopes the bodies so that the whole being feels like being on fire and in hell.

These manifestations cannot be observed in this world because this narrow, constricted and opaque world, which puts on the mantle of physical means and is in an imperfect condition, cannot bear their being made manifest. This world is subject to tests and trials and its comfort and its pain are both temporary and defective. Whatever a person experiences in this life is under the veil of physical means which hide the countenance of the Master of recompense. Thus this world cannot be the true and perfect and open day of recompense. The true, perfect and open Day of

Judgement or of Recompense will be the world which will follow this one. That world will be the place of the grand manifestation and of the demonstration of glory and beauty.

Whatever hardship or ease, comfort or pain, sorrow or joy, is experienced by people in this world is not necessarily attributable to God's bounty or His wrath. For instance, anyone's being rich is not a conclusive proof that God is pleased with him, nor is anyone's poverty or

privation proof that God Almighty is displeased with him. Both these are a trial so that a wealthy one may be tried in respect of his wealth and a poor one may be tried in respect of his poverty. These verities are set out in detail in the Holy Qur'an.

[Brahin-e-Ahmadiyya, Ruhani Khaza'in, Vol. 1, pp. 444-461, footnote 11]

In this journal, for the ease of non-Muslim readers, '(sa)' or 'sa' after the words, 'Holy Prophet', or the name 'Muhammad', are used. They stand for '*Salallahu 'alaihi wa sallam*' meaning 'Peace and Blessings of Allah be upon him'. Likewise, the letters '(as)' or 'as' after the name of all other prophets is an abbreviation meaning 'Peace be upon him' derived from '*Alaihis salatu wassalam*' for the respect a Muslim reader utters.

The abbreviation 'ra' or (ra) stands for '*Radhiallahtala*' and is used for Companions of a Prophet, meaning Allah be pleased with him or her (when followed by the relevant Arabic pronoun). Also 'ru' or (ru) for '*Rahemallahu Ta'ala*' means the Mercy of Allah the Exalted be upon him.

Distinctive Features of Islam

By Bilal Atkinson - Hartlepool, UK

An address delivered at the Annual Convention of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association (UK) held at Islamabad, Tilford, Surrey on 31 July 2004. The author is an English convert and serves as the Regional Amir for the North East of the UK.

Introduction

For those who may read this article, be they Muslim or non-Muslim, believer or non-believer, I can, by the Grace and Mercy of Allah only attempt to cover a few of the very many distinctive features of the religion of Islam. I must claim from the outset that I believe a feature can only be claimed as distinctive when it is shown to stand out above and beyond all other comparisons in meaning, interpretation and philosophy. From this base, I will humbly try to describe and explain some of the features of Islam which I feel are distinctive from among all the great religions. The features I have chosen to briefly review are: -

- » The Unity of God,
- » The Universality of Prophethood and Religion,
- » The Holy Qur'an,
- » The Rights of Women,
- » Life after Death and
- » Khilafat.

The Unity Of God

The cardinal doctrine of Islam is the Unity of Godhead and the belief of all Muslims is - '*La ilaha illallah*' - 'There is none worthy of worship but the One [and only] God'. This Unity of God is the first and foremost Pillar of Islam and every other belief hangs upon it.

Islam's primary beauty lies in the

fact that it provides its followers with the purest concept of the Creator. The concept is of only one unique God Who possesses all His attributes in absolute perfection and none of the attributes carry the stigmata of human imperfections or decay.

God, as conceived by Islam, is a personal God and not a philosophical concept. He is One, Unique, Alone, Absolute, without beginning or end, not having succeeded any one and above the need for succession. The Holy Qur'an says:

He is Allah the One: Allah the Independent and Besought of all. He begets not, nor is He begotten: and there is none like unto Him.

(Ch. 112: Vs. 1-5)

This small chapter covers all aspects of the Unity and Uniqueness of God. The Unity of God is meant both in physical terms as well as in the unique powers, qualities and attributes of God in which He has no rival or competitor.

This verse further indicates that God is the Guide for the whole of mankind equally, and He entertains no special attachment to any particular people. Those who sincerely strive to attain nearness to Him, He guides them along the paths that lead to Him. All people are equal in His sight as He is the source of all creation. He alone is the Unity that is the source from which the multiplicity of the entire Universe is born.

The last verse also categorically refutes any allegation that there may be any other Gods in existence by proclaiming; *'And there is none like unto Him'*. The Holy Qur'an further substantiates this claim by declaring:

If there had been in both the heaven and the earth gods other than Allah, then both the heaven and the earth would have ended up in chaos. Glorified then be Allah, the Lord of the Throne, above what they attribute.

(Ch. 21: v. 23)

Hadhrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmood Ahmad^(ra) comments on this:

'This verse constitutes an effective and conclusive argument against any form of polytheism. Even atheists cannot deny that a perfect and unifying order pervades and permeates the whole Universe. If there had been more than one God, then more than one law would have governed the Universe because for a god it is necessary to create a universe with its own laws; and thus disorder and confusion would have been the inevitable result and the whole universe would have gone to pieces.'
(English Commentary of The Holy Qur'an by Hadhrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmood Ahmad^(ra) Vol.4, p.1684)

The Universal Prophet and the Universal Religion

The teachings and scriptures of other religions were meant for certain people or nations at a given time. They were limited to

a particular period and they were not universal and never claimed to be universal. Jesus^(as) clearly stated:

I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.
(Matthew 15:24)

Meaning that his message was limited only to the Jews. The scriptures, which he claimed to fulfil and not to change, were not meant to cope for the human needs of all time. This task was reserved for a great and universal Law Bearing prophet who was to come at a later date. Jesus^(as) told his disciples that after him the Counsellor or Comforter would appear and would teach them all the things he was not commissioned to do.

(John 14:15-16, 14:25-26,16:7)

This is exactly the claim of the Holy Prophet Muhammad^(sa). In the Holy Qur'an God Almighty commands the Holy Prophet^(sa) to declare:

Say "O mankind! I truly am a Messenger to you all from

Allah." (Ch. 7: V. 159)

No other prophet or scripture lays down such a claim, because they were not meant to be universal.

The Holy Qur'an then says:

'This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favour upon you and have chosen for you Islam as religion.'

(Ch.5: V.4)

This unequivocal declaration of the perfection of God's message cannot be found in any other religion. It eliminates the need for any change or interpolation. It is a grand sign that God, in His Mercy, has provided the whole of mankind with a complete and perfect code for the satisfaction of its spiritual hunger.

Islam claims to be a complete religion, and therefore no aspect of human life is left without guidance. It lays down fundamental principles for addressing all types of problems but refrains

from stipulating details, which can be filled according to changing times or geographical needs. Its beauty is that it conforms to human nature. It provides a comprehensive code of conduct in individual, collective or international dealings.

All the teachings of Islam were put into practice in the best possible way by a human being, the beloved Holy Prophet^(sa), who reflected these teachings in his life with such excellence that he became the best example for the entire human race. If the Holy Prophet^(sa) as a human being could put the teachings of the Holy Qur'an into practice, no excuse is open for any other person to say that it is impracticable.

The Holy Qur'an

The Holy Qur'an forms the very words that God put in the mouth of 'That (The) Prophet' as mentioned in the Bible in Deuteronomy (18:18 and John 1:21). It contains all the truths for the guidance of mankind and its message is Universal. It affirms

the truth of all previous revelations and the righteousness of all the prophets.

The Holy Qur'an was revealed in Arabic by Divine revelation to Prophet Muhammad^(sa) over a period of about twenty-two and a half years. From the very outset, the Holy Prophet^(sa) used two independent but complementary methods for preserving the integrity of the revelations. The two methods used were memorisation and inscription. Besides ensuring independently the transmission of the revelations, the two methods also served as internal checks to ensure their accurate preservation.

Upon investigation it can be found that all previous religions have suffered from one common problem - that their original scriptures have been lost and only copies are available and even these have been tampered with or changed by man whenever he found that the teaching could not cope with the demands of the society of the time. Consequently their Divine

purity has been lost forever. God has therefore taken it upon Himself to safeguard the Holy Qur'an from being tampered with. A verse from the Holy Qur'an states:

Verily, it is We Who have sent down this Exhortation, and most surely We will be its Guardian.

(Ch.15: V.10)

Today, even non-Muslim scholars admit that the text of the Holy Qur'an is exactly the same as it was at the time of the Holy Prophet^(sa). This great prophecy protecting the integrity of the text of the Holy Qur'an has been fulfilled every day over the last 1400 years.

Islam is a living religion and Arabic is a living language. For a complete and living message it was essential that it should be preserved in a living language. The significance of this sign can be judged from the fact that even the English language has undergone tremendous changes over this period - and it is now

difficult for an ordinary man in the street to understand the English language of Chaucer. This is not so with the Holy Qur'an and its Arabic is still spoken, used and understood in the Arab world.

The Holy Qur'an explains all that is or may be needed by mankind for the complete fulfilment of life. It seeks to create faith in God and makes full provision for mankind's welfare - material, moral and spiritual.

It teaches all that is needed for the regulation of human life and also the philosophy underlying it. It explains the significance of establishing and maintaining communion with God. The Qur'an is so comprehensive that it makes provision for guidance in all aspects for all peoples for all times.

But, the Holy Qur'an is much more than simple injunctions and commands. It is a treasure house of spiritual knowledge. It is also full of prophecies - some of them have already been fulfilled,

others are being fulfilled and still others wait to be fulfilled. In fact every verse of the Holy Qur'an is called an Ayah i.e. a sign, a proof, an argument. Not one verse nor even one word is superfluous or out of place and any change would undoubtedly result in a profound decline in the meaning and the beauty of its form.

Other religions more or less agree with man's spiritual needs, but fail to describe how to fulfil them. For example, they agree that there is a God, but they expect everybody else to accept this fact without giving good reason that there is a God. Similarly, they may describe a few attributes of God, but provide no proofs of these attributes. The Holy Qur'an on the other hand, provides strong, incontrovertible proofs of the existence of God. It also gives complete and full descriptions of all those Divine attributes that are concerned with man and it also provides the proofs. Even if man were to make in a thousand years a most powerful and

ISLAM IS THE ONLY RELIGION THAT HAS TAKEN STEPS TO SAFEGUARD THE MORAL, ECONOMIC AND SPIRITUAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND BRINGS THEM ON AN EQUAL FOOTING WITH MEN. THE QUR'AN REPEATEDLY DECLARES THAT MEN AND WOMEN ARE SPIRITUALLY EQUAL IN THE SIGHT OF GOD AND WILL BE JUDGED ACCORDING TO THEIR DEEDS.

comprehensive computer, it could never match the power and the knowledge contained within this glorious Holy Qur'an.

The Equality of Mankind

Islam proclaims that every human being is born without sin and starts with a clean slate. As a former Christian, when I heard this claim it immediately released me from my previous belief that I, like all men and women, according to Christian doctrine, was born with the stigma of sin even before I took my first precious breath of life. It also appealed to my logic and common sense and was the precursor to my further investigation into the claims of the religion of Islam.

As for Jesus^(as) suffering for the sins of mankind, this doctrine of

Atonement is repudiated by Islam, which declares:

And no burdened soul can bear the burden of another; and if a heavily laden soul call another to bear its load, naught of it shall be carried by the other, even though he be a kinsman.

(Ch.35: V.19)

Islam gives us the assurance that we are just as capable and qualified to achieve the purpose of our creation as any other fellow human being. In this respect, Islam teaches complete equality of mankind. The Holy Qur'an for example says:

O mankind, we have created you from male and female: and We have made you into clans and tribes that you may

recognise one another. Verily, the most honourable among you, in the sight of Allah, is he who is the most righteous among you. Surely Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware.
(Ch.49: V.14)

The message from this verse totally eliminates any sense of superiority among people, tribes, nations or races. We have acquired different features, colours and characteristics due to the distribution of the human race in different parts of the world - it is not due to a different or superior origin. No matter who or what we are, the method of our birth is a common one. Whether he is a King or a President or an ordinary man in the street or a man in South America or someone from the remote parts of China - all are born in the same way. Our requirements are the same, our natures are the same and our needs are the same. Our God is the same One God, Who is very just in His dealings. He created all men with equal spiritual opportunities and rights, as it

would have been against His justice to make one people superior to another. The Holy Qur'an declares:

Surely We have created man in the best of creative plans.
(Ch.95: V.5)

A man's riches, colour, rank, position or intellect are all blessings of God, and He can take them away whenever He wants to do so. God can also bestow all these blessings and even more on a person who does not possess or deserve them. How, then, can a believer in God be arrogant about the possession of anything worldly?

Rights of Women in Islam

Islam is the only religion that has taken steps to safeguard the moral, economic and spiritual rights of women and brings them on an equal footing with men. The Qur'an repeatedly declares that men and women are spiritually equal in the sight of God and will be judged according to their deeds. The Qur'an states:

Whoso does evil will be requited only with the like of it: but whoso does good whether male or female, and is a believer - these will enter the Garden: they will be provided therein without measure. (Ch. 40: V.41)

Islamic philosophy is based on the nature of human beings. It, therefore, takes into account the special anatomical and biological variations between man and woman and lays down certain rules that cover these variations.

It does not blindly apply all rules to both sexes, but takes into account their special needs and requirements. This sometimes appears strange to an untrained eye, but upon reflection, provides a proof that the Provider of this teaching must also be the Creator of human beings Who knew the intricate and inner feelings and requirements of both sexes. Before the advent of Islam, the majority of women had no position in society. They were at the mercy of their husbands,

fathers, brothers or others who treated them as mere property.

Islam, for the first time, vindicated the rights of women and gave them a status in society. Islam has given women complete economic independence and the right to inherit money and property. Even after marriage they still have this economic independence.

Today in the West, we hear a lot about the rights and status of women yet only one hundred years ago, in England, a woman automatically lost all her property and belongings to her husband the day she married him. In the Middle Ages it was the Western woman who was burdened with the responsibility of providing her future husband with a dowry and even in today's Western (Christian) society the cost of a wedding and all it entails, such as the use of the church or licensed wedding establishment and provision of food for all guests is generally borne by the bride's parents.

Islam on the other hand, 1400 years ago, gave full protection to the rights of women - making them equals of men, both in the spiritual and religious spheres of life. For instance it now became the responsibility of the husband to offer a dowry to his wife according to his means. The dowry then became her sole property to do with as she saw fit. Islam makes it clear that a husband has no rights over his wife's property and that it is the duty of the husband to provide for the running of the household even if his wife has an independent source of income.

Another important right given to women by Islam 1400 years ago was their right to divorce their husbands. Divorce is not encouraged in Islam because of the devastating effect on all concerned, especially the children. Nevertheless the right of divorce was accorded to women so that they did not have to spend the rest of their lives living in discomfort or torment. It is narrated by Hadhrat Jabir that the Holy Prophet^(sa) said:

The best of you is one who is best in his treatment of his wife and I am the best of you in the treatment of my family. (Tirmidhi - *Kitabun Nikah*, Book of Marriages)

The Holy Prophet^(sa) attached great importance to a husband's kind treatment of his wife, so much so that in the eyes of God he considered the best of Muslims to be the ones who treated their wives best.

Abu Hurairah relates that a man came to the Holy Prophet^(sa) and asked:

'Messenger of Allah, which of all the people is best entitled to kind treatment and good companionship from me?' He answered, 'Your mother' The man asked 'and after her?' He said, 'Your mother' And after her? He said, 'Your mother' And after her? 'Your father' (Bukhari - *Kitabul Adab*, Book of Manners)

Again the Holy Prophet^(sa) is

reported to have said:

'Paradise lies at the feet of mothers.' (Nisai, *Kitabul Jihad*, Book of Jihad)

Surely these statements by the Prophet^(sa) of God make it crystal clear that a woman has such a high status in Islam.

Life after Death

To believe in the unseen does not mean that we should believe in unreal, magical or imaginary things. The Holy Qur'an does not invite us to believe in things blindly. Just because the Qur'an may contain things which not everyone can at this moment in time comprehend does not mean to say that they cannot be proved right by reason or experience. For instance the Holy Qur'an says:

Verily He will merge the two oceans, joining them together; between them is now a barrier; they encroach not one upon the other. (Ch.55: Vs.20-21)

For thirteen centuries people wondered what on earth these two verses could possibly mean. Yet we in this day and age have been privileged to understand what they mean in a physical sense. The verses refer to the construction of the Suez and Panama canals. They could have still other meanings but as I said, in a physical sense, God in His wisdom knew that one day, the needs of man to trade in other parts of the world using huge ships would require the linking of oceans.

The Big Bang theory was revealed by the Holy Qur'an, yet it has taken 1400 years for man to reach a similar conclusion (Ch.21: V.31). As mankind is now in the infancy of space travel, the Holy Qur'an tells us that if He wished, God could join us with others from other worlds indicating that there are other forms of life in His Universe (Ch.42: V.30).

It is therefore inconceivable that God, Who is All-Wise, Creator of the Universe and Master of the

Day of Judgement would fail to provide for the spiritual needs of mankind. If the prophecies in the Holy Qur'an have come true then why should man doubt about a spiritual life after physical death?

The Qur'an teaches that on a man's death his soul enters a new universe and assumes a new body. That body is different from his physical body that is adjusted to the requirements of life on earth.

Sahl ibn Sa'ad relates: "I was present in the company of the Holy Prophet^(sa) in which he described the condition of Paradise and said: 'In it there is that which no eye has seen, no ear has heard nor has the mind of man conceived it.'" (Bukhari - *Kitabul Tafseer* - Book of Commentary Chapter Al-Sajda, verse 18)

The whole concept of life after death is illustrated in the Holy Qur'an, where certain types of conduct in this life are described as defects and shortcomings that will affect the soul in the life

after death. For instance, the Qur'an states that he who is blind in this life will be blind in the life after death and will find himself even more astray.

This does not mean that a person who is physically blind in this life will be blind in the next. Blindness here means spiritual blindness. A person who has failed to develop a spiritual insight in this life will be blind in the life to come. On attaining life after death, the Qur'an describes their fate through the following verse:

But they who will disbelieve and treat Our Signs as lies, these shall be the inmates of the fire; therein shall they abide. (Ch.2: V.40)

All our actions, good or not so good, leave a permanent impression upon our souls and when we pass away our souls will carry the sum total of all these impressions into the life to come. Whatever we have done has been recorded on our souls and we take them with us and are

judged on them. The record of a man's acts and their consequences will be presented to him as if it were an open book. He will be told to read his book and he will have to follow the course that it lays down for him. He will have to render an account of the manner in which he spent his life on this earth and that account will constitute his rewards and his punishments. The Holy Qur'an states:

And every man's record of deeds have we fastened to his neck; and on the Day of Resurrection We shall bring out for him a book which he will find wide open. It will be said to him, 'Read thy book. Sufficient is thy own soul this day as a reckoner against thee'.

(Ch.17: Vs.14-15)

The life we lead on this earth is extremely short compared to the next life. We are ruled by the dimension of time in this life and are therefore subject to decay and death. Time does not exist as we know it in the next life and

therefore the next life will be an eternity - a living eternity for all souls. And as for those that strive towards righteousness, the Holy Qur'an gives the following promises:

And those, who feared their Lord, will be conducted to Heaven in groups until when they reach it, and its gates are opened and its Keepers say to them, 'Peace be upon you! Be ye happy, and enter it abiding therein.' And they will say, 'All praise belongs to Allah Who has fulfilled His promise to us, and has given us the land for an inheritance, making our abode in the Garden wherever we please.' How excellent is the reward of the righteous workers!
(Ch.39: Vs.74-75)

According to the teachings of Islam, Hell is only temporary whilst Heaven is a permanent abode.

Khilafat

The Holy Qur'an holds out a promise to Muslims that if they

carry out the programme of life which God has laid down for them, they will become leaders of the world both in spiritual and temporal matters and that their religion will become firmly established in the world.

The Holy Qur'an states:

Allah has promised to those among you who believe and do good works that He will surely make them Successors in the earth, as He made Successors from among those who were before them.
(Ch.24: V.56)

This verse embodies a promise that Muslims will be granted both spiritual and temporal leadership. The promise is made to the whole Muslim nation but the institution of Khilafat will take a palpable form in the person of certain individuals who will be the Prophet's successors and the representatives of the whole nation. This verse further says that the fulfilment of this promise will depend on the Muslims' observing prayer and

giving the Zakat and on obeying the Messenger of God in all religious and temporal matters. When they have fulfilled these conditions, the boon of Khilafat will be bestowed upon them and they will be made leaders of nations. As the Holy Prophet^(as) is now humanity's sole guide for all time, his Khilafat must continue to exist in one form or another in the world till the end of time. (From the *English Commentary of the Holy Qur'an* by Hadhrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmood Ahmad Vol.4, p.1869)

In one Hadith, the Holy Prophet^(sa) said:

‘O ye Muslims, the present prophethood period amongst you will last as long as Allah Wills. On its conclusion there will be a period of Khilafat on the design, pattern and succession of Nabuwwat (in continuation of the Prophet's mission). This Khilafat will be followed by a succession of kingship, which will be dictatorial regimes of tyranny and oppression, which will be

followed by non-democratic regimes. On its conclusion there will then begin real Khilafat on the model and pattern of prophethood'. (Musnad Ahmad Vol.5 p.404)

In the 19th Century CE, the fulfilment of this prophecy came to fruition and the world witnessed the Holy Prophet's greatest spiritual Khalifa in the person of Ahmad, the Promised Messiah^(as) who established the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. The re-establishment of Khilafat on the pattern of prophethood in the latter days has been fulfilled by the Promised Messiah and Mahdi, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(as) who also claimed to be an Ummati Prophet, a deputy and a Khalifa of Prophet Muhammad^(sa) in this age.

The Promised Messiah^(as) once again established faith in the hearts of people: that God exists, that God still communicates and that it is always possible to develop a personal and direct

relationship with Him. He said that this is the blessings of the Holy Prophet^(sa) and that by following in his footsteps, union with God is possible, so that our hearts can see God and our souls can hear His voice and see His signs repeatedly.

In fulfilment of the prophecy: '*I will carry thy message to the ends of the earth*' (*Tadhkira*) revealed to the Promised Messiah^(as) in his remote Indian village of the nineteenth century by Allah, the message of the Promised Messiah^(as) has and is reaching the ends of the earth. Indeed, the proceedings of this gathering are being transmitted simultaneously by satellite all around the globe by Muslim Television Ahmadiyya (MTA).

The Promised Messiah^(as) said that Khilafat would follow after him unbroken and would last forever until the Last Day (*The Will*, p.10). By the Grace and Mercy of Allah the Almighty, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community continues to be led and guided

by the institution of Khilafat.

Khilafat is a great and Divine blessing which brings about solidarity, cohesion and unity among the believers. This is so in the Worldwide Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, which has at its head, Hadhrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, the fifth Khalifa (Successor) of The Promised Messiah^(as) and whose members epitomise Unity in their daily lives, Unity and love of God and Unity and love for Mankind.

Finally, I would like to end with an extract from the writings of the Promised Messiah^(as):

All the prophets have been teaching the same thing: that has been the main subject of their propagation. '*La ilaha illallah*' (There is none worthy of worship but the One and only God) teaches us to believe God to be One and at the same time it also teaches that one should be perfect in the love of this One God. *La ilaha illallah* is so

beautiful a sentence, and so meaningful, that the like of it is not to be found in any of the Scriptures, be it Torah, or the Gospels or any other Book: no other Book contains so comprehensive a teaching. (*Malfoozat* Vol 3 p187)

I hope I have conveyed some of the many distinctive features of Islam that turned me towards this great religion. I sincerely invite all people to investigate with an open mind and to their own satisfaction the guidance offered in the teachings of Islam, Therein is a vast treasure available to us if only we all knew it.

(All Biblical references taken from the New International Version of The Holy Bible 1986, Hodder & Staunton)

THE HOLY QUR'AN - The Perfect Guidance for Mankind

By Fauzia Bajwa - Montreal, Canada

In one of its first verses the Holy Qur'an makes the proclamation:

This is the Perfect Book; there is no doubt in it; it is a guidance for the righteous.
(Ch.2: V.3)

Such a bold claim should be supported by compelling proofs. In this essay we intend to (1) evaluate the claim; (2) examine the Holy Qur'an for evidence to support the claim and (3) show, as far as is humanly possible, that this is indeed a just proclamation. Throughout this essay we take for granted that man was created by God and that the Holy Qur'an is the revealed word of God.

Perfect Guidance for Mankind

There are three key words in the above sub-title, 'perfect',

'guidance' and 'mankind'. Let us examine each one in turn.

Perfect: A perfect entity must possess the following attributes:

1. It should be free of flaws and contradictions.
2. It should be comprehensive and complete.
3. It should be balanced and harmonious.
4. It should be universal and eternal.

Guidance for Mankind: A guide should lead its followers to their destination(s). In other words it must not only provide a passive roadmap for reaching one's goal, it should also be an active prompter prodding one along and bringing one back to the correct path should one go astray. In other words a good guide would be actively

involved in the journey and it must be a living entity not a static one. In qualifying ‘guidance’ with ‘mankind’ we are stating that the guidance provided in the Holy Qur’an is intended only for human beings and not for animals, insects etc.

Objective of Man’s Creation

Before determining whether or not the Holy Qur’an guides man to his objective we must first determine what that objective is. For this we turn to the Qur’an:

And I have not created the Jinn and the men but that they may worship Me.
(Ch.51: V.57)

Given that God is our Creator it is His prerogative to define the purpose of our existence. Here He tells us that the sole purpose of our being is to worship Him. Worship of Allah encompasses much more than paying homage to Him, although this is important. It means total obedience and submission to Allah. It means imbibing in oneself the attributes of Allah. It is to know, to understand and to love Him. The

objective is the wholehearted and persistent use of our God-given faculties, our time and our money to reach Him and to earn His pleasure.

Guidance in the Qur’an

Having established that the purpose of our life is to become godly we need to know how to achieve this purpose. For this we turn, once again, to the Holy Qur’an. It would be impossible in this short essay to expound on all the Qur’anic teachings that prompt man to become godly and admonish him to abstain from vice. We will, therefore, select just a few verses to illustrate the points being made.

As stated earlier the purpose of man’s creation is to worship Allah and we are told in the very early verses of the Qur’an that this is not an easy task – *Thee alone do we worship and Thee alone do we implore for help.* (Ch.1: V.5) When we delve further into the Qur’an we find that Allah has provided the help we need to achieve our objective. To worship Allah it is necessary to have firm faith in Him, to fear Him and to

love Him. These motivating factors are amply provided in the Qur'an. It tells us what faith is and how it may be acquired. Faith or *Iman* is a stage beyond belief; it encompasses belief, security and trust. It is derived from the word *aman* which means to feel safe and to put one's trust in someone or something. The Holy Qur'an sets man on his journey to faith in the following verse:

O ye who believe! Believe in Allah and His Messenger and in the Book which He has revealed to His Messenger and the Book which He revealed before it. And whoso disbelieves in Allah and His angels and His Books and His Messengers and the Last Day has surely strayed far away.
(Ch.4: V.137)

Here Allah lists the five articles of faith as faith in the One God, the angels, the Messengers, the Books and the Day of Judgement. Together they form the starting point of the journey towards faith. It is necessary to accept them before continuing the spiritual journey. The Qur'an furnishes

strong arguments in favour of each of these articles. For example, concerning the Unity of God we are told that we will find nothing but harmony in God's creation, that we will find no contradiction between the word of God and the act of God. (Ch.67: Vs.2-5). This harmony points to the Oneness of the Creator.

Angels are the spiritual agencies created by God to serve man. They transmit God's messages to prophets and other pious and holy people or those who are near to God. They also administer the laws of nature. They are also responsible for keeping a record of man's good and bad deeds. Man's thoughts and actions have an ongoing effect on his soul; it is the angels who are responsible for maintaining this complex system of cause and effect.

In short angels execute God's will in the material universe and the spiritual universe. They form the link between the Books and the Messengers which are the next two articles of faith. It is through their agency that the Books are revealed to the Messengers. These

two articles of faith not only require belief in the Holy Qur'an and the Holy Prophet Muhammad^(sa) but in all the revealed books of God and in all of His prophets. And finally, the Qur'an enjoins belief in the Day of Judgement where man will give account of his deeds and misdeeds and will receive the appropriate rewards and penalties.

The Role of Hope and Fear

Hope and fear are the two major motivating factors in man's life. His intentions and actions are prompted either by hope of reward or fear of suffering. According to Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad, the Fourth Khalifa:

Man's intentions and his subsequent actions are always guided and controlled by either fear or hope and there is no exception to this rule. Those who do good deeds do so out of fear and hope and those who indulge in vices are motivated by the same. ⁴

The Qur'an motivates man through hope and fear to become godly, his objective in life. It gives

us hope of earning unending rewards and it warns us to fear the wrath of Allah should we be lax in discharging our duties towards Him. Belief in the Oneness and Omnipotence of God induces one to place all one's hopes and fears in Him alone. It liberates man from all other yokes. The Qur'an tells us that:

As for those who believe and do good works, they will have Gardens of Eternal Abode, as an entertainment, in return for what they used to do.

(Ch.32: V.20)

Here we see why belief in the Day of Judgement is a fundamental article of faith. Without belief in the hereafter the above verse would not inspire anyone to do good nor would the following verse deter anyone from doing evil:

And as for those who are disobedient, their abode will be the Fire. Every time they desire to come forth therefrom, they will be turned back into it, and it will be said to them, 'Taste the punishment of the

Fire which you used to deny’.
(Ch.32: V.21)

But even in the face of such a terrible punishment the Qur’an once again gives us hope:

And most surely We will make them taste of the nearer punishment before the greater punishment, so that they may return to Us with repentance.
(Ch.32: V.22)

In other words even when we fall into error, God gives us ample opportunity to mend our ways and hence save ourselves from hellfire. And once again the Qur’an gives us hope by telling us that:

Say, ‘O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls! Despair not of the mercy of Allah, surely Allah forgives all sins. Verily, He is Most Forgiving, Merciful.’ (Ch.39: V.54)

The above verse not only inspires hope, but the love with which Allah addresses His servants generates in His servants love for Him.

The Holy Qur’an is full of verses which discuss Allah’s wrath and punishment as well as His compassion and mercy. The former inspire fear of Him in His servants, the latter hope. Hope and fear, as stated above, are what motivate man’s intentions and actions. To fulfil his objective, man needs an adequate dose of both these motivating factors and the Qur’an provides exactly that.

Godliness

The Qur’an teaches man what godliness is. It does this by describing the attributes of Allah thereby giving man a blueprint for his self-development. To become godly one must develop in oneself, as far as is humanly possible, these same attributes. The Holy Prophet Muhammad^(sa) was the most perfect reflection of Allah’s attributes. By enumerating these attributes the Qur’an provides man with ample reasons to love and fear Allah. It tells of His beauty, grandeur, compassion, benevolence etc. inspiring us to love Him. It tells us that He is omnipotent and vengeful inspiring us to fear Him.

Some of His attributes invoke fear and hope at the same time; for example, the Qur'an states that Allah sees everything, that nothing is hidden from His sight. This motivates us to do good and it prevents us from doing evil as He sees all that we do. We are told time and time again that Allah is forgiving and merciful. This teaches us that we should develop the same qualities in our relationships with the rest of God's creation.

The Qur'an tells us that Allah is just; hence we should practise justice in all our dealings. Allah is patient, therefore we should be patient and steadfast even in the face of adversity. In summary, by giving us a comprehensive 'character sketch' of Allah, the Qur'an shows us the qualities we should develop in ourselves. If we develop the attributes of Allah in our persons to the extent we humanly can, we become godly which is the objective of our existence.

Believers and Non-believers

We are told in the Qur'an the characteristics of believers and

non-believers. This provides checkpoints for us in our daily lives. Some of the characteristics to be found in believers are:

And those who are watchful of their trust and their covenants, and those who are upright in their testimonies, and those who are strict in the observance of Prayer. These will be in the Gardens, duly honoured.

(Ch.70: Vs.33-36)

And:

Verily, Allah commands you to give over the trusts to those entitled to them, and that, when you judge between men you judge with justice.

(Ch.4: V.59)

In the above verses, believers are described as people who are honest, upright and just. This gives man guidance on the qualities that he should develop in himself in order to become godly. Similarly the Qur'an paints a picture of disbelievers so that man can safeguard himself against disbelief:

Surely they are too proud of themselves and have greatly exceeded the bounds.

(Ch.25: V.22)

And

And they are certainly liars.

(Ch.6: V.29)

And again:

And woe to the idolaters, who give not the Zakat.

(Ch.41: V.8)

The disbelievers are depicted here as being arrogant, deceitful and niggardly. The Qur'an lists some vices that should be eschewed if we wish to become godly.

Hence, the Qur'an provides descriptions of both believers and disbelievers so that man can endeavour to develop in himself the qualities of the former and avoid the failings of the latter. This gives us checkpoints in our daily lives which can be used to determine whether we are moving towards faith and hence our objective, or away from both.

The Relationship between Faith and Deeds

According to the Qur'an, faith should lead to action and all action should be rooted in faith. If faith, which is a condition of the heart, is not accompanied by right deeds then it is in danger of being extinguished. There is a strong inter-relationship between the two; faith leads to good deeds which in turn strengthens faith which then leads to even better deeds. Thus a virtuous cycle is formed. Faith and good deeds go hand in hand. When both co-exist both the individual and society reap the benefits.

We have described above the fundamentals of faith. We now examine the Qur'an to determine what kinds of actions should proceed from faith. We read in the Qur'an:

O ye who believe! Be strict in observing justice, being witnesses for the sake of Allah even though it be against yourselves or against parents or kindred.

(Ch.4: V.136)

THE QUR'AN MOTIVATES MAN THROUGH HOPE AND FEAR TO BECOME GODLY, HIS OBJECTIVE IN LIFE. IT GIVES US HOPE OF EARNING UNENDING REWARDS AND IT WARNS US TO FEAR THE WRATH OF ALLAH SHOULD WE BE LAX IN DISCHARGING OUR DUTIES TOWARDS HIM. BELIEF IN THE ONENESS AND OMNIPOTENCE OF GOD INDUCES ONE TO PLACE ALL ONE'S HOPES AND FEARS IN HIM ALONE. IT LIBERATES MAN FROM ALL OTHER YOKES.

And:

Verily Allah requires you to abide by justice, and to treat with grace, and to give like the giving of kin to kin; and forbids indecency and manifest evil, and transgression. He admonishes you that you may take heed.

(Ch.16: V.91)

In these two short verses the Qur'an gives a most comprehensive teaching for the moral and spiritual perfection of man and for establishing peace on earth. Believers are told that they must hold fast to the principles of absolute justice at all costs even to the detriment of their own self-interests or the interests of their kith and kin. The very minimum

required of believers is absolute justice. But they are then told to not remain content at that; they should move on and do more than justice by entering into the realm of benevolence. Forgiveness, charity and generosity fall into this category.

Passing through this stage, the Faithful should then continue their journey by further developing their conduct with their fellow human beings so that their relationship with them resembles that of a mother's to her children, where doing good becomes spontaneous. At this stage there is no thought of reward and no thought of doing or returning a favour; one is prompted to serve others through selflessness. Thus the journey towards virtue is a

progressive one, the first step being absolute justice. All good must be built upon this foundation.

The first half of verse 16:91 maps out the believer's journey towards virtue. The second half maps out the journey away from vice. Indecency means such vices as are practised in private known only to the practitioner, for example jealousy. Manifest evil describes such evils as are done in the open and the harm is confined to the doer alone. Transgression comprehends all vices which do positive harm to others.

Acting on this one verse alone would bring about peace in society. It is the absence of justice that is at the root of all evils.

Cultivating virtues and eschewing vices leads us to God and this brief verse of Surah Al-Nahl lists all the phases that must be passed through on this journey. It ends with the words 'that you may take heed'. The Arabic word *zikr* is translated as 'take heed' but it has a much wider meaning. It means to remember the obligations that one owes God and His creatures

and to celebrate His praises and to become a living embodiment of His attributes which, as stated previously, is the purpose of man's creation. Thus the Faithful are given the glad tidings that if they adhere to the injunctions of this one verse alone they will fulfil the purpose of their existence.

This verse on its own provides perfect guidance for mankind. It is balanced and harmonious; the three commandments are counter-balanced with three corresponding prohibitions. It is universal and eternal; the principles of absolute justice, benevolence and kinship can be applied in all eras and in all places. It is comprehensive and complete; the principles given in the above verse apply to all spheres of human activities. There are no contradictions or flaws. These are the characteristics of perfection given earlier. Hence it is a perfect teaching.

Conclusion

In this essay we have argued that the objective of man's life is to worship the one and only God. We stated that this means the acquiring of His attributes. This

can be achieved through faith, hope, love and fear. The Qur'an is a comprehensive guide to acquiring and strengthening faith and it motivates man to become godly by inspiring him with fear, with hope and with love. By detailing the attributes of Allah it gives man a blueprint for his life's purpose.

Furthermore, every Qur'anic injunction when closely examined will be found to be perfectly balanced, harmonious and free of contradiction. We therefore believe that the Qur'an is the perfect guide for mankind as it is balanced in itself and it leads man to his objective. However, it should also be noted that while it is intended as a guide for the whole of mankind, only the God-fearing among them will be guided aright by it:

This is a perfect Book; there is no doubt in it; it is a guidance for the righteous.
(Ch.2: V.3)

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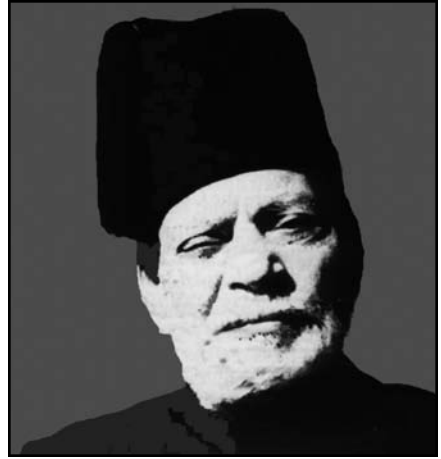
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The Task Ahead

The following is an extract of a speech delivered by Sir Muhammad Zafrulla Khan in 1972 at The London Mosque. The author served as the President of the United Nations General Assembly and then as the President of the International Court of Justice at the Hague.



The message of his speech remains relevant even today.

The subject of my address this afternoon is "the task ahead" which may be described in various ways. For instance it may be said that the task ahead of us is determined by the present juncture and history in which on one side man's intellect has arrived at a higher point than it had reached at any previous stage in its history, and on the other hand there is almost complete annihilation between man and his Creator on a scale and over such vast areas as has never happened before. Our task is to bring about reconciliation between man and his Maker. This is the purpose for

which the second advent of the Holy Prophet of Islam^(sa) was designed which found its fulfilment towards the end of the second half of the last century and the beginning of this one. We Ahmadis have covenanted at his hands as one of his sincere devoted servants but spiritually at the hands of the Holy Prophet^(sa) of Islam himself and that we shall undertake to fulfil that task to bring mankind back to its Maker.

That is the task ahead. As I have said it has been described in various ways but I do not want to

spend time on defining the task. I wish so far as it may be given to me to draw attention to what is needed for the fulfilment of that task. How must we equip ourselves so that we may be enabled to discharge that duty and responsibility? How shall we prepare ourselves so that the fulfilment of that duty may go forward from year to year, month to month, week to week, day to day and moment to moment?

I enjoin you humbly, sincerely and respectfully but in the name of the Maker of all of us, to consider honestly in examining your own selves without any kind of make-believe. Have we taken full advantage of equipping ourselves for the discharge of that duty? Are we doing all that is possible for us to do towards the discharge of that duty? To what degree are we inspired by the delicacy and the loftiness of the purpose ahead? To what degree have we succeeded in subordinating ourselves to this task we have undertaken? If we have not then we may be accounted false in the eyes of

God, which alone is what matters.

We have been told time and again beginning with the Qur'an itself and the admonitions of the Holy Prophet^(sa); then the very detailed explanations by the Holy Founder of our Community, that Islam does not forbid us to pursue what other people describe and consider as secular pursuits. In Islam there is no such division between secular and religious pursuits. In American terminology we only kid ourselves in thinking that we have been successful in this thing or that thing. We have achieved nothing except being false to our pledge if we have pursued other goals, ideals and purposes for their own sake. We will only be blessed with success if we subordinate everything to the purpose of winning the pleasure of God, so that what might be called our secular pursuits then take on the colour of spiritual pursuits.

The earning of our livelihood, marriages, bringing up of

children, amusements etc. are not prohibited and every one of them is a means of the achievement of that purpose only if we knew how to employ them. Maulana Rumi said at one place that if a person is devoted to his Maker then you say it is self-indulgence for him to have four wives. For such a person forty thousand wives are not an indulgence because his concept of life and marriage is different from the person who thinks this is self-indulgence. That makes a whole revolution in one's life and it is my purpose to try to persuade you that this revolution, however difficult or unattractive it might be to begin with, is easy, rewarding, and enriching and joyful. It is the only true means of attaining happiness.

A total commitment to our Maker and a burning consuming desire that if we are blessed with the ability of carrying out that commitment then every one of His creatures shall be led to the same commitment, if God so pleases, through us. If a person truly feels and believes that this

is the purpose of his life then everything else will be subordinated to this purpose and will become the means of the achievement of this purpose. I myself have had many occasions of talking about a person who adopts a profession which becomes, as we would say, a means of his physical livelihood. Let us assume that he is an honest worker. Fewer and fewer today are honest workers even in the sense of ordinary labours. Life has become altogether comparatively dishonest rather than honest. However, leave that aside and let us assume a certain person is an honest person. He works well, pleases his employer, brings home his money and does not gamble nor drink alcohol. He spends it on looking after his family. If, however, this is his only purpose to which he devotes the working time of his life then it is not a bad purpose. It is a good purpose and it will bear him certain benefits and advantages. It is, however, a very harmful, very wasteful and a very losing bargain he makes to give his life in return only for this

purpose although in itself it is not bad. I am not talking of those who waste even these opportunities. Leave them aside. But if he carries on his employment or occupation so that he may fulfil the purpose that God has appointed for him and this is the means of keeping himself alive; maintaining his family and bringing them up as true servants of God so that all of them by virtue of their relationship to one another and through the help of that relationship and the comfort that it brings, may be able to have the strength, vision and capacity to fulfil all required purposes backed by his example, i.e. if he might be able to lead himself and all others towards the establishment of communion with his Maker. This is the great need of his age of spiritual malaise and sickness, which has overtaken mankind today.

I am not asking you that you become hermits and discard life on the hilltops pretending to be seekers after God in isolation. God has to be sought here and

not on the hilltops. You may go to the summit of Mount Everest, to the bottom of the ocean or raise your hand until it becomes dry and useless in seeking God and guidance, but you are only destroying yourself. We have to seek Him and find Him through our ordinary daily occupations, but they must have that quality courage and stand which is given only to those who are true seekers after God and set their faces in His direction. If my yard-stick in life and my value is determined by my neighbours, by my fellow workers, by what the newspapers say, by what the television says or by radio broadcasts, then these are my gods... Wherever things stand in the way of our purpose we must discard them, overlook them and pass them by. As the result of all that, therefore, we should be walking examples of people who are devoted to that purpose. We should radiate it more strongly than any other radiation before we can help others in a godless world to worship and have communion with God.

The moment we are in the company of others, our principle desire should be to please the company in which we are. Let us not deceive ourselves by saying these things are little things. Look at it this way. A person who does not have the courage to change himself in little things, could he honestly say he would have the courage to change his life in big things which matter a great deal more? He who is not capable of small sacrifices, it is for you to think how he will make great sacrifices. Train yourselves to give a lot of everything for the sake of God and taking out only that much that God says.

It is related of Syed Abdul Qadir Jilani who said he eats good food and wears good clothes, but he did not put a morsel of food into his mouth until God told him to eat. Nor did he put on a garment until he was told by God to wear it. That should be the standard and understanding in everything. Everything else should be discarded. That is the change which we must carry out in

today's distressful world, which is hurtling towards destruction every moment before your eyes. If we are to prove that factor which can save not only ourselves but the whole of mankind against the wrath of God and bring mankind's allegiance back to Him and unless we illustrate it in our lives, all our preaching and announcements will be without result.

We have to be living examples of those who experience God daily. Without that nobody today is going to believe in God. You cannot convince anybody through any kind of reasoning that God exists. He has so ordained it Himself that He must be sought through experience of Him and not through arguments about Him. He does not leave reason and arguments out of it. They are only adjuncts. They are not the essence but they only help you in that direction to see if there may be one but they will not bring you to God's Presence with a capital 'P' which that experience alone can achieve.

WE SHOULD BECOME THE GREATEST SOURCE OF BENEFICENCE FOR THE COUNTRY IN WHICH WE LIVE, SOCIETY IN WHICH WE LIVE, FOR OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD IN WHICH WE DWELL AND FOR THE CHILDREN WHO COME IN CONTACT WITH OUR CHILDREN.

Unless we experience it constantly at every moment by being in His presence, all our other efforts will be without result. The first thing you need, therefore, is to have the courage that comes from certainty of faith. Nothing can overcome that. No one will be able to displace such a person from the stand he has taken in obedience to God. Every effort that is made will only evoke a pitiful endeavour and nothing more. Yet how many are there of us who are ninety percent of what we do and which we pursue just do so as a fashion? There is not much harm in following a fashion but that way must be God's fashion and not man's fashion. It must be the fashion of life and not the fashion of death.

There is a revelation of the Promised Messiah^(as) which points in this direction "*zindigi*

ke fashion se dur ja pare" meaning keep far away from the fashion of this world. After all we do have a fashion. Fashion just means the fashion, which is pursued. We follow a fashion. We leave our beds and get up in the late hours of the night to offer prayers. Our fashion is to get up at that time to hold communion with God. That is our fashion. It is our fashion, irrespective of what time the sun rises, that an hour and a quarter before sunrise, even having got up an hour and a quarter before and then having washed and held communion with God in tahajjud prayers, we then say *fajr* (morning) prayers and further prayers through the day. This is our fashion; what we earn is not ours. It belongs to God. Out of that we should use only that much for ourselves and for our children which barely suffices for our needs and it is

our fashion that the rest is for the service of our fellow creatures. There is nothing wrong in a fashion but what matters is what fashion. What are our young people worried about? Whether the side hair on their faces has grown down to here or there.

How long they spend before the mirror I do not know because I do not do it myself but presuming it is five minutes wasted when the world is in a conflagration and the future of mankind is being consumed and burnt and when every moment of our time is needed for beneficent occupation. I have often mentioned that in the older days when the fares of the underground had not gone up I used to come to the mosque from the West End of London and alight at Putney Bridge station from where I would take either bus number 85 or 93. Everybody asked me why I do that. I said first of all the bus stop is a little nearer to the mosque than Putney station. Secondly because I saved a penny in fare. This is not

a joke. Every penny, every cent, matters. Why? Because of the value that one attaches to the penny and the cent. It is God's bounty and has to be put to the best possible use. I am not saying that this is the only thing that was necessary to do. I could easily have gone to East Putney or Southfields station and I might have saved a little more time which would otherwise not have been employed for anything else and if I can save six pence then that is something. We have been endowed by God with all that is very valuable. Our thinking capacity, our physical frame all the wonderful incomprehensible machinery which is the human being; and it is still underestimated capacity which no one yet knows the end of.

Each of us is a universe in himself if he will but realise it. We have to devote to that purpose everything connected with us. If we are not doing so, we are not only failing in our duty but we are cheating, we are

embezzling and putting to use that which was given to us for use and a purpose quite different. We must therefore carry out a whole revolution in our lives. We must not be affected by what other people think. Someone has said a very simple and wise thing in a few words, 'They say, what do they say, let them say'. That contains the whole philosophy of the matter. Did the companions of the Holy Prophet^(sa), let alone himself, worry about what the people said? Would they have got anywhere if they had worried what people might say?

To discard the fashion of others institute your own fashion external, internal, moral, spiritual and physical. We should not merely out of stubbornness and prejudice go against other people. In fact a righteous person is much more in accord with other people because he acts in a beneficent way. We should become the greatest source of beneficence for the country in which we live, society in which we live, for our neighbourhood

in which we dwell and for the children who come in contact with our children. How should our being different make us unwelcome to anybody because we would then have to become a hundred percent beneficent whereas other people are normally only five or ten percent beneficent. If we want to make of our lives something that would be welcome to our Maker when we depart from this life, and this is the resolution that we must carry out, I am warning myself as well as warning you that the span of life passes faster than the fastest super-sonic plane which is now on the blue print and which has not yet been made. Use every moment while you have the opportunity to do so. Make up your mind and go forward with courage.

The Concept of Jihad in Islam

By Amjad Mahmood Khan - Boston, USA

The concept of Jihad is often misrepresented both by Muslims and non-Muslims. True jihad remains a key force for good and one that promotes peace at all levels, yet today perhaps no other word generates more confusion than jihad, as it has been misused as a result of multiple erroneous translations.

This article aims to unpack the notion of jihad as explained in the Holy Qur'an, and effectuated by Muhammad^(sa). It further aims to dismiss some of the most prominent criticisms levelled against Islam that flow from a misinformed understanding of jihad, namely that Islam breeds religious intolerance and that Muhammad^(sa), spread Islam with the sword.

The Arabic word jihad literally means to 'strive' or 'struggle'. It refers to a Muslim's inner spiritual quest to vanquish evil inclinations in his or her heart. Ultimately, *jihad-e-akbar* or 'great jihad' is that of overcoming the self that incites evil and achieving nearness to God. The word jihad has also been used in the Qur'an in the physical context of war, however such an act of force is strictly a defensive measure in Islam. A Muslim is entitled to

self-defence only if he is denied forcibly his ability to practice his faith. We read:

*And fight in the cause of Allah against those who fight against you, but do not transgress. Surely, Allah loves not the transgressors.*¹
(Ch.2: V.191)

And:

Permission to fight is given to those against whom war is

made, because they have been wronged and Allah, indeed, has the power to help them. (Ch.22: V.40)

These verses suggest that if an aggressor initiates the use of force for purposes of religious persecution, then and only then is forceful reaction of self-defence justifiable². The use of force is contingent upon emergency conditions and only when a Muslim is morally³, rather than religiously, provoked to fight. The suggested limits to religious tolerance in Islam are founded upon the rational precept that self-defence of one's own belief offsets an outward compulsion for another to believe.

With this brief framework laid out, it is surprising, even terrifying, to observe how militant so-called Islamists have hijacked the concept of jihad for political ambition and self-aggrandisement. In their propaganda Jihad has lost its Qur'anic meaning and has

instead been wielded as a political weapon to justify territorial and ideological expansion. The sublime spiritual significance of the term that millions of Muslims cherish is tragically undermined by the whims and ambitions of zealots.

Many Western scholars, however, refuse to accept that jihad has any deep spiritual significance or tolerant bent. Rather, they maintain, jihad has always constituted aggressive conversion and compulsion since the days of the Holy Prophet^(sa). These scholars fail to glean the reality of Muslim history.

Arabia before the time of Muhammad^(sa) was in moral disarray. Infanticide grew rampant in selected areas, and the dispossession of another was considered a birthright.⁴ At the age of forty, Muhammad^(sa) received the first Qur'anic revelation, and this was the beginning of the formation of a moral code. Muhammad^(sa) preached a belief in one God - a

revolutionary teaching in the polytheistic Arab world of the time. Within twenty years, the religion of Islam dominated Arabia, and Muhammad^(sa) stood as a spiritual leader of an entire empire. It was in this historic setting that the Qur'anic verse was revealed: '*There should be no compulsion in religion*' (Ch.2: V.257). The sweeping verse was a strong reminder that force was not something God condoned in Islam. When placed in the context of the preceding and subsequent verses, however, it becomes part of a larger rational argument against compulsion. In the preceding verse, we read:

Allah, there is no God but He, the Living, the Self-Subsisting and All-Sustaining. Slumber seizes Him not, nor sleep. To Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth. Who is he that will intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows what is before them and what is behind them; and

they encompass nothing of His knowledge except what He pleases. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth; and the care of them wearies Him not; and He is the High, the Great.
(Ch.2: V.256)

Arab scholars label this verse '*Ayat al-Kursi*' meaning the verse of divine power. Here, the only entity worthy of granting protection to man is God Himself. Man's knowledge is limited, incomplete, and ineffective as opposed to the endless, full, and powerful knowledge of God. The verse hints at the folly of human presumption and the need for a constant reminder of God's absolute and exclusive capacity to judge man.

The rest of verse 257 reads:

Surely, right has become distinct from wrong; so whomsoever refuses to be led by those who transgress, and believes in Allah, has surely grasped a strong handle

*which knows no breaking.
And Allah is All-Hearing,
All-Knowing.*
(Ch.2: V.257)

Here, a distinction is drawn between those who believe, i.e., the Muslims, and those who transgress, namely the pagan Arabs of the time. Anticipating the possible use of force on the part of Muslims against non-Muslim Arabs, the verse makes it plain that God bestows on the Muslims sublime guidance, and that such guidance should not be regarded as humanly concocted. Thus, the believers should not compel others to their belief system, for they have no such Divine right. Moreover, truth is distinct from falsehood, so the believers need not force the issue; it is an absurd, illogical action.

At another crucial place in the Qur'an, Chapter 109 entitled *Al Kafirun* 'The Disbelievers' fleshes out further the distinction described above:

Say, 'O ye disbelievers! I worship not that which you worship. Nor worship you what I worship. And I am not going to worship that which you worship. Nor will you worship what I worship. For you your religion, and for me my religion.'
(Ch.109: Vs. 1-7)

Not only are believers enjoined not to employ force on a non-believer, but also they are urged to proclaim emphatically that they will not force another to believe what they believe. In direct terms, the chapter insists that believers declare their tolerance for non-believers: '*For you your religion, and for me my religion.*' So here, Islam demands tolerance for people of other faiths and refrains from forced conversion.

The Qur'an leaves no doubt in these and other passages that it regards idolaters as profoundly in error. However, a group of scholars including Adolph L. Wismar have misconstrued this

to imply that the Qur'an contradicts itself when it says: '*There should be no compulsion in religion.*' They ask how the Qur'an can stand for tolerance when it rebukes unequivocally the non-believing pagan Arabs at the time of Muhammad(sa)?⁵ The Qur'an, however, stresses that an individual's spiritual destiny is strictly between him and God without interference from outside. True religious belief requires both intense personal commitment and individual consent. We read:

And if Allah had enforced His Will, they would not have set up gods with Him. And We have not made thee a keeper over them, nor art thou over them a guardian.

(Ch.6: V.108)

At another place we read:

And if thy Lord had enforced his Will, surely, all who are on earth would have believed together. Wilt thou, then, force men to become

believers? (Ch.10: V.100)

One notes how the case of the non-believing Arabs is not with man, but with God. They are immune from punishment (from their fellow beings) and compulsion in relation to their religion and practices.⁶ In pure Islamic teaching, it is irrational to show religious intolerance because it is tantamount to associating partners with God, which for a Muslim is the most egregious sin man can commit.

With the rising influence of Islam in Arabia by 628 CE, Jewish and Christian tribes on the southern frontier of the Roman Empire intrigued to turn the Chosroes of Iran and the Governor of Yemen against Islam. They met resistance from Muslim forces in Khaiber, a town near Madinah.⁷ Amid severe struggles between the Muslims, and Jews and Christians, Muhammad(sa) sent a series of letters to various kings surrounding the Arab peninsula declaring his intentions for peace

and co-operation. Among these letters included one written in 628 CE to the monks of the St. Catherine Monastery in Mt. Sinai. In it, he issues a '*Charter of Privileges*' offering secure protection of fundamental human rights to Christians living in the Muslim empire. He declares:

This is a message from Muhammad, son of Abdullah, as a covenant to those who adopt Christianity, near and far, that we are with them. Verily, I, the servants, the helpers, and my followers defend them because Christians are my citizens; and, by Allah, I hold out against anything that displeases them. No compulsion is to be on them. Neither are their judges to be removed from their jobs nor their monks from their monasteries. No one is to destroy a house of their religion, to damage it, or to carry anything from it to the Muslims' houses. Should

anyone take any of these, he would spoil God's covenant and disobey His Prophet. Verily, they are my allies and have my sincere charter against all that they hate. No one is to force them to travel or to oblige them to fight. The Muslims are to fight for them. If a female Christian is married to a Muslim, it is not to take place without her approval. She is not to be prevented from visiting church to pray. Their churches are to be respected. They are neither to be prevented from repairing them nor the sacredness of their covenants. No one of the nation of Muslims is to disobey this covenant until the Last Day of Judgment.⁸

The text demands scrutiny. At the outset, the Holy Prophet^(sa) appeals broadly to Christians living not only under Muslim rule, but also '*near and far*' around the world. One gets the sense here that his pronouncements, though buried in a letter

to a monastery, are nonetheless meant for a much larger Christian audience. Obversely, his reference to all Muslims defending Christians, ‘*servants, helpers, and followers*’, shows the onus he places upon his Muslim audience. His immediate audience, namely Christian monks living within the Muslim empire, earn the title of ‘*citizens*’ of the Holy Prophet^(sa).

The import of this word should not be underestimated. By referring to non-believers as ‘*citizens*’, Muhammad^(sa) sets up the possibility of divergent religious interests living peacefully under a Muslim State. Citizenship implies an adherence to the customs and practices of the supreme governing body of a State; yet it also connotes an independent voice that has a deliberative stake in the functions and operations of government. His use of the term certainly rings of the latter connotation, particularly when understood with respect to his remaining declarations in the

letter. Christians, as concerned citizens, are awarded a protective status⁹ in a Muslim state. He states that he ‘*holds out against anything that displease them*’ meaning he assumes a responsibility to take heed to their concerns. This responsibility is not outlined in any constitution or written document, but rather is constructed ‘*by Allah*’ as a part of his covenant to Muslims.

Prophet Muhammad^(sa) next proceeds to outline the Qur’anic injunction of refraining from compulsion in religion. He cites several potential compulsive acts, such as removing judges, damaging Churches, forcing one to fight or travel, or even forcing a Christian to marry a Muslim. Here, tolerance, as he explains, extends beyond civil to social matters; it is used in positive, sweeping terms. He negates the value of such acts and, in doing so, lauds the St. Catherine monks for regarding their covenants; his own covenant, namely the charter of privileges is a ‘*sincere*

response to all that they hate'. Historian and critic Marmaduke Pickthall comments on the intentions behind the letter thus:

The Charter which he granted to the Christian monks of Sinai is extant. If you read it you will see that it breathes not only goodwill, but also actual love. He gave to the Jews of Medina, so long as they were faithful to him, precisely the same treatment as to the Muslims. He never was aggressive against any man or class of men; he never penalised any man, or made war on any people, on the ground of belief but only on the ground of conduct. The story of his reception of Christian and Zoroastrian visitors is on record. There is not a trace of religious intolerance in all this.¹⁰

Prophet Muhammad's call for religious tolerance is couched in his repeated use of the phrase '*covenant*'. Muslims are not only commanded to grant necessary

privileges to their Christian brethren, but are also bound by God to uphold such a compact. The enforcing power behind the compact is God Himself. The Holy Prophet(sa) regards the covenants of Muslims and Christians alike because they implicate Divine backing. This is the sum and essence of how tolerance works in Islam: that by appealing to a higher spiritual sovereign, namely God, a Muslim's respect and accord for different religions becomes a sublime virtue rather than a civil necessity. When understood in this context, the scholarly concept of jihad as 'holy war' or 'aggressive conversion' is rendered suspect.

In 632 CE, the Holy Prophet(sa) delivered his final sermon to 10,000 followers. In it, we find mention of some important corollaries for religious tolerance. Of key significance is the section that reads:

All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no

superiority over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black, nor a black has any superiority over a white except by piety and good action. Learn that every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim and that the Muslims constitute one brotherhood. Nothing shall be legitimate to a Muslim that belongs to a fellow Muslim unless it was given freely and willingly. Do not, therefore, do injustice to yourselves ... Remember, one day you will appear before God, the Creator, and you will answer for your deeds.¹¹

For religious tolerance to work, the Holy Prophet^(sa) here implies that a Muslim must fully acknowledge and commit to social and civic equality. By making the distinction between ethnic and racial equality, he demonstrates the complexity and universality of the equality he desires in a Muslim state. Racial

and ethnic equality pre-suppose the existence of diverse groups within a single nation. But his grounding of this value after his initial declaration, '*All mankind is from Adam and Eve*', shows the intimate connection he places between religion and equality. Equality flows from the recognition of the fundamental religious precept that man comes from Adam and Eve.

He suggests that superiority is wholly exclusive from religious affiliation; it depends on '*piety and good action*', which are religion-blind. The '*brotherhood*' among Muslims cannot be misconstrued as intolerance to other religious groups. That is, to maintain solidarity, Muslims cannot employ force against non-believers or 'non-members,' but rather should allow them to commit '*freely and willingly*' to Islam if they desire. Any action to the contrary is '*an injustice to [themselves]*' and presumptuous of God's unique capacity to judge man.

Here, the use of the phrase ‘*injustice to yourselves*’ deserves consideration. He suggests that intolerance of another’s belief system brings more harm to oneself than to another because it forces a Muslim to relinquish the core teachings he or she lives by, rendering one a hypocrite rather than a righteous believer. In other words, religious intolerance is a self-defeating act that breeds hypocrisy.

The Holy Prophet^(sa) concludes by admonishing Muslims to remember their covenants and accountability to God. Again, just as in his letter to the Christian monks, he elevates the status of one’s covenants, treating them as binding contracts. For the Holy Prophet^(sa), tolerance for human life and possessions ‘*had the same sacredness which belonged to sacred days, sacred months, and sacred places.*’¹²

A Muslim’s covenant entails a corroboration of civic equality, citizenship, and religious

tolerance, values antithetical to a construal of jihad as ‘holy war’ or ‘aggressive conversion.’ Indeed, from the examples during the time of the Holy Prophet^(sa), it is clear that jihad was not a concept used to convert non-Muslims to Islam or to wage a holy war. Characterising Muhammad’s treatment of non-Muslims, the Qur’an reads:

And it is by the great mercy of Allah that thou art kind towards them, and if thou hadst been rough and hard-hearted, they would surely have dispersed from around thee.

(Ch.3: V.160)

Islam, in its purest practice as demonstrated by Muhammad^(sa), advocates religious tolerance. In fact, religious tolerance proves to be the very crux by which the entire Islamic system of governance rests.¹³ The fundamental teaching of religious tolerance in Islam supplants the concept of jihad to create a spiritually rich frame-work for

morality and governance in Islam. It is a framework that is tragically tainted by militant Islamists and frequently the scholars who study them.

References

1. Maulawi Sher Ali, *The Holy Qur'an*, Islam International Publications, UK, 1997.
2. Islam regards the breaking of treaties or agreements as grounds for aggression. The Arabic word *Dhimmah* means literally 'covenant,' 'treaty,' or 'obligation.' The expression *Ahl al-Dhimmah* refers to non-Muslim people with whom the Muslim State has made an agreement and who pay poll tax to the State, in return for which the State is responsible for their security and freedom. Those non-Muslims who paid no respect to such a treaty proved treacherous or perfidious and were, thus, attacked by the Muslims. See commentary note in Ref.1, p.397.
3. In Ch.22: Vs.41-42, one notes how Islam regards the importance of freedom of conscience. Any assault on this freedom threatens the sanctity of a Muslim's life. A call to arms in Islam is contingent upon a direct and clear threat to one's freedom of conscience; in other words, it is grounded in the idea of preserving one's basic moral right.
4. Hadhrat Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad, *Life of Muhammad*, Islam International Publications, UK, 1990.
5. Adolph L. Wismar, *A Study in Tolerance As Practised by Muhammad and His Immediate Successors* (New York: AMS Press Inc., 1966), 5.
6. David Little and others, eds., *Human Rights and the Conflict of Cultures: Western and Islamic Perspectives on Religious Liberty* (Columbia:

- University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 29.
7. See W. M. Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 189.
8. The text of this letter may be found online from <http://www.alhewar.com/labibkobti.html>.
9. Watt points out the limits of protection granted to minorities in an Islamic State and asserts that the sword spread Islam. See W. M. Watt, *Islamic Political Thought: The Basic Concepts* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1968), 50. Here, however, he concedes: "On the whole there was more genuine toleration of non-Muslims under Islam than there was of non-Christians in medieval Christian States" (51).
10. Marmaduke Pickthall, *Tolerance in Islam*. The fifth of eight lectures given at the invitation of the Committee of Madras Lectures on Islam in 1927. Reprinted in Pickthall's *Islamic Culture* (Hyderabad, India: Islamic Culture Board, 1927), 25.
11. Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad, *Life of Muhammad* (UK: Islam International Publications, 1990), p.161-162.
12. *Ibid.*, p.163.
13. The term *Mushawarah* or 'consultation' in verse 3:160 sets the basis for administration and republicanism in the Islamic State. The idea of deliberative decision-making and consent are essential components of Islam. It is important here to note that such basic governing principles follow directly after a historical reference to the religious tolerance employed by the Prophet Muhammad^(sa).

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