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Acropolis at Night – from BigStock Photo Library

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Publisher:

Al Shirkatul Islamiyyah

Distribution:

Muhammad Hanif

All correspondence should be forwarded to the editor at:

The Review of Religions
The London Mosque
16 Gressenhall Road
London, SW18 5QL
United Kingdom

© Islamic Publications, 2006
ISSN No: 0034-6721

EDITORIAL

Fazal Ahmad– New Malden, UK

Even though the practice in many so-called Muslim countries may lead to the opposite conclusion, freedom of speech and conscience are fundamental tenets of the faith of Islam.

Recent cases have led to the impression that turning away from Islam or any other faith (apostasy) is a sin punishable by death. In this issue we break that myth categorically. This dilemma is not limited to Islam. In the context of the Teacher of Righteousness, we can see how theological conflict was exercised two thousand years ago in the Jewish community.

We also see an example in Athens of where as soon as freedom of thought and freedom of conscience were established in the 5th century BCE, great advances were made in theology and philosophy. A healthy respect for and interest in other faiths raised the understanding of the ancient Greeks in a way that is still appreciated today. In the same

way, when Islam reached its zenith in Spain, Jews, Christians and Muslims lived in harmony together, researched all faiths and beliefs, and inspired by the Greeks reached new heights in spiritual understanding.

Faith and religion are personal. It is in man's relationship with God, that only God can understand the intentions and motives of a man in his actions. So if someone decides to accept a faith or to change a faith, this is a matter purely for the individual concerned. Seeking knowledge is always a good thing, and can only ever provide more evidence for the truth. It is through seeking knowledge that we can break down our own ignorance just as the Greeks and the early Muslims inspired by Islam did. In today's world, we must encourage dialogue and research to remove ignorance, and banish false views about apostasy and jihad.

ESSENCE OF ISLAM:

Devotion to the Holy Prophet^(saw) and Poems in Rememberance of the Holy Prophet^(saw) — Part 9

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 Zafrullah Khan, may Allah be pleased with him, and is quoted from *The Essence of Islam*, Volume 1. All references throughout, unless otherwise specifically mentioned, are from the Holy Qur'an.

In our estimation, there is no greater testimony than the testimony of the Holy Prophet^(saw). My heart trembles when I hear that any person who is confronted with a decision of the Holy Prophet^(saw) does not accept it and turns away from it. (*Itmam-ul-Hujjah, Ruhani Khazain, Vol. 8, p.293*)

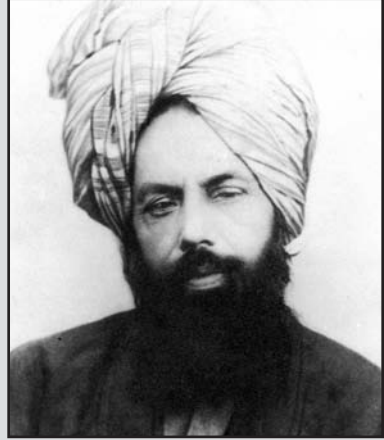
The Muslims are a people who are ready to lay down their lives to uphold the honour of their Holy Prophet^(saw). They would

prefer to die rather than endure the disgrace that they should make peace and become friends with such people who are occupied day and night with abusing the Holy Prophet^(saw) and mention his name with contempt in their books, journals, and announcements and use vile language with reference to him. Such persons are not the well-wishers even of their own people, for they create numberless difficulties for them. I tell you truly that it is possible for us

to make peace with the serpents of the jungle and the wild beasts of the forests, but we cannot make peace with those who do not refrain from speaking ill of God's Prophets and who consider that abuse and vituperation mean victory. True victory is that which comes from heaven.

(Chashma-e-Ma'rifat, Ruhani Khaza'in, Vol.23, pp. 385-386)

The insults that have been offered to Islam and the Holy Prophet(saw), the attacks that have been made against Divine Law and the apostasies and heresies that have become widespread, cannot be matched in any other age. Is it not true that in a short while in India alone a hundred thousand people have become Christians, and more than sixty million books have been published in opposition to Islam, and people belonging to high families have lost their religion, and those who used to describe themselves as the descendants of the Holy Prophet(saw) have put on the garment of Christianity and have become his enemies, and numberless books full of vile



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

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.

abuse of the Holy Prophet(saw) have been published? My heart cries out with tears that if these people had murdered my children before my eyes, and had cut to pieces my sincere friends,

and had killed me with great humiliation, and had possessed themselves of all my property, I would not have been so pained and my heart would not have been so hurt as it has been pained and hurt by the insults offered to the Holy Prophet^(saw).

(A'ina-e-Kamalat-e-Islam, Ruhani Khaza'in, Vol. 5, pp.51-52)

Poems in Remembrance of the Holy Prophet^(saw)

Al-Qasidah – An Ode in Praise of the Holy Prophet^(saw)

(Arabic Poem)

O fountainhead of Divine grace and knowledge! All creation flocks towards you like the thirsty.

*O ocean of the grace of the Generous Benefactor!
Multitudes throng towards you holding empty cups.*

O sun of the kingdom of beauty and grace!

You have illumined the face of deserts and dwellings alike.

A nation had the honour to behold you and another heard

Of this full moon that has enchanted me.

*They shed tears in remembrance of your beauty;
And the pangs of separation from you make them cry.*

*I find hearts throbbing wildly;
And tears streaming from the eyes.*

*O ye who in his light and radiance is like the sun and the moon;
And has illumined the day with his light.*

O full moon of ours, O the sign of our Gracious Lord! O the most guided of all guides, and the bravest of all the brave.

*I perceive in your bright face
A quality far superior to human qualities.*

*He is genial, gracious,
bounteous, lover of
righteousness;
Generous, and one who has
excelled all the youth.
He surpasses all creation in his*

*perfection and beauty;
In his glory, and his pleasant
nature.*

*No doubt, Muhammad is the
best of creation;
He is the elect of the elect and
chief of chiefs.*

*All excellence attained
perfection in his person;
The bounties of every age
reached their climax in him.*

*I call Allah to witness that
Muhammad is His vicegerent;
Through him alone access is
possible to the Divine court.*

*He is the pride of every pious
and holy person;
In him does the spiritual army
take pride.*

*He is superior to all those who
attained nearness to Allah in
earlier times;
For the criterion of excellence is
virtue, not time.*

*A light drizzle often precedes
rain;
But there is a world of difference*

between the two.

*He is the one and only archer
whose arrows never miss the
target;
He is the master archer whose
arrows hit the target and kill the
Satan.*

*He is like a heavenly garden: I
see his fruits;
Whose bunches have been
lowered towards my heart.*

*I found him an ocean of verities
and guidance:
Full of lustre like a pearl.*

*Verily 'Isa-Jesus-quietly
breathed his last, but our
Prophet is alive;
God is my witness, I have had
the honour to meet him.*

*I swear by Allah! I have
witnessed his beautiful
countenance;
With my own eyes while sitting
in my house.*

*Our Holy Prophet is alive-of this
I am a witness; And I have been
blessed with the fruit of*

converse with him.

*I had the honour of witnessing
his blessed countenance in my
early youth;
He graced me with his presence
when I was wide awake.*

*Surely, I have been brought back
to life by his life giving grace,
Praise be to Allah, What a
miracle! What a life he has
granted me!*

*O my Lord, shower Your
blessings upon the Holy
Prophet,
Ever and always, here and in
the hereafter.*

*O my master! I have come to
your door as the one wronged
and aggrieved;
For my people have hurt me by
calling me a kafir.*

*Do look upon me with mercy
and compassion!
O my master, I am the humblest
of your slaves.*

*O my beloved! My soul, my
senses, my heart;*

Are all saturated with your love.

*O garden of my delight, never
for a moment,
Am I without the remembrance
of your countenance.*

*Overwhelmed with longing, my
body yearns to fly towards you;
If only I had the power to fly!!!
(Aina-e-Kamalat-e-Islam,
Ruhani Khaz'ain, Vol.5, pp.590-
594)*

Qualities of the Holy Prophet^(saw) (Arabic Poem)

*O my Heart! remember Ahmad;
Source of guidance and
annihilator of enemies.*

*He is pious, kind and
benevolent;
An ocean of bounties and
beneficence.*

*He is bright like the full moon;
Praiseworthy in all his qualities.*

*His benevolence captures
hearts; His beauty quenches the
thirst.
The oppressors rejected him,*

*So unjustly, and with such
arrogance!*

*No one can deny the truth
When it becomes manifest.*

*Go and find someone perfect
like him; You will be humbled
and bewildered.*

*We have not seen anyone like
him
Who so wakes up the sleeping
ones.*

*He is the light of God that has
resuscitated
All branches of knowledge
afresh.*

*He is the elect, the chosen one;
The guide, and the source of
grace.*

*The rain of guidance is but a
part
Of the heavy rains of his
generosity.*

*The world forgot its light
drizzle,
When they saw the torrential
rain from this leader.
Today the mean try to put out*

*And extinguish the light of his
guidance.*

*Sooner or later,
Allah will manifest his light.*

*O rain that pours day and night,
You have been safeguarded from
destruction.*

*You have nourished the trees of
low lands
And high lands with your
bounties.*

*We have found you to be the
haven of refuge; Hence after
finding such a great haven,
We are no longer afraid of
adverse circumstances, Nor are
we scared of the horrors of any
sword.*

*We fear not the vicissitudes of
time;
Nor are we frightened by
threats.*

*At the time of every crisis,
We turn to our Lord.*

*In many a contest,
Between me and the opposing*

*hordes,
I emerged victorious, honoured,
And a recipient of divine
succour.*

*Praise be to Allah! Praise be to
Him! As we have recognised our
guide.*

*My friend! It is Allah indeed,
Who has favoured us with this
gift.*

*He is the Night of Decree,
Whose bounties are perennial.
(Karamat-us-Sadiqin, Ruhani
Khaz'ain, Vol.7, pp.70-71.)*

**The Faith of Muhammad^(saw) –
(Urdu Poem):**

*I let my fancy fly in all
directions,
But I did not find a faith like the
faith of Muhammad.*

*There is no religion which
shows the signs of truth; This
fruit I tasted only in the garden
of Muhammad.*

*I tested Islam myself – It is light
upon light; Wake up, I have*

informed you in time.

*No one came for a trial, even
though
I challenged every opponent to
compete.*

*Come, O ye people! Herein you
will find the light of God;
Lo! I have told you the way of
satisfaction.*

*Today those lights are surging in
this humble one;
I have coloured my heart with
every hue of those lights.*

*Ever since I received that light
from the light of the Prophet,
I have joined myself with the
True One.*

*Countless blessings and peace
be upon Mustafa^(sa);
Allah is my witness: from Him I
received this light.*

*My soul is forever wedded to the
soul of Muhammad^(saw);
I have filled my heart to the
brim with this elixir.*

I swear by your countenance, O

*my dear Ahmad^(saw);
For your sake alone, have I
taken up all this burden.*

*O my Beloved! I swear by Your
Uniqueness;
I have forgotten all about myself
in Your love.
(A'ina-e-Kamalat-e-Islam,
Ruhani Khaz'ain, Vol. 5,
pp.224-225)*

**The Perfect Prophet^(saw) – (Urdu
Couplets)**

*The ignorant of Europe say:
'This Prophet is not perfect;
What was the difficulty in
spreading faith among
the uncivilised?'*

*But to convert the uncivilised
into civilised people is a
miracle;
Which manifests the meaning of
the secret of Prophethood.*

*He brought the light from
heavens, he himself was light;
What is the harm if he was born
among an uncivilised people?
What difference does it make to
the light of the shining moon;*

*Whether it rises from the border
of Rome or from Zanzibar?
(Barahin-e-Ahmadiyya, part v,
Ruhani Khaz'ain, Vol.21, p.144)*

**Grandeur of Ahmad^(saw) –
(Urdu Couplet)**

*Beyond all thoughts and
imagination
Is the status of Ahmad^(sa);
Whose servant, you can see,
Is the Messiah of the age!
(Haqiqatul Wahi, Ruhani
Khaz'ain, Vol.22, pp.286,
footnote)*

Our Leader^(saw) (Urdu Poem)

*He is our leader, who is the
source of all light;
His name is Muhammad^(saw); he
alone is my beloved.*

*All Prophets are holy, one better
than the other;
But from the Almighty, he is the
best of the creation.*

*He is far better than those
before him, he is a darling in his
qualities;
Every eye is focused on him, he*

*is the full moon which dispels
all darkness.*

*Those who came earlier, were
fatigued halfway; He it is
who brought us to the shore;
May I be a sacrifice; he alone is
the guide.*

*He removed the screen, and
showed the secret path; He
joined the hearts to the Beloved,
such a friend he is!*

*That Friend, beyond all physical
limitations, that Unseen
Beloved;
We saw through him, so he is the
true guide.*

*Today he is the King of faith; the
Crown of the apostles; He is
pure and holy, this is his eulogy.*

*All commandments ordained by
the True God were demonstrated
in practice by him;
He revealed all secrets, an
excellent gift is this.*

*His vision is far-reaching like a
telescope, his heart is close to
the Friend;*

*In his hands is the light of faith;
he is the fountain of light.*

*He revealed the weighty secrets
of faith;
He is the King who grants
wealth.*

*I am a sacrifice at that light; I
belong entirely to him;
He is all, what worth do I
possess? This is the final
verdict.*

*That Unique Beloved is the
source of all learning;
All else is a mere tale, this is the
truth unblemished.*

*We found everything through
him, O Allah You are a witness;
He is that manifestor of Beauty,
who showed us the Truth.*

*We were blind of the heart, with
hundreds of knots upon the
hearts;
The one who opened the locks is
this very Mujtaba – accepted
one.*

*(Qadian Ke Arya aur Hum,
Ruhani Khaz'ain, vol.20, p.456).*

**Leader of the Lovers of God –
(Persian Poem)**

*That sovereign of all the world;
Whose name is Mustafa – the
chosen one;
Who is the elite of the lovers of
the True God;
Who is bright like the midday
sun.*

*Verily, all light is due to his
light;
He who is accepted by him is
accepted by God.*

*He is the one that, for life, is the
flowing water;
And a limitless ocean of
spiritual insight.*

*He it is in support of whose
truthfulness and excellence,
Hundreds of incontrovertible
proofs and arguments have been
made manifest to the world.*

*His countenance radiates the
light of God;*

*His path manifests the works of
God.*

All Prophets and truthful ones

*are his devotees;
They are like dust at his
doorstep.*

*Love for him elevates one to the
heaven;
And transforms one like the
lambent moon in purity.*

*He demonstrates to the
Pharaohs of every age,
Hundreds of signs like that of
the white hand of Moses.
(Barahin-e-Ahmadiyya, Ruhani
Khaz'ain, Vol.1, p.627, footnote)*

**Muhammad^(saw) is our Leader
and Guide – (Persian Poem):**

*That Prophet whose name is
Muhammad;
We are forever holding on to his
lap.*

*His love that entered our bodies
with the milk of our mothers;
Became our very life, and will
last till death.*

*He is the best of the Prophets
and best of the creation;
Prophethood found perfection in
him.*

*We drink deep the water of his fountain,
Whoever has been satiated, has been satiated by it.*

*Whatever revelation or inspiration is granted to us;
Is because of him, not because of us.*

*Through him are we blessed with guidance and perfection;
Without him, meeting the Eternal Lord is impossible.*

*To follow every one of his commandments is ingrained in me;
Whatever is proven to be from him is my faith.*
(Siraj-e-Munir, Ruhani Khaz'ain, Vol.12, p.85)

meaning Unique. The line purports to say that by freeing himself completely from his own self, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah upon him) became a true manifestation of Allah, the Unique.

* Ahmad is composed of four Arabic letters – *Alif, Ha, Mim,* and *Dal*. When the *Mim* is dropped, the three remaining letters – *Alif, Ha,* and *Dal* make the word *Ahad*, which is an attribute of Almighty Allah,

PUNISHMENT FOR APOSTASY – Part 7, section 2

This is the second section of the seventh extract taken from the book Murder in the Name of Allah by Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad^(rw), dealing with the lack of evidence and contrary arguments from the Holy Qur'an on the subject of capital punishment related to someone changing one's faith.

Continued from June 2006:

h) Reference needs to be made to the appointments of Muadh b. Jabal and Abu Musa Ashari, each as governor of a part of Yemen. As they were about to leave, the Holy Prophet^(saw) instructed them: 'Make things easy for people and do not put them into difficulty. Talk to them cheerfully and not in a manner that might repel them'. One day Muadh came to meet Abu Musa Ashari and noticed a person sitting there who had been secured with a rope. When Muadh enquired about this he was told that that person was a Jew who had become a Muslim and then became an apostate. The narrator adds that for the past two to three months the Muslims had reasoned with him in order to persuade him to become a Muslim but to no avail. Muadh declared that he

would not dismount until the person had been executed and observed that this was the judgement of God and His Messenger. This last remark indicates no more than his personal opinion of what he understood to be the Will of God and His prophet. Such opinions carry no weight in law unless they are completely substantiated by references which verify the claim. (This principle is elaborated subsequently in this chapter.)

Now let us examine the reliability of this tradition (of capital punishment for apostasy). Muadh's remark contradicts the instruction of the Holy Prophet^(saw) to make things easy for people and not in a manner which might repel them. To place reliance on one tradition without investigating Muadh's understanding of Islam on a key

issue where human rights are involved is sheer absurdity.

Considerable doubt prevails regarding this tradition, the chain of narrators and their authenticity. Wherever such disputes arise, the tradition is rejected outright. It should be remembered that these traditions were compiled some three to four centuries after the advent of Islam and that, over a passage of time, memories are prone to error. According to one tradition, the Jew was beheaded upon Muaz's instructions.¹¹ In the second tradition, Muaz himself beheaded the Jew. When such fundamental differences occur in a key incident, how can anyone accept the authenticity of these traditions? People may forget what someone said, but if they were eye-witnesses they would at least remember what ultimately happened to the 'apostate' in question.

Next we turn to a tradition which has obtained much attention because it is strongly emphasised and relied upon by the school advocating capital punishment for apostacy. This has deliberately

been deferred to the end of this chapter so that justice may be done to it without interfering with the general flow of the subject matter.

Before a detailed examination of this tradition, a few words concerning the application of certain principles accepted by Islamic scholars throughout the ages would not be out of place. These principles help to resolve controversies concerning the apparent contradiction between the Holy Qur'an and hadith (tradition) on the one hand and some traditions vis-a-vis other traditions.

1. The Word of God stands supreme.
2. This is followed by the actual practice of the Holy Prophet of Islam^(saw). This is known as *sunnah*.
3. This is followed by *hadith*, the words reported to be those of the Holy Prophet^(saw).
 - a) If the authenticity of the words of the Holy Prophet^(saw) is established unquestionably, the words concerned are words put

into the mouth of the Holy Prophet^(saw) by God Almighty. Where there is no apparent contradiction between the word of the Holy Prophet^(saw) and the Qur'an, the tradition may be accepted as authentic.

b) There are no two opinions regarding the accepted fact that whenever any so-called tradition attributed to the Holy Prophet of Islam^(saw) contradicts any clear injunction of the Holy Qur'an, such a tradition is rejected as false and is not accepted as the word of the Holy Prophet^(saw).

c) If such a tradition does not glaringly violate any injunction of the Holy Qur'an and there is room for compromise, then ideally an attempt should be made to search for a suitable compromise before the final rejection of the tradition.

d) In attempting to reconcile a tradition attributed to the Holy Prophet^(saw) with the Holy Qur'an, it must always be borne in mind that the clear teachings of the Holy Qur'an are not to be compromised for the sake of a so-

called tradition, but a genuine attempt is to be made to find an explanation of the tradition. Therefore in all cases of doubt, the tradition is put to the anvil of the Holy Qur'an and judged accordingly.

e) If there is no contradiction between the Holy Qur'an and hadith, then their mutual merit of credibility would be determined according to the reliability of the sources and the chain of narrators.

f) Such a tradition will also be compared with other authentic and widely accepted traditions to make sure that the tradition does not conflict with other traditions.

g) Lastly, another reliable method of investigating the credibility of a tradition is to study its internal evidence critically. If the contents of the tradition clash with the image of the Holy Prophet of Islam^(saw) which has emerged from a study of his conduct and bearing throughout his life, then such a tradition would be rejected as a false attribution to the Holy Prophet^(saw) or as being against the

principles of logic and common sense.

In the light of the above principles, let us examine¹³ the tradition in question.

Chapter	Verses
2	57, 100, 109, 218, 257, 273
3	21, 73, 86-92, 145
4	83, 138, 139, 146
5	55, 62, 91-93, 99-100
6	67, 105-108, 126
7	124-129
9	11-14
10	100-109
13	41
15	10
16	83, 105-107, 126
20	72-74
22	40
24	55
25	42-44
42	7, 8, 48, 49
17:55, 18:30, 19:47, 26:117, 28:57, 29:19, 39:30-42, 40:26-27, 47:26, 50:46, 51:57, 64:9-13, 66:7, 88:22-23	

Tradition

It is recorded in Bukhari that:

‘Ikramah relates that he heard that some Zindeeqs were presented before Hadhrat Ali whereupon he directed the burning alive of these people. Ibn Abbas stated that had it been him, he would not have ordered this because the Holy Prophet^(saw) had said that the torment of the fire may only be decreed by God but the Prophet had also said, ‘Slay whosoever changes his religion.’¹⁴

This tradition, with some variation, may also be found in Tirmidhi, Abu Daud, Al-Nisa’i and Ibn Majah’s compilations.

Contradiction with the Holy Qur’an

It is not possible for a fair-minded person to reconcile the following verses of the Holy Qur’an with this tradition:

The following passage is typical:

Whoso seeks a religion other than Islam, it shall not be accepted from him, and in the

life to come he shall be among the losers. How shall Allah guide a people who have disbelieved after having believed and who had borne witness that the Messenger is true and to him clear proofs had come? Allah guides not the wrongdoers. Of such the punishment is that on them shall be the curse of Allah and of angels and of men, all together; thereunder shall they abide. Their punishment shall not be lightened nor shall they be granted respite; except in the case of those who repent thereafter and amend. Surely, Allah is Most Forgiving, Ever Merciful. Those who disbelieve after having believed, and then continue to advance in disbelief, their repentance shall not be accepted. Those are they who have gone utterly astray. From anyone of those who have disbelieved, and die while they are disbelievers, there shall not be accepted even an earthful of gold, though he offer it in ransom. For those there shall be a grievous punishment, and they

shall have no helper.
(Ch.3: Vs.86-92)

It is obvious from these verses that no punishment is to be inflicted by one man on another for apostasy. The words 'thereunder shall they abide' clearly refer to the life hereafter. By no stretch of the imagination can any sane person interpret the words 'curse of Allah' to be a licence to murder anyone whom he considers to be an apostate. No capital punishment is mentioned. If it had, according to the strict requirements of the law, the punishment would have been clearly defined, as in the case of all other *hudud* (punishments specifically prescribed in the Holy Qur'an). On the contrary, the Holy Qur'an mentions the possibility of repentance by such persons and subsequent forgiveness by God. How can anyone repent and atone for his sins in this world if he has been killed?

The advocates of capital punishment for apostasy need to consider how, if their tradition is presumed to be accurate, the clear

contradiction between it and the Holy Qur'an is to be resolved. In particular, they should reconsider their stance in view of the verses quoted above and re-examine those with an impartial mind. How could anyone accredit greater weight to such a dubious tradition than to these manifestly clear dictates of the Holy Qur'an:

If thy Lord had enforced His Will, surely all those on the earth would have believed without exception. Will thou than take it upon thyself to force people to become believers? Except by Allah's leave no one can believe and He will afflict with His wrath those who will not use their understanding.

(Ch.10:Vs.100-1)

When God Himself does not force people to believe, who are we to raise the sword to force belief or to set Maududian mouse-traps? The problem with the advocates of capital punishment for apostasy is that they invariably accept literally traditions compiled hundreds of years after the Holy Prophet^(saw) which obviously contradict the

teachings contained in the Holy Qur'an.

Conflicts with the practice of the Holy Prophet^(saw)

Our second source of law is the conduct and personal example of the Holy Prophet^(saw). We have already demonstrated the hollowness of the claim that anyone has ever been executed for the crime of apostasy.

After all, what was the stand of the Holy Prophet^(saw) against the Makkans? It was that he should be allowed to profess and proclaim the message of God in peace. The Makkans did not grant him this freedom and punished those who began to believe in him. As far as the Makkans were concerned, those who believed in the message of Muhammad^(saw) were the apostates, having recanted their faith of idol worship.

The Holy Prophet^(saw) spent his entire life fighting in defence of the fundamental human rights that everybody should be free to choose his religion, no one should change another person's religion by force, and everybody has a

right to change his own religion, whatever that religion is.

In fact, this has been the true meaning of 'Holy War', waged by all messengers of God against their opponents throughout the history of religion. The Holy Qur'an has repeatedly mentioned this with reference to earlier prophets of God (see 2.5; 6.113; 21.42; 25.32; 36.8, 31; 43.8). To name but a few, these are Abraham^(as) (6.75-9; 19.47; 21.53, 59, 61, 69-70; 37.89-91, 98); Elias^(as) (37.126-7); Lot^(as) (26.166-8; 27.57; 15.71); Noah^(as) (7.60; 10.72; 11.26-7; 26.117; 71.2-21); Moses^(as) (7.105-6, 124-7; 10.76-9; 17.102-3; 20.44-5; 50-3; 26.19-34); and Jesus^(as) (3.52-6; 5.118; 19.37; 43.65). What was their struggle about? It was simply a response to the claim of the opponents of the prophets^(as) that they had no right to change the faith of their contemporaries. In fact everybody has a right to choose his faith and as long as the message of peace and love is spread by peaceful means, no one has the right to prevent this by force.

The obstinate response of the opponents to this most logical and humane stance was that they positively rejected the prophets' position and stuck to their claim that the prophets had no right to change the faith of their people. If they did not desist from this course, the prophets were to be ready to accept the penalty for apostasy which was (in the opponents' opinion) no other than death or exile.

The Holy Prophet's^(saw) struggle with his opponents was consistent with the practice of all prophets of the past. How can any sane person deny the lifetime mission of the Holy Prophet^(saw) and challenge his firm stance on this fundamental principle? The Holy Qur'an, the practice of the Holy Prophet^(saw), and the other traditions provide ample contradiction to the tradition in question. One cannot over-emphasise the utter unreliability of this tradition.

Reliability of the sources and narrators

Prima facie, the tradition refuted here has been authenticated by the

reputable compilers Bukhari, Tirmidhi, Abu Daud, Al-Nisa'i and Ibn Majah; it is included in five out of the six generally accepted compilations of *hadith*. But there ends its claim to authenticity.

For a tradition to be declared authentic, it is not enough for it to be found in an authentic compilation. There are other established measures which are applied to every tradition. The most important among these measures is the examination in depth and detail of the reputation and character of the narrators forming the links in the chain of narrators.

There are scholars who have devoted their whole lifetime to such studies and, thanks to their most painstaking and thorough investigations, we are today in a position to examine every link of the chain of narrators in any compilation. Let us turn our attention to the tradition under consideration. This hadith falls into the category of *ahad gharib* (i.e., a tradition in which there is

only one chain of narrators connected to the same single source) because all the five books of hadith derive their chain of narrators from Ikramah as their ultimate source.

The late Maulana Abdul Hayy of Lucknow specifically refers to Ikramah, pointing out that merely because Bukhari had included him in his compilation, others followed suit without carrying out independent research.¹⁵

A tradition may be authentic and reliable even if it is quoted through a single chain of narrators. However, it cannot be regarded as being as reliable as traditions which have more than one chain of reliable narrators. Such traditions are not permitted to influence edicts regarding the rights, liabilities and penalties; in particular, extra caution is required in relation to *hudud*. *Hudud* is a term strictly applicable to punishments specifically prescribed in the Holy Qur'an. The exponents of death as the penalty for apostasy consider their view to be based on Qur'anic

injunctions falling within the category of hudud. In fact, we have disproved this claim earlier.

It is important to bear in mind that the tradition under discussion is a tradition quoted by a single chain of narrators and has no jurisprudence even if it is considered to be correct by some. In this context, it is essential to learn more about Ikramah and his reputation.

Ikramah

Ikramah¹⁶ was a slave of Ibn Abbas, and also his pupil – a very indifferent pupil, for that matter, and a back-bencher of the first order. He confirms this himself by saying that Ibn Abbas was so infuriated with his lack of interest in his studies and by his truancy that he would bind his hand and foot to compel him to remain present during his sermons.¹⁷

He was an opponent of Hadhrat Ali^(ra), the fourth caliph of Islam, and was inclined towards the Khawarij in particular at the time when differences between Hadhrat Ali^(ra) and Ibn Abbas began to emerge. Later, during the

Abbasid period, (the Abbasids, it should be borne in mind, were extremely antagonistic because of political apprehensions) to all those who were in any way allied to Hadhrat Ali's progeny, Ikramah acquired great renown and respect as a versatile scholar, obviously because of his hostility towards Hazrat Ali^(ra) and links with the Khawarij.¹⁸

Dhahbi states that because Ikramah was a Kharijite, his traditions were unreliable and dubious. An expert on the punishment for apostasy, Imam Ali b. Al-Madani, is of the same opinion. Yahya b. Bekir used to say that the Kharijites of Egypt, Algiers and Morocco were strongly allied to Ikramah.

It has generally been observed that the traditions of capital punishment for apostasy emanate mainly from incidents in Basra, Kufa and Yemen. The people of the Hejaz (Makkah and Madinah) were totally unfamiliar with them. One cannot shut one's eyes to the fact that the tradition from Ikramah under discussion is known as an Iraqi tradition. Let us

recall the famous Makkan Imam, Taus b. Kaisan, who used to say that Iraqi traditions were generally doubtful.¹⁹

That is not all. A great scholar, Yahya b. Saeed Al-Ansari, has strongly censured Ikramah for his unreliability in general and has gone to the extent of calling him a *kadhab*,²⁰ that is to say an extreme liar of the first order.

Abdullah b. Al-Harith quotes a very interesting incident which he witnessed himself when he visited Ali b. Abdullah b. Abbas. He was deeply shocked and dismayed to find Ikramah bound to a post outside the door of Ali b. Abdullah b. Abbas. He expressed his shock at this cruelty by asking Ali b. Abdullah b. Abbas if he had no fear of God in him. What he obviously meant was that Ikramah, with all his renown of piety and so on, did not deserve such a base and cruel treatment at the hands of his late master's own son. In response to this, Ali b. Abdullah b. Abbas justified his act by pointing out that Ikramah had the audacity to attribute false things to his late father, Ibn Abbas.²¹ What better

judge of the character of Ikramah could there be than Ali b. Abdullah b. Abbas? No wonder, therefore, that Imam Malik b. Anas (95-179 AH), the pioneer compiler of hadith and an Imam of jurisprudence held in the highest repute throughout the Muslim world, held that the traditions narrated by Ikramah were unreliable.²²

The following scholars of great repute have declared that Ikramah had a strong disposition towards exaggeration: Imam Yayha b. Saeed Al Ansari, Ali b. Abdullah b. Abbas and Ata b. Abi Rabae.²³

This, then, is the man who we are dealing with and on whose sole authority the matter of the lives of all those people who change their faith is left hanging till the end of time.

Ibn Abbas

Whenever the name of Ibn Abbas²⁴ appears at the head of a chain of narrators, the vast majority of Muslim scholars is overawed. They forget the fact that because of his name and reputation, concocters of false

traditions tended to trace their fabricated chain of narrators back to him. Therefore, all traditions beginning with the name of Ibn Abbas must be properly judged and examined.

Moreover, even if Ibn Abbas is honestly reported by a narrator, the possibility of human error on Ikramah's part regarding what Ibn Abbas might have said cannot be ruled out. The following would be a good illustration of the case in point:

Ibn Abbas says that Umar used to say that the Holy Prophet(saw) said that crying over the dead brought chastisement to the dead. Ibn Abbas further said that after Umar died, he related this tradition to Ayesha who said, "God forgive Umar!" By God, the Holy Prophet(saw) said nothing of the kind. He only said that if the descendants of a disbeliever cried over his dead body, their action tended to augment his punishment, and by way of argument, Ayesha also said: Sufficient for us is the saying of the

*Qur'an: "Verily no soul can bear the burden of another."*²⁵

If a man of Hadhrat Umar's stature and integrity can misunderstand the Holy Prophet(saw), however rarely it might have happened, how much more is there danger of ordinary narrators misunderstanding the reports of Ibn Abbas?

With such wide possibilities for the miscarriage of the message of the Holy Prophet of Islam(saw), how can a sane person rely entirely on the evidence of this hadith and draw conclusions of far-reaching import regarding matters of life and death and fundamental human rights?

It is likely that Ikramah concocted this tradition, attributing it to Ibn Abbas, as it was his wont to do, according to Ali b. Ibn Abbas.

Other internal criteria

When we examine the subject matter of the tradition under consideration, we find the contents to be erroneous in several ways.

a) A person of Hadhrat Ali's

stature is presumed to be unaware of the fact that Islam categorically prohibits a person to be punished by fire.

b) The words ‘slay whosoever changes his faith’ are so general that they can be interpreted in many ways. They can apply to men, women and children, whereas according to Imam Abu Hanifa and some other schools of jurisprudence, an apostate woman can never be slain.

c) The Arabic word *deen* (religion) used in this tradition is a general word meaning any religion, not Islam specifically. Even the faith of idolaters is referred to as *deen*. (Sura Al-Kafiroon).

In the light of the general nature of the language used, how can one restrict the application of this tradition to a Muslim who renounces his faith? In strict legal terms, according to this tradition, anyone who changes his religion, whatever that religion is, would have to be put to death. It would mean slaying the Jew who became a Christian, slaying the Christian

who became a Muslim, and slaying the pagan who adopted any new faith. ‘Whosoever’ also transcends the geographical boundaries of Muslim states, implying that anywhere in the world, anyone who changes his faith – be he an aborigine of Australia, a pygmy of Africa or an indian of South America – must be slain forthwith the moment he renounces his previous faith and accepts another one.

Islam lays a great deal of emphasis on proselytizing, so that it is binding upon every Muslim to become a preacher in the path of Allah. How ironic it is therefore that many renowned Muslim scholars today negate the very spirit of Islamic jihad by audaciously sticking to the narrow-minded view that Islam dictates that whosoever changes his faith, meaning in this context Islam, must be put to death forthwith. What about those of other faiths? Islam declares it to be an obligation upon Muslims to stand committed to the noble goal of constantly endeavouring to change the faith of all non-Muslims around them by peaceful means.

This task is so important and demanding that every Muslim is instructed to stick to the endeavour till his last breath.

The Holy Qur'an states:

Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and reason with them on the basis of that which is best. Thy Lord knows best those who have strayed away from His way; and He knows best those who are rightly guided.

(Ch.16: V.126)

The advocates of the bigoted inhumane doctrine of death upon apostasy never visualise its effect on international and inter-religious human relationships. Why can they not see that according to their view of Islam, adherents of all religions have a fundamental right to change their faith but not so the Muslims, and that Islam has the prerogative of converting others but all adherents of different faiths are deprived of any right to convert Muslims to their faith? What a

sorry picture of Islamic justice this presents!

To conclude, apostasy is the clear repudiation of a faith by a person who formerly held it. Doctrinal differences, however grave, cannot be deemed to be apostasy. The punishment for apostasy lies in the hand of God Almighty, against Whom the offence has been committed. Apostasy which is not aggravated by some other crime is not punishable in this world. This is the teaching of God. This was the teaching of the Holy Prophet^(saw). This is the view confirmed by Hanafi jurists,²⁶ Fateh al Kadeer,²⁷ Chalpi,²⁸ Hafiz ibn Qayyim, Ibrahim Nakhai, Sufyan Thauri and many others. The Maududian claim of consensus, concerning the tradition they hold to be true, is a mere fiction.

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14. *Bukhari Mishkat* (Egypt), 9-10; *Bukhari and Fath Al-Bari*, Hadith no. 6922, Egypt, Vol.12, 267.
15. Abdul Hayy, *Al-Riaf a wal Takmeel*.
16. Not to be confused with Ikramah b. Abu Jahl.
17. Ibn Saad, *Al Tabqa al-Kabir*, Vol.2, 386.
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23. *Fateh Al-Bari*.
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25. Bukhari, *Kitab al-Janaiz*, chapter headed 'Wailing over the Dead'.
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THE ACROPOLIS:

Its significance in the development of religious philosophy

By Fazal Ahmad – London, UK

Introduction

The Acropolis in Athens has for millennia been the religious hub of the Greek world. Today it is a tourist magnet, but the rock and the adjacent parts of the city have played a major role in the development of religious thought - both ancient and modern. This article examines the debates and religious thought that have surrounded the Acropolis over so many centuries.

Origins of the Greek culture

There had been settlers on the Acropolis since around 4000 BCE. The first Greek Hellenic tribes arrived around 2000 BCE. Not long after, from around 1550 BCE, the Mycenians settled on the Acropolis. Around the same time, the great Minoan culture of Crete lost its regional power after the eruption of the volcano on

the island of Thera. It was in the period from 1000 BCE to the time of Christianity that the Greek culture reached its zenith and produced so many world famous scientists and philosophers.

The Greeks were not a single race at that time. Many tribes from the Indo-European steppes moved to Greece and brought with them their own local deities. Perhaps the need to keep the peace resulted in the need to worship all gods rather than the single Creator and led to the pantheon of gods and goddesses of Olympus that emerged about as a sort of democratic religion. The Greeks were agreed that Zeus, the sky god, was the chief deity.

Many cults such as the Orphics



The Acropolis

sprang up. They were more spiritual and abstained from meat and other foods. They believed that ascetism would lead to salvation just as Hindus believed on the other side of the world. Orphics were initiated by a sacrament just as Christians did hundreds of years later.

By the 9th century BCE, many of the stories related to the individual deities and historical

events around the early formation of Greece became intertwined in mythology as captured by Homer.

The Greeks became a sophisticated and cultured race. The Olympic Games were another way of bringing together the various Greek tribes. The deities had temples built in their honour and many had mysteries attached to them such as Demeter and Orpheus.

The Greeks became aware of nature very early on. Philosophers in Greece began to awe at the skies and the size of the universe. They wondered at the continents around them and the extent of the world.

They developed a religion based on the need for protection from bad fate. The Oracle at Delphi is a famous example of a place where people would go to learn their fate, or to ask for help before a major task such as a long journey or battle. This form of religion commanded power and a hierarchy built up around it just as would happen in nearby Rome. Many of the rulers had become cruel and tyrannical and used their 'knowledge' to keep the population under control.

The Battle of Marathon in 490 BCE was a turning point. The democrats of Athens overthrew the invading Persian army and also the tyrants of their own people to usher in a new era of intellectual freedom which spawned many great thinkers.

Pythagoras began to think about spirituality in the 6th century BCE. He travelled widely and studied different faiths from the region including Zoroastrianism. He was intrigued by the soul and the concept of reincarnation. Another scholar of the time, Xenophanes taught monotheism. Athenian youth were also encouraged to learn and absorb the Homeric epics such as The Iliad (war against Troy) and the Odyssey. These epics captured their beliefs and traits of morality, heroism and poetry.

Socrates^(as)

It was in this climate that Socrates^(as) began to debate his own world view at the Agora, the marketplace of Athens standing just below the Acropolis in the 5th century BCE. He would debate with people of all ages and from all walks of life. He did not restrict himself to theologians or poets, but wanted to reform the wider Athenian population. Having been born and brought up in Athens, he had the same classical education, and was developing skills as a sculptor

(some of his work had been displayed on the road leading to the Acropolis). His life changed when a series of dreams and signs (he referred to his ('*Divine voice*') pointed him to his mission to reform the people of Athens. He encouraged Athenians to challenge their long-held beliefs and not to use Homer as a prop. He encouraged his friends to pray for good rather than just for material gain. He shunned the plurality of Greek gods and mythology and debated a more practical world view in the Agora.

His principled stance led him to conflict with the state and he was arrested in 399 BCE with the charge of having denounced the Athenian deities and corrupted the youth. He was imprisoned in a cell on the Filopappou Hill facing the Acropolis. Having refused to denounce his own beliefs in monotheism, he was sentenced to death and forced to drink hemlock poison.

He was followed by Plato who founded the Academy in Athens

in 387 BCE. Academy was actually a suburb of Athens (thought to derive from the hero Academos), and the philosophical school that Plato founded remained in use until 526, over 900 years later, when the Roman emperor Justinian had it closed down. Plato expanded on the debate around the nature of the soul. He described the 'psyche' as a form of existence before a man was born, and how it departed after death to account for a man's behaviour and deeds.

One of the famous students of Plato's Academy was Aristotle who later founded the Lyceum philosophical school of Athens after having studied for over 22 years in Plato's college. The Lyceum is thought to be around the area between Syntagma Square and the National Gardens just north-east of the Acropolis (there is current archaeological work going on to try to confirm the location of the Lyceum). Aristotle is thought to have returned to his native Macedonia after Plato's death to train the young Alexander the Great, and



The Agora - Marketplace of Athens

then returned to Athens in 335 BCE to establish his own school where he encouraged research, debate and dialogue based on his own concept of logic. Aristotle wrote on many subjects including morality, ethics and the obligations of citizens in Athens. He seemed to favour a view that the soul was a part of the body and died with the physical body. There were many other philosophers and thinkers at that time such as Democritus, Anaxagoras and Epicurus who participated in this debate around

the same time. The debate was not just on the nature of the soul and life after death, but also the purpose of life. The Epicurians are famous for their concept of life that it is for the pursuit of pleasure.

In the next few centuries, there were many other schools of thought that emerged in Athens and elsewhere in Greece such as the Stoics and several Mystic sects influenced by Asia Minor and the East. Poets and theatre writers such as Sophocles started

to move away from reliance on the deities for all actions and fate, and started to show how the characters in his plays suffered due to their own actions.

Interactions with other cultures

The Greeks were not an isolated culture. The mainland of Greece is largely coastal, so it is no surprise that the Greeks developed naval skills very early on and came into contact with many other cultures around the Mediterranean. They would have had dealings with Crete, the Romans, the Carthaginians, Turks, Persians and Egyptians, and these neighbours represented their world. Alexander the Great expanded their horizons around 300 BCE to cover the Middle East and the Indian sub-continent.

It is the interactions with the Persians that are perhaps the most interesting, as there were regular battles, but they also came into contact with Cyrus the Great (possibly Dhu'l Qarnain as mentioned in the Qur'an) and the

philosophy and religion of Zarathustra^(as).

Acropolis or Parthenon

Many people confuse the Parthenon and the Acropolis of Athens. The Acropolis is the rocky outcrop towering over most of the city (but not the highest point in the city – that is Mount Lykavettos). It is a plateau on which the locals built many temples such as the Parthenon, especially after it was declared a religious and holy sanctuary by the Oracle of Delphi in 510 BCE. It was after this pronouncement that the Acropolis was exclusively used for ancient worship. The common people were banned from living there.

The earliest temple was devoted to Aphrodite. By the 6th century BCE, a temple was erected to Apollo and another to Athena (from which the city takes its name). Much of these structures were destroyed by the Persians who had attacked Athens and the Greek mainland. This was followed by the golden period of

Pericles during which the Parthenon was erected to the patron Athena and the nearby gateway to the Acropolis, the Propylaeum, were built.

In ancient times, only the Priest was able to visit the temples, and his family and those of a few select helpers lived on the Acropolis itself. The rest of the population devoted themselves to the deities of Athens for their protection. The Acropolis was opened to the general population of Athens only once every ten years. This preserved the mystique about their religion and kept the general population in awe. Their concept of religion was not an accessible deity open to all as we have now in modern religion. Their faith was based upon fear and the need for protection rather than gratitude and love.

However, it was during this period of security for Athens and democracy (fuelled by the efforts of Solon and Cleisthenes who guaranteed rights for the poorest) that the period of philosophical

development was able to flourish.

Over time, as with all polytheistic cultures such as the Egyptians and Romans, the focus shifted to grandeur and decoration, pomp and rituals rather than theology. The noble theology of Socrates^(as) had been diluted over time, and by the turn of the Millennium and the advent of Christianity, although there was a significant Jewish minority in Athens, much of the population was absorbed in what amounted to idol-worship.

Athens began to lose some of its status from the 4th century BCE when the Greeks lost the Peloponnesian War to the nearby Spartans. Although it peaked again after the death of Alexander the Great, soon the Romans arrived and the city was eclipsed by Rome, Egypt and Constantinople (modern Istanbul).

During the Roman period, they built their own Agora and a Tower of the Winds commissioned by the Syrian astronomer Kyrrestes who built a weather

vane and water clock. The Romans also erected temples to their own deities in the city, and built a temple dedicated to the Emperor Augustus.

Paul and Christian Byzantium

When Paul began to preach to the non-Jews in Europe, his focus was on the Greek civilisation. A brief glance at the cities where Paul sent letters (the bulk of the modern Bible New Testament) shows that much of his effort was spent in Greece. The Bible preserves letters that he wrote to the Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and the Thessalonians. All these seven letters were to people in Greece.

In his travels to preach his version of Christianity, both his second and third journeys took place in Athens and nearby towns such as Corinth, Thessaloniki and the area of Attica.

In Athens, he is said to have stood on a rocky outcrop next to the Acropolis (the Areopagus) to start spreading his message. The

Bible describes how he preached to the ancient Greeks of Athens:

‘While Paul was waiting for them (Silas and Timothy) in Athens, he was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and also in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.’

(Acts 17:16-17)

The Agora, the marketplace of Athens was more than just a traditional market on the foothills of the Acropolis. It was also the administrative heart of the city, the place where there were many temples to ancient Greek deities, and there were open spaces here where poets would read out their works, and philosophers would debate various issues, so it would have been a natural place for Paul to preach just as Socrates^(as) had done a few hundred years earlier. Paul encountered both Stoic and Epicurian thinkers while in Athens.

Paul had been disturbed at the wealth of temples and idols in the city and began to tell the Athenians about his concept of a living God:

‘The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him – though indeed he is not far from each one of us.’

(Acts 17:24-27)

Unfortunately, many of the original Jewish teachings of Jesus^(as) about a living God that people could have a relationship with were distorted in his name

into the worship of Jesus^(as) himself. It is difficult to say whether Paul preached a monotheistic message which was later distorted, or whether Paul himself had distorted the message of Christianity to suit the idol worshippers of Europe. It is perhaps more likely that Paul himself had changed the message to some extent as he had been summoned to the Council of Jerusalem in 49 CE for taking the message to non-Jews and relaxing the conditions associated with being a Jew.

Either way, the debates that he had in the Agora of Athens about not worshipping lifeless forms and understanding the nature of a living God are very interesting.

Gradually, Orthodox Christianity took hold in Athens, but the Greeks still held their old schools of thought in great esteem. When the Odeon of Athens was rebuilt in the 2nd century, it contained statues of prominent members of the Stoic, Platonist, Aristotelean and Epicurean schools of thought.



The Tower of the Winds

In 390, Emperor Theodosius I made Christianity the state religion, and soon the Olympic Games were banned. A century later, in 529, the schools of Aristotle and Plato were closed and classical thought was discarded, not to be revived until the Muslims started translating the classic works a few hundred years later sparking the

but faced stiff resistance from the Greeks. However, it took them many decades to get control of nearby Constantinople in 1453, and Athens was not taken until 1456.

Thereafter, Athens and Greece became part of the Islamic world of the Ottomans, and new mosques sprang up around the

Renaissance of Europe.

Christianity continued to take a stronger hold, and in 841, the Parthenon on the Acropolis was turned into a cathedral.

The Ottomans

The Ottoman Turks had a long rivalry with their Greek cousins, a rivalry that is still strong today. The Ottomans began to extend their Islamic empire across Europe, North Africa and the Middle East,

Agora of Athens such as the Tzisdarakis Mosque in Monastiraki Square. Mehmet the Conqueror visited Athens in the late 15th Century, and the Fethiye Mosque which stands at a corner of the Roman Agora was built to mark that visit. The nearby Tower of the Winds became a sanctuary for Sufi mystics and the famous whirling dervishes (Muslim ascetics) who used to do a weekly frenzied dance in the Tower.

Many Jews migrated to Athens under tolerant Ottoman rule fleeing persecution following the cruel Inquisition in Spain.

By 1687, the Ottomans had crudely turned the Parthenon from a Mosque (at least it still had a religious use at that stage) into their Arsenal. Knowing this, when the Venetians of Italy attacked that year, they fired on the Acropolis and managed to destroy much of the Parthenon. The city was captured by the Venetian admiral Morosini but was later recovered by the Ottomans in 1690.

During Ottoman rule, Christians were given full rights to worship, and Islam was not imposed on the Greeks. The Ecumenical Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church was made accountable to the Ottoman Sultan for the native Greeks, and in return he was given wide powers over courts, schools and the Church. So the Orthodox Church began to take more political control in society than had previously been the case.

At this time, Athens remained autonomous while neighbouring areas had Ottoman governors. The Orthodox Patriarchs had more freedom than when the Catholic Venetians had controlled the city, and they were relatively content.

Some Greeks hid their Christian faith and pretended to be Muslims in order to pay a lower rate of tax, but there was no major drive by the Ottomans to convert them to Islam.

As the Ottoman Empire fell into decline, there was an increase in corruption and in-fighting and

gradually many parts of Greece fell beyond Ottoman control. This resulted in greater militancy by the Ottoman rulers. The reaction from the Greeks was increased resistance.

It was in the 19th century that Greece gained its independence and returned to its Orthodox Christian religion after four centuries under Muslim rule.

Conclusion

The Acropolis of Athens has been the scene of the debate and creation of philosophy for centuries, and has had an impact on much of the religious thinking of the Mediterranean region. Its prominent position overlooking the city meant that for centuries it held a position as a place of worship.

The many tribes that came together to form the Greek civilisation brought their own beliefs with them, but it was after the battle of Marathon that a unified and free Athens was able to take its theology and science to new levels, with great thinkers

such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle taking the concept of the soul and God to new levels.

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References to the Holy Qur'an item count 'Bismillah...' (In the Name of Allah...) as the first verse of each Chapter. In some non-standard texts, this is not counted and should the reader refer to such texts, the verse quoted in *The Review of Religions* will be found one verse less than the number quoted.

In this journal, for the ease of non-Muslim readers, '(saw)' or 'saw' after the words, 'Holy Prophet', or the name 'Muhammad', are used. They stand for '*Sallallahu '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*' which are words that a Muslim utters out of respect whenever he or she comes across that name. The abbreviation 'ra' or (ra) stands for '*Radhiallahu Ta'ala anhu*' and is used for Companions of a Prophet, meaning Allah be pleased with him or her (when followed by the relevant Arabic pronoun). Finally, 'ru' or (ru) for '*Rahemahullahu Ta'ala*' means the Mercy of Allah the Exalted be upon him.

In keeping with current universal practice, local transliterations are preferred to their anglicised versions, e.g. Makkah instead of Mecca, etc.

The Teacher of Righteousness of the *Dead Sea Scrolls*

By Khalid Saifullah Khan – Australia

Introduction

The central figure of the Dead Sea Scrolls, who is talked about or quoted therein time and again, is a person referred to as the ‘Teacher of Righteousness’. It appears that after a serious attempt on his life, his identity was concealed for his security. The secrecy maintained about him also suggests that he must have been living at the time when the scrolls were written, as otherwise such a precaution would not have been necessary.

Scholars hold diverse opinions about his identity. J.L. Teicher thinks that he was Jesus^(as), while Barbara Theiring thinks he was John the Baptist^(as) and Eisenman prefers James the Just (brother of Jesus^(as)).

The Righteous Teacher

The Righteous Teacher depicted in the scrolls belonged to the House of Israel. He was born

fatherless at a time just preceding the start of Christianity. His mother dedicated him to God. He believed in the absolute Unity of God. He claimed to have been sent by God as the Messiah for the Jews and was helped by the Holy Spirit. He interpreted the Torah through God’s guidance and was bitterly opposed by Jewish priests, particularly by their chief referred to as the ‘Wicked Priest’.

He was severely persecuted and an attempt was made to kill him, but God saved his life. He was forced to migrate to some distant lands where his voice was heard and his claim accepted. Before leaving his country he prophesied that his opponents, the opponents of Truth, would be punished by God for their iniquities and that his followers would always prevail over those who rejected him.

Could the Teacher be Jesus^(as)?

James was a follower of Jesus^(as). How could it be that he was given such high status as to be written about and to have his writings included in the collections of the community in preference to the person he himself followed as a Prophet of God? It is surprising that a scholar like Eisenman should have missed such an important point in developing his theory that the Teacher was James the Just.

John the Baptist^(as) could also not be the Teacher because his message was different to that of the Qumran community as discussed by Dr Will Varner in his *Christian Answers Network*.

My view that the Righteous Teacher was none other than Jesus^(as) is based on the striking resemblance between the two. The well-known French scholar Dupont-Sommer, counts some similarities between the two in his book, *The Dead Sea Scrolls, a Preliminary Survey*. Though he draws a different conclusion, yet

there is no disagreement on the facts quoted in the passage. He writes:

The Galilean Master, as he is presented to us in the writings of the New Testament, appears in many respects as an astonishing reincarnation of the Teacher of Righteousness. Like the latter, he preached penitence, poverty, humility and love of one's chastity. Like him, he prescribed the observance of the Law of Moses, the whole Law, but the Law finished and perfected, thanks to His own revelations. Like him, he was the Elect and the Messiah of God, the Messiah redeemer of the world. Like him, he was the object of the hostility of the priests, the party of the Sadducees. Like him, he was condemned and put to death. Like him, he pronounced judgement on Jerusalem, which was taken and destroyed by the Romans for having put Him to death. Like him, at the end of time, he [(The Teacher) Ed.] will be

the supreme judge. Like him, he founded a Church whose adherents fervently awaited his glorious return. In the Christian Church, just as in the Essene Church, the essential rite is the sacred meal, which is presided over by the priests. Here and there, at the head of each community, there is the overseer, the 'bishop'. And the ideal of both Churches is essentially that of unity, communion in love even going so far as the sharing of common property.

(Dead Sea Scrolls, a Preliminary Survey, Dupont-Sommer, p.99-100)

It may be noted that according to Dupont-Sommer, the Teacher of Righteousness was condemned and put to death by his enemies. But there are clear passages in the scrolls which say that though an attempt was made on the life of the Teacher, he was saved by God. Edmund Wilson mentions in his book *Dead Sea Scrolls 1947-1969* that there is no definite evidence in the Scroll

literature that the Teacher of Righteousness was killed.

Ahmadiyya Point of View

Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(as) of Qadian, the holy founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, wrote in 1899:

‘Let it be noted that though Christians believe that Jesus (on whom be peace) after his arrest through the betrayal by Judas Iscariot, and crucifixion – went to heaven, yet from the Holy Bible it appears that this belief of theirs is altogether wrong. Matthew 12:40 says that just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, so the Son of Man shall be three days and three nights in the bowels of the earth. Now it is clear that Jonah did not die in the belly of the fish, the utmost that happened was that he was in swoon or a fit of fainting. The holy books of God bear witness that Jonah, by the grace of God, remained alive in the belly of the fish, and came out alive, and his people

ultimately accepted him. If then Jesus (on whom be peace) had died in the belly of the earth, what resemblance could there be between a dead man and the one who was alive, and how could a living one be compared with one dead? The truth rather is, that as Jesus^(as) was a true prophet and as he knew that God, Whose beloved he was, would save him from an accursed death, he made a prophecy in the form of a parable, revealed to him by God, in which he hinted that he would not die on the Cross, nor would he give up the ghost on the accursed wood; on the contrary, like the prophet Jonah^(as), he would only pass through a state of swoon. In the parable he had also hinted that he would come out of the bowels of the earth and would then join the people and, like Jonah, would be honoured by them. So this prophecy was fulfilled; for Jesus^(as), coming out of the bowels of the earth, went to his tribes who lived in the eastern countries, Kashmir and Tibet

etc. viz. the ten tribes of the Israelites who 721 years before Jesus, had been taken prisoner from Samaria by Shalmaneser, King of Assur, and had been taken away by him. Ultimately, these tribes came to India and settled in various parts of that country. Jesus^(as) at all events must have made this journey; for the divine object underlying his advent was that he should meet the lost Jews who had settled in different parts of India; the reason being that these in fact were the lost sheep of Israel who had given up even their ancestral faith in these countries, and most of whom had adopted Buddhism, relapsing gradually into idolatry. Dr. Bernier, on the authority of a number of learned people, states in his 'Travels' that the Kashmiris in reality are Jews who in the time of the dispersal in the days of the King of Assur had migrated to this country.' (*Jesus in India*, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, Qadian, India 1899, pp. 22-23)

The Promised Messiah^(as) went on to make the following observation:

‘We have no alternative, therefore, than to acknowledge in this connection that God had willed – it had been destined by Him – that this bright weapon and this truth-revealing proof which destroys the belief about the Cross, should be explained to the world by the Promised Messiah; for the Holy Prophet^(saw) had prophesied that the faith of the Cross shall not decline nor shall its progress be arrested until the Promised Messiah appears in the world. It was the Promised Messiah at whose hands was to be brought about the ‘Breaking of the Cross’. The hint in the prophecy was that in the time of the Promised Messiah, God would bring about circumstances which would lay bare the truth about the Crucifixion.’

(Jesus in India, pp.60-61)

Before proceeding to quote passages from the Scrolls which support the above-mentioned description of the Teacher of Righteousness, let us begin with some background to the Scrolls.

Who wrote the Scrolls

Dr Will Varner, Professor of the Old Testament at Master’s College, Israel says:

‘After six seasons of intensive excavation, the scholars were sure beyond any reasonable doubt that the scrolls found their origin in the community which flourished between 125 BC and AD 68. The scrolls had been stored in haste in the caves as the community fled the encroaching Roman army, which was in Judea to put down the Jewish Revolt of AD 66-70... The contents of the Dead Sea Scrolls indicate that their authors were a group of priests and laymen pursuing a communal life of strict dedication to God. Their leader was called the ‘Righteous Teacher’. They

viewed themselves as the only true Elect of Israel; they alone were faithful to the Law. They opposed the ‘Wicked Priest’, the Jewish High Priest in Jerusalem who represented the establishment and who had persecuted them in some way. ... Most scholars have identified the Qumran brotherhood with the Essenes, a Jewish sect of Jesus' day described by Josephus and Philo.’

(Christian Answers Network)

The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in caves near the excavations at Qumran, and there are strong links to the Essenes there, so it is natural to assume that they authored the Scrolls, especially when their views correspond so closely.

Dr Barbara Thiering of Sydney University writes in *Jesus of the Apocalypse* that Jesus' father Joseph was an Essene and lived by their marriage rules and that the Essenes were the immediate predecessors of Christians. She claims that just like the

mainstream Jews, the Essenes were also divided into two parties who despised each other. Dr. Thiering also believes that Jesus^(as) did not die on the Cross, but survived it.

Similarities between the Scrolls and the New Testament

Highlighting a few notable similarities between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament, Prof. Geza Vermes says:

‘... We note

(a) fundamental similarities of language, (both in the Scrolls and in the New Testament the faithful are called ‘Sons of Light’);

(b) ideology (both communities considered themselves as the true Israel, governed by twelve leaders, and expected the imminent arrival of the Kingdom of God);

(c) attitude to the Bible (both considered their own history as a fulfilment of words of the Prophets).’

(Vermes, p.22)

The Teacher of Righteousness founded a new religious community and was persecuted. Prof. Vermes continues:

‘The Teacher and his followers were compelled to withdraw into the desert, where they awaited the impending manifestation of God's triumph over evil and darkness in the end of days, which had already begun.’
(Vermes, p.3)

Some fundamental differences exist between the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls leading to potential modifications to the Bible at the Vatican as reported by Richard Owen of *The Times*:

‘The Vatican is to abandon decades of secrecy and obstruction to allow changes in the Bible based on revelations in the Dead Sea Scrolls more than half a century after they were discovered. The extent of the changes is expected to be revealed this month but the revised version of the New

Jerusalem Bible will take five years to complete ...

Father Gianluigi Boschi, a Dominican theologian at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome and a leading expert on the scrolls, said the recent growth in scroll scholarship, and the publication of previously inaccessible scrolls, meant that some of the changes would be radical...Father Boschi said that the project would link “the whole picture of the origins of Christianity” to the findings at Qumran. He declined to say which of the passages would be modified but he predicted that the changes would be “surprising and innovative...”

Minor adjustments already have been made to the Jerusalem Bible in the light of the two scroll versions of the Book of Isaiah.’
(*The Times* reproduced by ‘The Australian’, Sept 12, 2001)

The Teacher in the Scrolls

The Teacher of Righteousness described himself as fatherless, poor, dedicated (abandoned) to God by his mother, God's elect (prophet), mortal, (creature of clay) and metaphorically a son of God.

The Dead Sea Scrolls contain poems or hymns, which were most likely written by the Teacher of Righteousness himself. Prof. Geza Vermes introduces the poems :

‘Two fundamental themes running through the whole collection are those of salvation and knowledge. The sectary [a member of a sect – *Ed*] thanks God continually for having been saved from the ‘lot’ of the wicked, and for his gift of insight into the divine mysteries. He, ‘a creature of clay’ has been singled out by his Maker to receive favours of which he feels himself unworthy, and alludes again and again to his frailty and total dependence on God. Whereas some of the

Hymns give expression to thoughts and sentiments common to all members of the sect, others particularly nos. 1,2,7-11, appear to refer to the experiences of a Teacher abandoned by his friends and persecuted by his enemies.’

(*Vermes*, pp.243-244)

In the following Hymn (taken from the Thanksgiving Hymn found in Cave 1), the Teacher calls himself fatherless, poor and devoted to the service of God by his mother:

‘I thank Thee (corrected: Blessed art Thou) O lord, for Thou hast not abandoned the fatherless or despised the poor.’

(1QH 9, *Vermes*, p.268)

‘Until I am old Thou will care for me; for my father knew me not and my mother abandoned me to Thee; for Thou art the father to all the sons of Thy Truth; and as a woman who tenderly loves her babe, so dost Thou rejoice

in them, and as a foster father bearing a child in his lap, so carest Thou for all Thy creatures.’

(1QH 14, *Vermes*, p.284)

The Holy Qur’an (Ch.3: Vs.46-64 and Ch.19: Vs.17-37) also says that Jesus^(as) was born without the agency of a father and that from his early childhood his Godliness was obvious.

The Teacher believed in the absolute Unity of God as he shows in one of his poems while beseeching God:

‘For Thou art an eternal God; all Thy ways are determined for ever and ever and there is none other beside Thee.’

(1QH 12, *Vermes*, p.277)

‘Announce and say: Blessed be God, Creator of the heavens by His power, Designer of all their devices by His strength, of the earth by His might.’

(*Vermes*, p.300)

The Qur’an tells about Jesus^(as)

and describes his advice to his followers,

...Surely, Allah is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him alone, this is the right path.

(Ch.19: V.37)

So in all of these passages, it is clear that Jesus^(as) worshipped the One True God and was grateful to Him for his salvation and mission.

The coming of the ‘Messiah’

The Israelites were expecting a Messiah when Jesus^(as) came. Prof. Vermes says:

‘The third figure, “the Prophet”, is mentioned directly, though briefly only once; we are told that his arrival was expected together with that of the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel (1QS ix,11). The whole messianic phrase is absent, however, from all the extant 4Q manuscripts of the Community Rule. Viewed in the context of inter-Testamental Jewish ideas, “the Prophet” was to be either

an Elijah returned as a precursor of the Messiah (Mal. iv, 5; 1 Enoch xc, 31,37; Matth., xi, 13; xvii, 12), or as a divine guide sent to Israel in the final days (1 Mac., iv, 46; xiv, 41; Jn. i, 21), no doubt identical with “the Prophet” promised by God to Moses (“I will raise up for them a Prophet like you... He shall convey all my commands to them”, Deut. xviii,15-18, cf. Acts iii, 22-3; vii, 37).’
(*Vermes*, pp.86-87)

The title given to one of the scrolls is, ‘*A Messianic Apocalypse*’ i.e. the Messiah’s Revelation, because it contains a prophecy concerning ‘The Messiah’ identified with the arrival of the ‘Kingdom of God’. Introducing the Scroll ‘A Messianic Apocalypse’ (4Q521), Prof. Vermes says:

‘As in the Gospels, healing and resurrection are linked to the idea of the Kingdom of God. Line 12 furnishes the most explicit evidence con-

cerning the rising of the dead. Fragment 7, line 6, repeats the same idea, referring to God as ‘He who revives the dead of His people.’
(*Vermes*, p.391)

Prophesying the advent of ‘The Messiah’ (the ‘New Moses’ or the ‘Like of Moses’ who was linked with the ‘Kingdom of God’), the Teacher said:

‘The Heavens will listen to His Messiah and none therein will stray away from commandments of the holy ones.... Over the poor His spirit will hover and will renew the faithful with His power. And He will glorify the pious on the throne of the eternal Kingdom. He who liberates the captives, restores sight to the blind, straightens the bent (Ps. cxlvi, 7-8). And forever I will cleave to the hopeful and in His mercy... And the fruit will not be delayed for anyone. And the Lord will accomplish glorious things which have never been as He. For He will

heal the wounded, and revive the dead and bring good news to the poor (Isa. lxi, 1)'...He will lead the uprooted and knowledge... and smoke (?)' (*Vermes*, pp.391-392)

This prophecy of Jesus^(as) is mentioned in the Qur'an as follows:

And (call to mind) when Jesus, son of Mary, said, 'O Children of Israel, surely, I am Allah's Messenger unto you, fulfilling that which is before me (of the prophecies) of the Torah, and giving glad tidings of a Messenger who will come after me, his name will be Ahmad.' And when he came to them with clear proofs, they said, 'This is a manifest sorcery'.
(Ch.61: V.7)

Reference to the fulfilment of Prophet Moses^(as) prophecy is found in the following verse of the Holy Qur'an;

Verily, We have sent to you a Messenger, who is a witness

over you, even as We sent a Messenger to Pharaoh.
(Ch.73: V.16)

Therefore, the prophecy of Moses (Deut..18:18-19) as well as of Jesus^(as) (quoted above), concerning the advent of a 'Prophet like Moses' were fulfilled in the person of Prophet Muhammad^(sa).

Helped by the Holy Spirit

In Hymn 15 (formerly 11), the Teacher thanked God for strengthening him with the Holy Spirit. He said:

'I thank Thee, O Lord, for Thou hast upheld me by Thy strength. Thou hast shed Thy Holy Spirit upon me that I may not stumble.'
(*Vermes*, p.275).

Similarly in Hymn 18 (formerly 14), the Teacher addressing God says:

'Thou hast upheld me with certain truth, Thou hast delighted me with Thy Holy Spirit and hast opened my

heart till this day.’
(*Vermes* p.284)

The Qur’an also says about Jesus^(as):

*...And to Jesus, son of Mary,
We gave manifest Signs, and
strengthened him with the
Spirit of holiness.’*
(Ch.2: V.88)

Interpretation of the Law aroused severe opposition

The Teacher faced opposition from his people, because he interpreted the Torah through God's guidance, opposing the views of the common priesthood. He said:

‘These things I know by the wisdom which comes from Thee, for Thou hast unstopped my ears to marvellous mysteries.’
(*Vermes*, p.254)

‘But to the elect of righteousness Thou hast made me a banner, and a discerning interpreter of wonderful mysteries to try

those who practice truth and to test those who love correction. To the interpreters of error I have been an opponent, {but a man of peace} to all those who see true things.’
(*Vermes*, p.257)

God saved him from an attempt on his life

In Hymn 13, the Teacher thanks God in the following words:

‘I thank Thee, O Lord, for Thou hast not abandoned me whilst I sojourned among a people burdened with sin’ ...
‘For Thou O God, hast sheltered me from the children of men, and hast hidden Thy Law within me against the time when Thou shouldst reveal Thy salvation to me. For Thou hast not forsaken me in my soul's distress, and Thou hast heard my cry in the bitterness of my soul; and when I groaned, Thou didst consider my sorrowful complaint. Thou hast preserved the soul of the poor one in the den of lions

which sharpened their tongue like a sword. Thou hast closed up their teeth, O God, lest they rend the soul of the poor and needy.... The wicked and fierce have stormed against me with their afflictions; they have pounded my soul all day. But Thou O my God, hast changed the tempest to a breeze; Thou hast delivered the soul of the poor one like [a bird from the net and like] prey from the mouth of lions.’
(*Vermes*, p.267-268)

In Hymn 6, the Teacher thanks God saying:

‘They have cast towards the Pit the life of the man whose mouth Thou hast confirmed, and into whose heart Thou hast put teaching and understanding, that he might open a fountain of knowledge to all men of understanding.’
(*Vermes*, p.257)

In his Hymn 7, the Teacher says:

‘I thank Thee O Lord, for

Thou hast placed my soul in the bundle of the living, and hast hedged me about against all the snares of the Pit. Violent men have sought after my life because I have clung to Thy Covenant. For they, an assembly of deceit, and a horde of Belial, know not that my stand is maintained by Thee, and that in Thy mercy Thou wilt save my soul since my steps proceed from Thee...They have themselves fallen in the snares which they laid for my life. But my foot remains upon level ground; apart from their assembly I will bless Thy Name.’

(*Vermes*, pp.257-258)

In Hymn 8, the Teacher thanks God for keeping him under His care and saving his life, by foiling their plan:

‘I thank Thee, O Lord, for Thou hast fastened Thine eye upon me. Thou hast saved me from the zeal of lying interpreters, and from the congregation of those who

seek smooth things. Thou hast redeemed the soul of the poor one whom they planned to destroy by spilling his blood because he served Thee.’
(*Vermes*, pp.258-259)

God had made a New Covenant with the Teacher, in the land of Damascus to which he clung:

‘For they have spoken wrongly against the precepts of righteousness, and have despised the Covenant and the Pact - the New Covenant - which they made in the land of Damascus’
(*The Damasus Document*, *Vermes*, p.135)

The Qur’an also mentions a Covenant made with Jesus^(as) as with other prophets (Ch.33:V.8). The Teacher’s enemies planned that he should die an accursed death on the Cross, but God’s plan was that he (Jesus^(as)) should be saved from that death (Ch.3:V.55). The hell of *Abadon* (eternal hell), from which the Teacher was saved, is the lot of those who die an accursed death,

but the Teacher was saved from it and was rather raised to everlasting (spiritual) height by God. The Qur’an attests this by saying:

And their saying, “We did kill the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah”, whereas they slew him not, nor did they crucify him, but he was made to appear to them like one crucified; and those who differ therein are certainly in a state of doubt about it; they have no definitive knowledge thereof, but only follow a conjecture; and they did not convert this conjecture into a certainty. On the contrary, Allah exalted him to Himself. And Allah is Mighty, Wise.
(Ch.4: Vs.158-159)

The Teacher was banished from his land to a far off land, close to a spring of waters. In Hymn 12 in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Teacher seeks God’s help to accomplish His design, as his enemies have despised and banished him from his land, causing all his friends

and brethren to be driven far from him:

‘I thank Thee O Lord, for Thou hast illumined my face by Thy Covenant... I seek Thee and sure as the dawn Thou appearest as perfect Light to me. Teachers of lies have smoothed Thy people with words, and false prophets have led them astray; they perish without understanding for their works are in folly. For I am despised by them and they have no esteem for me, that Thou mayest manifest Thy might through me. They have banished me from my land like a bird from its nest; all my friends and brethren are driven far from me and hold me for a broken vessel....But Thou O God, dost despise all Belial's designs; it is Thy purpose that shall be done and the design of Thy heart that shall be established for ever.’
(*Vermes*, p.263)

In another poem (Hymn 18), the Teacher thanks God for providing him shelter in a land of fountains:

‘I thank Thee, O Lord, for Thou hast placed me beside a fountain of streams in an arid land, and close to a spring of waters in a dry land, and besides a watered garden [in a wilderness.]’
(*Vermes*, p.278)

It appears from this poem that the Teacher was forced by his enemy to migrate to some far off arid and dry wilderness, and took shelter near a place of running waters, fountains and gardens. Many historic records suggest that Jesus^(as) travelled far and wide, presumably to convey his message to the Lost tribes of Israel. People of Israeli stock had dispersed in various lands and to find them he probably travelled from Jerusalem to Mosul, Tehran, Herat, Kabul, Peshawar, Rawalpindi and Maree before finally settling in Kashmir. (*Jesus in India*, p.65)

Taken in this larger context, Kashmir is a place of fountains, running springs and gardens surrounded by a mostly arid, dry and rocky part of the world.

The Qur'an corroborates the description of the final home of Jesus^(as):

And We made the son of Mary and his mother a Sign, and We rescued them and helped reach an elevated land, a restful place with springs of gushing waters. (Ch.23: V.51)

Hadhrat Ahmad, peace be upon him says:

'I, however, do not approve of the way European investigators wish to prove that the principles of Buddhism reached Palestine in the days of Jesus^(as). It is, indeed, unfortunate that when the name and mention of Jesus^(as) are contained in the ancient books of Buddhism, these investigators should adopt the awkward course of trying to find traces of Buddha's faith in Palestine. Why should they not search for the blessed footprints of Jesus on the rocky soil of Nepal, Tibet and Kashmir?'
(*Jesus in India*, p.78)

Is there any wonder, therefore, if the Teacher referred to the place of his refuge as an area of fountains, running waters and gardens amidst vast tracts of arid, dry and rocky lands, where he might have travelled and stayed en-route? When the Teacher was living at this place, all his friends and brethren were far from him – as expressed by him in his poem.

The Teacher prophesied that the wicked will continue to be punished till eternity. The Teacher prophesied in his poem (Hymn 5), that the wicked people who planned to kill him would remain under the wrath of God, till Doom's Day (Day of Judgement). He said:

'But the wicked Thou didst create for the time of Thy wrath, Thou didst vow from the womb to the Day of Massacre, for they walk in the way which is not good. They have despised Thy Covenant and their souls have loathed Thy truth; they have taken no delight in all Thy commandments and have

chosen that which Thou hatest. For according to the mysteries of Thy wisdom Thou hast ordained them for great chastisements before the eyes of all Thy creatures, that for all eternity they may serve as a Sign and a wonder, and that all men may know Thy glory and Thy tremendous power.’

(*Vermes*, p.250-251)

The Qur’an also mentions that Jesus^(as) cursed the Jews and they incurred the wrath of God:

Those amongst the children of Israel who disbelieved, were cursed by the tongue of David and of Jesus, son of Mary. That was because they disobeyed and used to transgress.

(Ch.5: V.79)

The Teacher made certain exhortations to his followers, which included a prophecy that they would always prevail over the worldly people (sons of the earth) who rejected him. Among other admonitions he said:

‘And God observed their deeds, that they sought Him with a whole heart, and he raised for them a Teacher of Righteousness to guide them in the way of His heart.’

(*Vermes*, p.127)

The Teacher made the following prophecy in "The Exhortation":

‘But all those who hold fast to these precepts, going and coming in accordance with the Law, who heed the voice of the Teacher and confess before God, saying, Truly we have sinned, we and our fathers, by walking counter to the precepts of the Covenant. Thy judgements upon us are justice and truth; who do not lift their hand against His holy precepts of His righteous statutes or His true testimonies; who have learned from the former judgements by which the members of the Community were judged; who have listened to the voice of the Teacher of Righteousness and have not despised the pre-

cepts of righteousness when they heard them; they shall rejoice and their hearts shall be strong, and they shall prevail over all the sons of the earth. God will forgive them and they shall see His salvation because they took refuge in His holy Name’.
(*Vermes*, p.135-136)

The Qur’an also mentions this prophecy of Jesus^(as):

When Allah said, 'O Jesus, I will cause thee to die a natural death and will exalt thee to Myself, and will clear thee of the charges of those who disbelieve, and will place those who follow thee above those who disbelieve, until the Day of Resurrection; then to Me shall be your return, and I will judge between you concerning that wherein you differ.
(Ch.3: V.56)

Message of the Dead Sea Scrolls

Who was the Teacher of Righteousness and what is the

spiritual significance and message of the Scrolls to the world of religion? The Jews, Christians and mainstream Muslims might feel it difficult to recognise Jesus^(as) in the guise of the Teacher, because none of them believe that he survived the Crucifixion and travelled to the lost Israelite tribes. It may interest them to know that in 1891, the holy founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community received the following Arabic revelation:

‘Jesus, son of Mary, Messenger of Allah, has died and you have come, as promised, in his spirit.
(Arabic): Allah’s promise is always fulfilled’.
(*Izala Auham*, p.561)

And subsequently in 1899, he wrote a book: *Jesus in India*, in which he proved from the Holy Qur’an, the Bible, ancient Buddhist and Hindu records and old medical and historical books that Jesus^(as) was taken down from the Cross, in a state of coma, his wounds were treated

and when sufficiently healed, he secretly travelled to the East in search of the Lost Tribes of Israel. He conveyed God's message to them and died at an old age in Kashmir – land of springs, water and gardens – after completing his mission as a Messenger of God.

It is surprising how the story of the Teacher of the Scrolls, discovered 40 years after the death of the Promised Messiah^(as), coincides so closely with what was told about Jesus^(as) by him under Divine inspiration and guidance.

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Taoist Yin-Yang

A short study of how the Taoist philosophy of Yin-Yang compares to Islam and explains the existence of God

By Asim Rai – UK

Taoism does not uphold any belief in God. The main aspect of Taoism is derived from the first three letters of this philosophical belief namely, 'Tao'. Tao means 'path' or 'way' and its core ideas were manifested by a Chinese teacher called Lao-Tzu in 604 BCE. According to Lao-Tzu, the Tao is the origin and nature of the universe. It is the way of life for all species on our planet, including human beings living in tribal societies.

This explanation of the Tao gives rise to the possibility that the Tao in actual fact describes God as the creator of the universe and that God's 'way' namely Islam, is the exact way of life which Lao-Tzu envisaged for all civilisation in this world. In his celebrated book, *Revelation Rationality Knowledge and Truth*, Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad^(ru) best describes the similarities in meaning between the Tao and the Qur'anic and

Islamic description and explanation of God.

Having briefly introduced Taoism, I set the scene in answering how Taoism ultimately compliments Islam in explaining the existence of God. In Taoism, the path (Tao) is sustained in the universe by an older doctrine which has been incorporated into Taoism called, 'The Old Dualism' or in short the 'Yin-Yang'. This belief in dualism, yin and yang, describes a state in which the universe is seemingly divided into two opposing but equal forces. The dualistic world of yin and yang however, is not seen as good versus bad. It is divided along other lines. Yang, represented by the white in the yin-yang symbol, stands for the creative principle while yin, represented by black, is dissolution and return (to creation). Yang came to represent hot, dry, male, light, hardness, movement and initiative. Yin

symbolises coolness, moistness, female, darkness, softness, stillness and receptivity. The yin and yang forces are believed to be cyclical, moving and evolving into each other, represented by the white dot on the black yin side of the symbol, and by a black dot on the white yang side. In this view, the universe depends on the interaction between these two forces which arise from the Tao.

The book of Taoism, *The Tao Te Ching*, describes the implications of the yin and the yang. I have chosen two verses:

*The Tao is like stringing a
bow,
Pulling down the high,
Lifting up the low-*

*Shortening the long,
Lengthening the short,
To take from the excessive
And give insufficiency
support.*

(Verse 77: the Opposite
Processes)

*We know beauty because there
is ugly,
We know good because there*

*is evil,
Being and not being,
Having and not having,
Create each other.*

*Difficult and easy,
Long and short,
High and low,
Define each other,
Just as before and after follow
each other.*

(Verse 2: Relativity)

From the two verses we understand that much of what exists, only exists through the realisation of its opposite. We cannot define things as being easy if we never experience something more difficult. If we cannot become ill, the term ‘good’ health would cease to exist as there would be no general purpose to pursue health, as we cannot become ill. It seems that everything in this world has come in ‘pairs’ to define and create each other and to create balance. Such a notion is clearly upheld in the Holy Qur’an:

*Holy is He Who created all
things in pairs, of what the
earth grows and of themselves,*

and of what they know not.
(Ch.36: V.37)

He is the Prime Creator of the heavens and the earth. He made pairs from among you and also pairs from among the cattle for your benefit. He multiplies you therein.
(Ch.42: V.12)

And of everything have We created pairs, that you may reflect.
(Ch.51: V.50)

The Qur'an prompts man to reflect on how God made everything in pairs (Ch.51:V.50), and it is this exact prompt which allows one to view the doctrine of yin and yang as one which ultimately explains the existence of God.

Having established that the universe is in its totality bound by the doctrine of the yin and yang as further established by the Qur'an, we now know that for one thing to exist, it must be put into balance by another thing which exists as its opposite (i.e. good and bad). If there was no death, life on Earth would be severely unbalanced as

the Malhiusian theory is that the Earth could not possibly sustain an infinite amount of creation. Thus death is the vital balancing factor as being opposite to life. However, death itself implies the physical nature of man (body), which can never be infinite. When we die, our body perishes. Yet Islam teaches us that our souls continue to exist for a very long time. How can this belief be reconciled with the idea of yin-yang? The answer is quite simple. Humans are mortals – The Holy Qur'an explained that God made everything in pairs. Through reflection we can realise that the only 'opposite' to balance mortality is immortality itself. Therefore, there exists a realm of immortality alongside mortality to balance the universe. God cannot die and will never cease to exist, and He Himself balances mortality, by His attribute, which is found in this world.

One may argue that even if God is Immortal, that it does not necessarily mean God is All Knowing and All-Powerful. Therefore, how can we be sure. The answer to this lies in the

reflection of our surroundings. Life can never on its own create itself from nothing. Atheists find it hard to explain how the first organisms ever came into existence. Physical matter cannot originally create life. Life is not physical in its entirety. Thus creation of all sorts needs a Creator, and we know this Creator to be God. By looking at this world, it would require perfect knowledge to have created all that we could through our senses. Moreover, God is All-Powerful. He is Immortal, and the All-Knowledge.

The study of Taoism is quite paradoxical. Taoism overtly expresses that God is not the factor that created all, nor is He the maintainer of the universe. What is He then? Taoists are very conclusive about this idea and yet dwell in the teaching of Lao-Tzu who says in one of his verses in the Tao Te Ching, that '*the spirit of life never dies, it is the infinite gateway to mysteries within mysteries.*' One must surely always be cautious when trying to make conclusive statements involving mysteries. One aspect

that has intrigued many minds about Taoism, is its fondness for the much older idea of the yin and the yang. Having noticed that the doctrine of 'pairs' as read in the Qur'an was similar to the yin-yang, the truth of God's existence is no mystery. By understanding that opposites need each other to define and sustain each other, universal mortality needs universal immortality in the form of God, Who has the knowledge to sustain the entire 'tao' or universe. Therefore Taoism and its doctrine of yin and yang, compliments Qur'anic teachings in proving God's existence.

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