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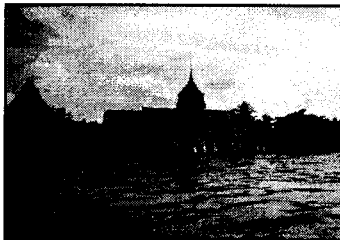
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From the Cosmi Photo  
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# Editorial

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We live in a society which is increasingly becoming multi-cultural as the prevalence of travel increases. As we get more and more used to seeing other cultures and have a chance to study each others beliefs, we begin to see that views that once seemed worlds apart or maybe even diametrically opposed, may not be so different after all. In fact living in a multi-cultural city such as London, Toronto or even Singapore, it soon becomes clear that religions share more common beliefs than they have differences.

The feature article in this issue on Buddhism takes a closer look at a religion which is widely known even in the western world, and yet barely understood. A cursory glance would have us believe that Buddhists worship Buddha as though he were a god and believe in reincarnation. Yet one hundred years ago, the Promised Messiah<sup>(as)</sup> claimed to the world that Prophet Buddha<sup>(as)</sup> was actually a monotheistic prophet of God, raised in the line of prophets, who himself worshipped the One true God, and believed in all other common religious convictions such as heaven and hell, angels and the Day of

Resurrection. Modern research is proving him right.

In order to recognise common religious themes and trends, especially with older religious traditions, it is useful to study other traditions and beliefs which might not be classed as 'worldwide religions'. Such a concept of seeking knowledge has always been encouraged by Islam. It is essential that the study of each others religions is encouraged. The best way to study any religion is to go back to its original texts and traditions. However, a modern trend is to utilise the Internet, or World Wide Web as a research tool. The article on 'Mobile Internet' shows how we may not be able to rely upon 'data' in the modern world as fact, rather the old fashion written text is the ideal source of research as it can be referenced, and once committed to paper, cannot be changed.

The moral is that the seeking of knowledge is essential, but we must be wary of what we trust as fact, and what we recognise as interpolation or even fiction.

# Notes and Comments

## TWENTY YEARS OF AIDS EPIDEMIC

June 5, 2001 marked the 20th anniversary the first cases of acquired immuno-deficiency syndrome (AIDS) were reported on Centers for Disease Control bulletin under the title '*Pneumocystis pneumonia* – Los Angeles.'<sup>i</sup> Since then this global epidemic has already claimed 21.8 million lives. An additional 36.1 million persons are infected with HIV, the virus causing AIDS, and 13.2 million children have become 'AIDS orphans.' Nearly 14,000 new infections occur daily; there were 5.3 million in year 2000 alone. Approximately 70 percent of cases occur in sub-Saharan Africa, where, in some regions, the seroprevalence of HIV among adults exceeds 25 percent.<sup>ii</sup>

Although incidence of AIDS-related deaths are declining in the United States since the mid-1990s due primarily to greater awareness and improved drug regimens, prevalence of the disease and federal spending are steadily increasing.<sup>iii</sup> Despite efforts by the scientific community, several governments, and other authorities of the world, the experts predict that in the next twenty years the AIDS 'epidemic threatens to spin completely out of control in many of the poorest nations.'<sup>iii</sup> It is perhaps because the main focus of AIDS control has been medical containment of the virus once it has infiltrated the body rather than striking at the root of the problem from a moral perspective.

AIDS is a syndrome that primarily affects a certain group of people: those who are promiscuous in their sexual activities, and practice indecency that goes against the nature created by God. Because of its associated morbidity and mortality, it is not just another venereal disease. It is significant spiritually as well, as a mention of it is found in the Holy Qur'an, where Allah the Almighty says:

*And when the sentence is passed against them, We shall bring forth for them a beast (or a germ of plague) out of the earth which shall wound them because people did not believe in Our Signs.<sup>iv</sup>*

The expression used for the microorganisms mentioned in this verse is *daaba tul eardth*. The Holy Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) elaborated on this saying that during the days of Christian prosperity, due to their widespread immoral acts, a beastly germ would appear, wounding those who would partake in such lewdness, eventually destroying many among them.<sup>v</sup>

The New Testament presents such pestilence as a sign for the Latter Days.<sup>vi</sup> Compared with other epidemics, AIDS fits this picture more appropriately because of the number of lives it has claimed, its initial association with Christian nations, and most notably, because of the testimony from the Messiah of the present time. Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (peace be

on him), related a vision in which he saw an elephant-like beast was let loose by Allah to destroy a part of humanity. Hadhrat Ahmad<sup>(as)</sup> interpreted this as being the same beastly germ mentioned in the Holy Qur'an which was to appear during the time of the Promised Messiah owing to the sinful activities of people.<sup>vii</sup>

If AIDS is a form of divine punishment, as the above references and our conscience compel us to believe, then its cure lies in following the commandments of God and accepting the Divine Reformer appointed by Him for this age. The Promised Messiah<sup>(as)</sup> writes, 'God has wished to show a sign of His Divine Mercy for the people of this age. He, therefore, addressed me and said, 'Thou and those who remain within the four corners of thy household, those who obey thee fully, and those who extinct themselves in thee owing to their true fear of God, all of them will be safe from the plague. In this Last Age, this will serve as a sign from God to distinguish the different sects. As per those who do not follow thee completely, they are not of thy Community. Worry not regarding them. This is the commandment of God.'"<sup>viii</sup> He goes on to say, 'Differences in religious opinions do not bring down heavenly chastisement on earth. They will be brought to account on the Day of Judgment. What warrant punishment are injustice, arrogance and sinfulness of man.'<sup>viii</sup>

If, however, the human race ignores this call and try to fight the epidemic of AIDS with man-made inventions alone, overlooking the root cause of the present situation, then take heed of the Qur'anic warning, 'And beware of an affliction

which will not smite exclusively those among you who have done wrong. And know that Allah is Severe in requiring.'<sup>ix</sup>

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- iv Holy Qur'an, Ch.27:v.83
- v *Muslim*, Book of the Anti-Christ and the Hypocrites.
- vi Matthew 24:7
- vii Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. *Nazul al Massih*, 1902. Quoted from *Review of Religions*, Vol. 93, No.3
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- ix Holy Quran: Ch.8:v.26

**By Manzurul A Sikder – New York, USA**

# Buddhism

*by Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad*

*This is an extract taken from the book Revelation, Rationality, Knowledge and Truth written by the author.*

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The general impression that prevails in the world about Buddhism is that it is a philosophy of life which, though counted among religions, does not prescribe to the existence of God. This impression is only partially correct. Even in contemporary Buddhism, it is wrong to say that none of the Buddhists believe in God or gods. Although the predominant sects, Mahayans and Theravadins, are known to believe only in the ultimate inherent wisdom in man which Buddha<sup>(as)</sup> perfected, they too believe in many superstitions and demonic figures which substitute God for them. This impression of the Buddhists' negation of God is also wrong on another count. An exploration of early Buddhist sources as we shall demonstrate, reveals ample proof that Buddhism began like any other Divinely revealed faith with its emphasis on the Unity of God.

As for the position of Buddha (563-483 BC) among the Buddhists, although he is not directly worshipped as a deity, there is very little difference between the veneration shown to the Buddha by the Buddhists and the manner of worship of God found in other religions. They revere him and pay homage to him, bow to his images and statues and prostrate before them like the adherents of any other idolatrous religion in the world.

In fact, despite the denial of God by most Buddhists, deep within their hearts there seems to be lurking a desire to worship something. It is this which is manifested in their veneration of Buddha. The same unquenchable innate thirst for God etched deep upon the human soul urges them to worship Him, or something, if not Him. So it is to fill this void that the Buddhists worship the Buddha without formally recognizing him to be a god.

It must also be mentioned here that in the Tibetan form of Buddhism not only is the existence of superhuman deities or demons a part and parcel of their faith, but also they certainly believe in communication with them. The selection of a new Panchen Lama for instance, requires many rites and rituals to be performed, to obtain guidance from gods as to which one of the newborn Tibetan children should be the future Panchen Lama.

Among the so-called atheistic Buddhist sects, it is commonly alleged that Buddha himself denied the existence of God. They support their claim by pointing at the hostility shown to Buddha by the contemporary Hindu pundits. That hostility, they maintain, was largely due to the contempt shown by Buddha to their gods. The Buddhists in general do not bother to analyse the real factors at work which generated misunderstandings leading to the persecution of Buddha. It is quite sufficient for them to believe that Buddha must have rejected the idea of God in totality.

However, as we shall presently establish by reexamining some facts of history and some important relevant passages in the Buddhist sacred literature, it can be clearly shown that Buddha<sup>(as)</sup> is absolved from all such allegations. Yet it must be said, at the very outset, that the historical evidence to which the adherents of both view points refer, is in itself meagre. This difficulty, however, can be offset to a large degree by having recourse to other circumstantial evidence.

The Buddhist philosophy, teachings and practices remained to be transmitted only verbally for almost five hundred years after Buddha, except in the case of inscriptions on the rocks and stupas made during the illustrious reign of Ashoka (273-232 BC). Ashoka, it should be remembered, appeared some three hundred years after his spiritual master, Buddha<sup>(as)</sup>. This fact in itself is of vital importance because these writings can certainly serve the purpose of judging Buddha's philosophy and way of life from the vantage point of Ashoka. Moreover, at a time when nothing of Buddhism was committed to writing, it was Ashoka alone who left behind a written account of what he understood to be Buddha's

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**HENCE, THE ALLEGATION THAT BUDDHA<sup>(AS)</sup> DID NOT BELIEVE IN GOD IS PURE FABRICATION. WHAT BUDDHA REJECTED WAS VEDANTA (I.E. DOCTRINES AND BELIEFS FOUND IN THE HINDU SACRED BOOKS, THE VEDAS). HE REJECTED THE BELIEF IN CORPOREAL MANIFESTATIONS OF GODS AS FOUND IN HINDUISM. HE WAS SEVERELY CRITICAL OF THE BRAHMANS AND REGARDED THEM TO HAVE CORRUPTED THEIR DIVINE TEACHING THROUGH THEIR DISTORTED INTERPRETATION.**

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teachings. Again, his authority as a true representative of Buddha has never been challenged. What remains therefore, is simply a case of different interpretations.

As far as the story of Buddha is concerned, although it too was committed to writing many centuries after his demise, it has been unanimously accepted by all researchers without serious disagreement. This knowledge seems to have been passed on from generation to generation. Hence the personality of Buddha and his lifestyle appear to have a continuity, beginning from Buddha himself to the present day.

From this, it is reasonable to conclude, that an understanding of Buddha and Buddhism which accords with these two sources i.e. the life of Buddha and the writings on the stupas, should have the stronger claim to acceptance. Against this, such views as are clearly at variance with them may safely be rejected. However, if the early sources seem to contradict each other, caution has to be applied in accepting one and rejecting the other.

A close examination of Buddha's biography reveals that in his lifestyle, he was not any different from other prophets of God, who appeared in different parts of the world. There is a universality about the character and style of prophets which can also be discerned in the life of Buddha.

Coming to the issue of the fundamental beliefs of Buddhism, the problems begin with different interpretations of what he is known to have said or done. We disagree with the commonly held view that Buddha was an atheist. We maintain that Buddhism was a Divinely revealed religion. We emphasize the fact that the founder of Buddhism was certainly not an atheist, but was a man commissioned by God Himself, to deliver His message in the style that all other messengers were raised.

Most scholars who write about Buddhism are out of their depth in trying to justify the placing of Buddhism among the great religions of the world. To do that they have to change the universally accepted definition of religion so that it also accommodates Godless philosophies and religions. Why should a code of conduct which starts its journey with a denial of God be admitted into the comity of religions, is the question. As far as our view is concerned, no such objection can be raised on this count. We on our part reject the premise that Buddhism had no Divine origin. To support our contention we shall have recourse to the same well-established sources as the Buddhists themselves rely on and demonstrate that our interpretations have a stronger basis for acceptance. We repeat that Buddhism is no oddity among religions; on the contrary, its fundamental characters are at one with the rest of the Divinely revealed faiths.

The erroneous popular belief in the Godless origin of Buddhism was spread largely by the Western scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Their knowledge of Buddhism was largely based on the translations of Buddhist literature from the Pali language by Buddhist scholars who had permitted their own biased, godless philosophy to influence their translations. Few among them understood the Pali language, which is the language of the source material. Moreover, instead of drawing their own inferences directly from a study of reliable Buddhist sources, they leaned entirely on the beliefs about Buddhism prevailing among the major Buddhist sects.

Contrary to this general trend of Western scholars, a solitary voice in India was raised by Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad's of Qadian (1835-1908),



who presented a diametrically opposed view. He maintained that Buddha<sup>(as)</sup>, had firm belief in the existence of God who Himself had raised him as His messenger with a specific mission to perform. He demonstrated that Buddha<sup>(as)</sup>, like all other prophets of God, also believed in the existence of Satan, as well as in heaven and hell, in angels and in the Day of Resurrection. Hence, the allegation that Buddha<sup>(as)</sup> did not believe in God is pure fabrication. What Buddha rejected was *Vedanta* (i.e. doctrines and beliefs found in the Hindu sacred books, the Vedas). He rejected the belief in corporeal manifestations of gods as found in Hinduism. He was severely critical of the Brahmans and regarded them to have corrupted their Divine teaching through their distorted interpretation.

The voice of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>(as)</sup> was not to remain solitary for long. Soon, other voices from among the second generation of Western scholars and researchers on Buddhism began to follow suit. The most prominent among them was the great French scholar Dr. Gustav Le Bon (1841-1931) who writes:

Unfortunately, the study of Indian monuments has been completely neglected by European scholars. The specialists of Indian studies, through whom we have come to learn of Buddhism, had never visited India. They had only studied this religion in books; an unfortunate twist of fate made them chance upon the works of philosophical sects written five or six centuries after the death of Buddha, these being absolutely alien to the religion practised in reality. The metaphysical speculations which had so astonished Europeans by their profundity were in fact nothing new. Ever since the books of India have been better known, these have been found in the writings of philosophical sects which had developed during the Brahmanic period.\*<sup>1</sup>

So far, Dr Le Bon seems to be perfectly right in his criticism, but as is apparent from the following text, he himself committed the same mistake of not deriving the concept of true Buddhism, strictly as it is presented by

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[\* Both these passages have been faithfully translated from Dr Le Bon's original book which is in French.]

the writings on the stupas – which never mention Buddhism as polytheistic. In the words of Dr. Le Bon:

It is not in the books, but in the monuments that one should study what Buddhism used to be. What the monuments tell us differs strangely from what certain books teach us. The monuments prove that this religion, which modern scholars want to see as an atheistic cult, was, on the contrary, the most polytheistic out of all the cults.\*<sup>2</sup>

It is this last part of his statement which is false as will be presently shown.

After Dr. Le Bon, another renowned scholar, Arthur Lillie drew a completely different conclusion from his careful study of the inscriptions on Ashoka's stupas. He amply quotes them in his book, *India in Primitive Christianity*. It should be noted that these inscriptions were not etched solely on the stupas which were specifically built for this purpose, they were also discovered upon the faces of huge rocks situated on highways and trade routes. We present below two examples of such inscriptions from Lillie's translations.

On the Eastern bank of the river Katak, twenty miles from Jagan Nath, there is a rock by the name of Pardohli upon which is written:

‘Much longing after the things (of this life) is a disobedience, I again declare; not less so is the laborious ambition of dominion by a prince who would be a propitiator of heaven. Confess and believe in God (Is’ana) who is the worthy object of obedience. For equal to this (belief), I declare unto you, ye shall not find such a means of propitiating heaven. Oh strive ye to obtain this inestimable treasure.’<sup>3</sup>

Is’ana, mentioned in this inscription is the name of ShivDevta - God. (See *The Sanskrit/English Dictionary* by Shivram Apte). On the seventh Stupa the same writer quotes:

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\* The usage of the word God in singular is highly significant.

‘Thus spake Devanampiya Piyadasi: “Wherefore from this very hour, I have caused religious discourses to be preached, I have appointed religious observances that mankind, having listened thereto, shall be brought to follow in the right path, and give glory to God\* (Is'ana).”’<sup>4</sup>

From these references it becomes obvious that the early sources portray Buddha<sup>(as)</sup> as a dedicated believer in God (may He bless his soul). The second source material in order of credibility and authenticity, is such Buddhist literature as came into being five hundred years after Buddha. This too contains enough evidence to indicate that Buddha was neither an atheist nor an agnostic but was indeed a believer in God. We specifically refer to the *Theravada* texts known as *Tripitaka* (*Three Baskets*), which as the name suggests, are divided into three sections. The first part is called *Vinaya-Pitaka* (*Rules of Conduct*), the second is called *Sutta-Pitaka* (*Discourses on Truth*) and the third is called *Abhidhamma Pitaka* (*Analysis of Religion*).

In *Sutta-Nipta* there is *The Chapter on Going to the Far Shore*,<sup>5</sup> in which the goal of conquering death is expressed. Buddha explains that birth and death do not mean anything to those who have overcome their ego thus becoming at one with God. These passages may have been misunderstood and confused with the Brahman concept of *Mukti* (redemption), but it is not right. Buddha clearly speaks of only those who have already reached the other side of the barrier here on earth before their death. This simply means that according to him, no man could have access to the hereafter, unless he had experienced it during his life here on earth, a teaching close to the Qur'anic precept. He preached that by being at one with God, man rises above life and death and becomes eternal.

At the end of the chapter, Pingiya, a follower of Buddha describes the excellence of his master which becomes instrumental in converting him to Buddhism. Having already expressed that he was enfeebled by old age and close to dying, Pingiya concludes his discussion with the following statement:

‘Assuredly I shall go to the immovable, the unshakeable, the likeness of which does not exist anywhere. I have no doubt about this. Thus consider me to be one whose mind is so disposed.’<sup>6</sup>

This illustrates the hope and expectation of a disciple of Buddha, that after his death he will meet his Lord, who is described as immovable, unshakeable and without likeness. This is a description of God in full agreement with that found in other scriptures.

There is another interesting account giving further information about Buddha's beliefs found in *Sutta-Pitaka* -the second part of the *Tripitaka* texts, subdivided into five books containing many of the Buddha's dialogues. The president of the Pali Text Society of London, Mrs T.W. Rhys Davids has translated some of these dialogues into English and her translation can be found in a series of books entitled *Sacred Books of the Buddhists*. Dialogue number thirteen of the second volume entitled *Tevigga Sutta*, deals specifically with the question of how man can be led to God.

In response to this question, Buddha first rejects the suggestion that anyone among the Hindu clergy of his time was capable of leading man to God, then he answers the question as he understood it himself. The background of how and where this dialogue took place is quite interesting.

It is said that once upon a time there used to be a famous Brahman village by the name of Manasâkata. This village was situated at a most scenic spot of the country beside a beautiful river. Its fame had reached far and wide because it was the centre of Brahmanic religious controversy. Five of these Brahmans were especially distinguished and led the school of their respective religious ideology. It so happened that Buddha also alighted by the same river along with his chosen disciples. The news spread and people began to pay him visits to enlighten themselves on Buddha's doctrine and hear about Buddhism from his own lips. Once, Vâsettha and Bharadvaga of the same village, while taking a walk after their bath in the

river, began to debate a religious doctrine. Neither of the two could convince the other of the correctness of the opinions of their respective gurus. Vâsettha, the young Brahman, suggested that it should be taken to the court of Buddha. This agreed upon they proceeded to present the issue to Buddha seeking his wise counsel. During the meeting, Bharadvaga, the young Brahman, remained silent and Vâsettha asked the questions. Before responding to the question, Buddha posed some counterquestions.

First he asked, 'Did any Brahmans versed in the Three Vedas, ever see Brahmâ face to face?' The answer was 'No'. Then Buddha asked Vâsettha if any of the Brahmans or their pupils of the previous seven generations had seen Brahmâ, and the answer was again, 'No'. Then Buddha asked them if they themselves claimed that they had ever seen Brahmâ. Again the answer was, 'No'. Then he asked Vâsettha that if a man, born and brought up in Manasâkâta was asked the way to Manasâkâta, would that man be in any doubt or difficulty in answering that question. Vâsettha answered:

'Certainly not, Gotama! And why? If the man had been born and brought up in Manasâkâta, every road that leads to Manasâkâta would be perfectly familiar to him.'

At this point Buddha expounded:

'That man, Vâsettha, born and brought up at Manasâkâta might, if he were asked the way to Manasâkâta, fall into doubt and difficulty, but to the Tathâgata,' (the fully enlightened one, meaning himself), 'when asked touching the path which leads to the world of Brahmâ, there can be neither doubt nor difficulty. For Brahmâ, I know, Vâsettha, and the world of Brahmâ, and the path which leadeth unto it. Yea, I know it even as one who has entered the Brahmâ world, and has been born within it!'

Buddha's argument was that the residents of Manasâkâta should clearly

know the roads leading to Manasâkata. Any claimant belonging to God, must also know the path leading to Him, but it would only be possible if he had come from God and had known Him personally. But the answers to the counter questions of Buddha clearly showed that none of the gurus had either seen God or had any personal knowledge of Him. Hence, the identity of God was completely outside and beyond their understanding. Up to this point of the dialogue, Buddha's arguments may have been misunderstood by some to mean that Buddha was declaring there was no God because nobody had met Him. Indeed, the translator in her introduction has suggested that the whole line of argument followed in this discourse is:

‘... only an argumentum ad hominem. If you want union with Brahmâ - which you had much better not want - this is the way to attain to it.’<sup>8</sup>

But this analysis of the discourse shows a total failure on the part of the author to understand what Buddha positively proves. It illustrates how some researchers have been influenced by the beliefs of the Buddhist monks who had misread Buddha's heroic campaign against his contemporary order of the Brahmans. What he categorically rejected were their superstitious beliefs in godlike figures, which they had neither seen nor heard from. But Buddha's answer did not end there. He went on to claim that for the Tathâgata, there could be no such difficulty in pointing out the way to God. He went on to claim that he himself was the one who could lead man to God because he had been in communion with Him and had come from Him.

It should by now have become obvious that Buddha did have faith in the existence of one Supreme God and it was from Him that he claimed to have come. He knew Him better than the villagers of Manasâkata knew their own village or the roads leading to it. Here Buddha asserts for himself a life of constant communion with God, a state which stands higher in order of nearness to Him than mere revelation. Many great prophets have made similar claims of witnessing a life of eternity with

commissioned to, by their Supreme Creator. It is this verdict of Ashoka which is indelibly etched upon the rocks of history.

### **Asceticism or Escapism**

Renunciation of the world and the severing of worldly ties is considered as the ultimate means in Buddhism for the complete liberation of self from anguish and misery. It takes an ascetic to understand the problems associated with the conflicts between the soul and the mundane temptations of life. Unless one is endowed with exceptional qualities of patience and resolution, this challenge seems insurmountable. But in this lies the only hope offered by Buddhism. A total renunciation of all that life is made of and a total withdrawal from the allurements of life is the only path to Nirvana, the eternal peace.

The complete denial of all passions is therefore claimed by the Buddhists to be the absolute truth. The greed for material wealth, for power, or even for the love of others, when unfulfilled, results in the agony and frustration of the deprived. Similarly, hatred also plays havoc with one's peace of mind. All these forces weaken the spiritual powers of man. This also emphasized that because man's intrinsic nature cannot be changed and his lust for ever more cannot be stilled, full contentment and satisfaction can never be achieved without severing all ties with matter.

This for the Buddhists is a starting point upon a long journey of denial to reach the ultimate goal of redemption. He has to deny all that life requires for its comfortable existence in a material sense. It is a struggle of denial relating to all the five senses. A denial of what the eyes require, and what the cars crave for, a denial of touch, taste and smell, a denial of all which agitates human hearts. They seek to avoid all dangers of addiction by avoiding all situations in which there is a threat to man becoming involved and enslaved by material influences. In short, the Buddhist concept of peace through denial is simply another name for escapism. To live is the problem, to die is the solution.

Him here on earth, even before death transports them to the otherworldly life. They, all the Divine messengers, share this eternal state of communion with Him, Buddha being no exception. Buddha referred to God as Brahmâ, because this was a familiar term to the Hindus, who applied it to the Supreme God among their gods. As the dialogue continues, the position is made even clearer.

‘When he had thus spoken, Vâsettha, the young Brahman, said to the Blessed One: “So has it been told me, Gotama, even that the Samana Gotama knows the way to a state of union with Brahmâ. It is well! Let the venerable Gotama be pleased to show us the way to a state of union with Brahmâ, let the venerable Gotama save the Brahman race!”’<sup>9</sup>

Having heard Vâsettha, Buddha does not reject his prayer and aspirations with reference to Brahmâ as unreal and meaningless; a definite proof of his approval of whatever he spoke of the Brahmâ and His communion with His chosen ones.

For people who respond to the call of God, irrespective of their caste, the path to God is made easy for them. For one who fears God, all human passions such as anger, jealousy, prejudice etc., cease to dominate him. When one transcends them, one is likely to imitate Godly attributes and acquire them. This whole dialogue is worthy of special attention by those who want to understand Buddha's attitude towards Him.

So why should Buddha have been misunderstood by his own followers? An answer to this question may lie in earlier Buddhist history and the conflict between the newly emerging religion of Buddha and the older religious order of Brahmanism. They attributed to Buddha their own views, not a rare phenomenon with religious clergy, or they might have misunderstood him in good faith. When Buddha waged war against the prevalent idolatry, to which the Brahmans of the time were entirely dedicated, he was accused of denying the existence of God. This propaganda, carried out by a powerful class of Brahmans, was so loudly



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**WHEN BUDDHA WAGED WAR AGAINST THE PREVALENT IDOLATRY, TO WHICH THE BRAHMANS OF THE TIME WERE ENTIRELY DEDICATED, HE WAS ACCUSED OF DENYING THE EXISTENCE OF GOD. THIS PROPAGANDA, CARRIED OUT BY A POWERFUL CLASS OF BRAHMANS, WAS SO LOUDLY PROCLAIMED THAT THE VOICE OF BUDDHA WAS DROWNED IN THEIR TUMULTUOUS ANTAGONISM.**

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proclaimed that the voice of Buddha was drowned in their tumultuous antagonism.

Considering the difficulties of communication and lack of writing facilities, it is not at all unlikely that this propaganda not only found favour with the Hindus, but also influenced the followers of Buddha. Ultimately, they themselves began to believe that Buddha's rejection of the Hindu gods was total. Thus Gotama Buddha's denial of the gods of the Brahmans was overgeneralized and led many to maintain that he did not believe in any God.

As far as their allegiance to Buddha is concerned, it remains untouched. They had accepted Buddha as an allwise teacher, so kind, so loveable, so humane. We are talking of an age when literacy was at its lowest level. The common people would often make their decisions on hearsay, hence the followers of Buddha themselves could have been carried away by this Brahmanic propaganda. But it created little effect upon their loyalty to him. For them it was sufficient that Buddha was the perfect source of wisdom. As such they revered him and continued to follow him with all their heart, as their beloved and all-wise master. Slowly and imperceptibly, however, this so-called Godless master of theirs began to be revered as God himself.

It had not happened for the first time in the history of religions. How often oracles had been transformed into gods and humans raised to the level of

deities! In the case of Buddha however, all the forms of their love and attention remained centred upon Buddha as a human paragon of perfection and he was not literally raised to the mythical concept of godly figures. For them, it was sufficient to place the Brahmans on one end of the spectrum and Buddha on the other. To them the Brahmans stood as oracles of legends and myths, while Buddha personified truth, wisdom and rationality. Thus, gradually Buddhism acquired a character where the belief in a legendary god had no role to play. Whatever the urge in human nature there is for believing in God, it was progressively filled with the image of Buddha. So Buddha, who in the eyes of his followers of the fourth century, had started his journey as just a source of absolute wisdom, began to rise to a status much higher than can be filled by an ordinary secular philosopher. In his case, he did not remain a mere symbol of mundane wisdom for long, but began to command such high respect and veneration as is commanded by God, or gods, among religions.

We are not talking here of a short period of a few years. It might well have taken centuries for the shadow of atheism to have cast its ominous spell over a large part of the Buddhist world. Again, it may also have taken centuries for the Buddhists to ultimately build a god out of Buddha, without naming him so. The manner in which we suggest the transformation of Buddhists took place from believing in God to a Godless people, is not merely conjecture. A study of Buddhist sources, as we have demonstrated, fully supports the view that Buddha<sup>(as)</sup> was a believer in One Supreme Creator. What he rejected was polytheism. This is the true image of Buddha which survived untarnished for the first three centuries despite the best efforts of his enemies. Here we take the reader's mind once again to the age of the great Buddhist monarch Ashoka, who ruled a vast Buddhist empire which extended beyond the boundaries of India covering the whole of Afghanistan. It is he who possesses the most authentic and unquestionable authority on the teachings and the ways of Buddha's life. There is no shadow of doubt that what he portrayed Buddha to be was simply a messenger of God who founded his teachings upon Divine revelation. Whatever he conveyed to mankind was only what he was

Rather than attempting to struggle and conquer the baser motivations and to bring them under the command of the soul, the soul is advised to beat a retreat and vacate the arena of life on earth. All that is born out of desire to satisfy one's ego, is lowly, materialistic, ignoble and should be sacrificed for the sake of the ultimate good of the same ego. The peace achieved through such an escape amounts to little more than death i.e., the negation of life.

Peace can be of two types. Death can also be classed as peace; to draw a line between peace and death is not an easy task. For instance, a compromise with defeat and resignation to a state of dishonour can serve as a case in point. The contentment of victory and the calm of surrender, though similar, are in reality poles apart. One is life and the other is death. The identification and classification of religions, at times, becomes difficult because of this attendant confusion. Each religion seemingly invites to the same ultimate goal of peace and contentment. Yet there are some which prefer a peaceful surrender to death rather than to die for a noble cause and there are those who raise the banner of a holy war to be fought against evil at all costs. All challenges to absolute morality are taken on bravely and roundly defeated. The calm that ensues is the true Nirvana.

Religions such as the decadent form of Buddhism admonish their adherents to find peace in the haven of escape. They teach escapism from all temptations which may lure them to their natural desires, urges and cravings. A Buddhist would withdraw to the safety of his inner self – a state described vaguely by some as an emptiness – by others as something which is eternal and possesses the qualification of being without substance. Are they talking of God? One may wonder! But opinions differ. Most believe that it is a state shared and understood only by those who reach it. If it is not an ultimate return to God, and most Buddhist scholars will refrain from admitting the existence of God in any form, then the only valid definition for this emptiness is absolute annihilation and total death.

In short, all natural urges related to the five senses which constitute life are denied with a finality for gaining absolute peace or Nirvana. Of course, all the adherents cannot reach that goal simultaneously, but all true adherents are required to continue to endeavour to achieve it step by step, as they advance to the precipice of annihilation.

To illustrate this point further, let us relate an episode which we find so befitting in helping the reader to understand the specific point we are raising. There used to be a beggar in Kashmir, who was half mystic and half beggar. He begged for the barest necessities of his life and no more. He was often found lost in contemplation and reverie, delving deep into his own self in search of something. Once a sage walked past him and suddenly noticed that he was no longer the same person, because he was bubbling with joy and dancing with ecstasy.

"Baba why this great transformation? You do not seem to be the same pauper any more. Whatever have you achieved?" were the questions. 'Have you chanced upon a treasure?' 'Yes,' was the answer. 'A priceless, peerless treasure! Why should not one exult at the fulfilment of all one's desires?'

Having received this reply, the sage inquired, 'You are clothed in the same rags and tatters, covered from head to foot in dust like you ever were, how then can you claim that all your desires are fulfilled?'

The beggar dismissed him with a wave of his hand, staring at him with a gaze of profound wisdom and said, 'Remember this, that one's desires are only fulfilled when he is left with no desires. Such is my great moment of liberation. Off you go and leave me to dance.'

A beautiful answer, leaving the sage absolutely nonplussed. But looking at it once again, one is bound to admit that the answer of the beggar was as beautiful as it was empty. No change had taken place beyond the confines of his limited personal world. The world around was the same

miserable world of sorrow, suffering and pain. The world around him was the same world of tyranny, oppression and despotism. He still needed something to live by – food, water and air were as indispensable to him as they ever were. Of desires one may get rid, but not of needs.

Whatever change was brought, was brought about within himself. But who knows whether it had come to stay forever. Maybe it was just a brief moment of triumph. Maybe on a chilly night with freezing cold, he would desire to have some warmth around, some clothes, some shelter, some hearth. Maybe if he fell ill, he would feel the need of a healer and pray for one. With what surmounting resolve would he conquer such challenges of the hard realities of life? Only a Buddhist sage would know the answer. It was only a subjective feeling of fulfilment and no more. In truth it was an absolute resignation to the state of helplessness – call it peace or call it death, by whatever name you may, it is not entitled to be called true Nirvana.

The search for peace through complete denial of all that relates to life and supports it, seems to have taken hold in both the major Indian religions, Hinduism and Buddhism. This is tantamount to denying the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest. In application to the human pursuit of peace, this can only mean surrender and acceptance of defeat.

Here we are not discussing the teachings of the founders of Hinduism or Buddhism, but are merely examining the philosophies that have resulted after thousands of years of decadence. Both have moved far away from their Divine origin. In fact they have followed the same course as is followed by mysticism or Sufis in other major religions of the world. In their case, the latter do not break their ties with a belief in God; instead within the framework of a Divine religion, they carve their own domain of subjective spiritual experiences which result from inspiration rather than revelation.

In the case of yogic philosophy in Hinduism and Buddhism, both are

completely broken away from their traditional teachings without a trace of the original to be found in them. As against revelation, which was the ultimate source of enlightenment of Buddha, the emphasis during the later ages kept shifting from revelation to inspiration, contemplation and reverie. In a strange way, despite the fact that Buddhism at its beginning was at complete odds with Hinduism, both joined forces later in the philosophy and practices of yoga.

It is amazing that the first mention of yogic teachings is only found in the *Tantras*, the so-called religious documents, which were compiled at least five hundred years after Buddha<sup>(as)</sup>. These documents were only for the eyes of a few who comprised the supreme Buddhist hierarchy and were kept under strict secrecy from the common people. To doubly reassure their secrecy they were written in such cryptic language and terminology as would be impossible for an ordinary person to understand. Much later, the contents of the *Tantras* became accessible to scholars who were horrified to find this so-called sacred literature to be extremely profane and indecent. There are mentions of demons and frightful phantom images. They are also full of vulgar language speaking of obscene and sexual desires in a manner as jars the human sensibilities. As such, the yogic teachings as contained in the *Tantras* have no connection whatsoever with the holy words of Buddha<sup>(as)</sup>.

Maybe all the talk of demonic nonsense and sexual vulgarity are symbols and allegories. Perhaps no living monks share the secret of such cryptic language. Maybe the Buddhist hierarchy of two thousand years ago were the only people who invented this jargon and understood its meaning. But they are long dead and with them has died the age of the *Tantras*. Yoga however, has outlived the cryptic in the *Tantras*. There are scholars who still understand and implement the subtle science of yoga contained in the *Tantras*. It is hard indeed to draw a clear-cut line between the yoga as understood and practised in Hinduism and the yoga as understood and practised in Buddhism. If there are any minor differences, they merely belong to nomenclature. Call them Hindu hermits or Buddhist ascetics, the

reality of their withdrawal from the world, for the sake of God, will not change. Give them any name possessing the same meaning, it would not make the slightest difference to their holy identity. Whatever they find and whatever they consider enlightenment to be, neither has ever been able to change the face of the world with their subjective experiences. It is a dishonour for Buddha<sup>(as)</sup> and Krishna<sup>(as)</sup> to be counted in this category. They were revolutionaries – like all other prophets of God, whose philosophy of the spiritual and moral revolution sprang forth from the fountainhead of revelation. They gave a call for a noble struggle against falsehood and evil. They sounded the bugle for a heroic strife in life which was not just subjective. It was an outward, outgoing holy war, which came into headlong clash with the forces of darkness. A dire struggle for the survival of the fittest ensued. The life histories of Buddha<sup>(as)</sup> and Krishna<sup>(as)</sup> clearly present them as belonging to this category. They are only warriors, not suicidal escapist. Their faiths were products of revelation. Their teachings gave birth to inspirations, but were not born out of them.

The understanding of the majority of present day Buddhists appears to be that their religion is just a wisdom, *budhi*, discovered by Buddha through meditation. All that is claimed of their philosophy is that it was an inspiration of Buddha.

From the vantage point of those who believe in God, inspiration is nothing but a psychic experience in which many a time one feels spiritually elated. During this phase of elation, one experiences a sense of peace which seems to be the very ultimate of tranquillity. Returning from this ecstatic state to normal life, one has a strong impression of having gained something which might well have been the very purpose of life – the goal which mankind is striving to reach.

This psychological experience is all that they can boast of as spiritual enlightenment and redemption from the bondage of matter. Even at its very best, it cannot change any objective realities or reform the wicked people. It cannot transfer a jot from the world of the unknown to the world

of the known – it cannot change darkness into light. Never has inspiration been able to retrieve the unknown events buried in the graves of history, nor has it ever been able to leap into the future to catch a glimpse of events to come.

If the philosophy of absolute self-negation is followed to its logical conclusion, it will inevitably lead to the extinction of the human race. To ascribe this inspirational jibberish to the Divinely enlightened wisdom of Buddha<sup>(as)</sup> does him no honour; this is not the Divine cup of revelation from which he drank deep and became immortalised!



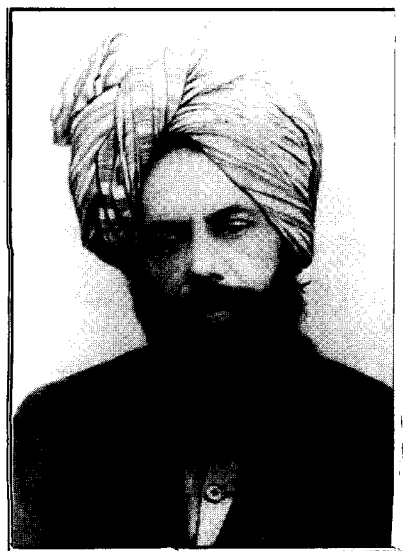
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# True Repentance

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**Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>(as)</sup>  
(The Promised Messiah and Mahdi)**

Presented below is a compilation of extracts that have been taken from the discourses and speeches of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>(as)</sup> of Qadian, the Promised Messiah and Mahdi, as recorded in the collection entitled *Malfoozat*.

*Translated by Amatul Hadi Ahmad  
[Translator's Note: All references to the verses of the Holy Qur'an are given in Arabic as they occur in the text. The English translation, presented in Italics is taken from the translation of the Holy Qur'an by Hadhrat Maulvi Sher Ali Sahib<sup>(ra)</sup>. Where the Promised Messiah<sup>(as)</sup> has himself stated a certain interpretation of the Arabic verse, this is incorporated in the main body of the text].*

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In Islam there have been designated certain days by God as being days of great happiness and endowed with great blessing from God. Among such days is the day of Friday. This day is a very blessed day and it is written that God created Adam on a Friday and it was on a Friday that Adam's repentance was accepted. There is much goodness and blessing in this day. Similarly, there are in Islam two days of Eid celebrations. Both these days are considered to be days of great happiness and joy and both the days are endowed with great blessings. Doubtless all such days are blessed

days of much happiness, but remember that there is one day that is even more blessed and of even greater happiness.

Regretfully, that day is not awaited by people with any anticipation, nor is it sought after. If people were aware of the blessings and the goodness of that day or if they cared for such a day, then in reality that day would be a day of great blessing and good fortune and people would consider it to be a great prize.

What day can be better and more blessed than the day of Friday and the days of Eid celebrations? I will tell you [of such a day] – that day is the day of one's repentance which is better than all other days and is better than every Eid. Why is it so? It is so because on such a day, the repentant person's '*book of bad deeds*' that was pushing him closer to hell and was gradually bringing him towards the wrath of God, is wiped clean and his past sins are forgiven. What greater day of happiness and celebration could there be for a human being than that which in reality saves him from eternal hell and God's eternal wrath? The sinner who was previously distanced from God Whose wrath

was upon him, after repentance becomes closer to God's blessing and is distanced from hell and from God's punishment as is stated by God in the Holy Qur'an:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ التَّوَّابِينَ  
وَيُحِبُّ الْمُتَطَهِّرِينَ

*Allah loves those who turn to him and loves those who keep themselves clean.*

(Ch.2: v.223)

That is, doubtless God befriends those who repent and those who wish to attain purity. From this verse we learn not only that God loves those who repent but also that true repentance carries with it the condition of true purity. To be distanced from all manner of filth and impurities is a necessary condition [for true repentance], otherwise the mere verbal repetition of the words of repentance can lead to no benefit. Hence, when a day is so blessed that a human being repents from all his bad deeds and makes a truthful vow of peace with God and bows his head before God's commandments then without doubt he will be saved from the punishment that was being prepared

as a consequence of his bad deeds. In this manner he attains that which he did not even have any hope of attaining.

You can imagine yourself what great joy a person would feel when having lost all hope of attaining something, in a state of complete hopelessness, he finds what he was seeking. His heart would feel a fresh and new life within. This is the reason for its mention in the Ahadith. From the Ahadith and previous holy books it is noted that God is very pleased with the life of a person when he escapes death from sin and finds a new life through repentance. In reality it is a matter of happiness that a person who is buried under sin, where death and destruction are closing down upon him from all directions, and the punishment of God is ready to swallow him and then, suddenly, he should repent from ill deeds and immoral acts that had become the cause of his distancing from God and move towards God. Such a time is a time of God's happiness and the angels in the heavens also celebrate this happy event. This is so because God Almighty does not wish that any servant of his should suffer ruin and destruction. On the contrary, God

wishes that even if his servant has erred and displayed weakness, he should repent and thereby enter (a state of) peace.

You should remember, therefore, that the day when a person repents from his sins is a very blessed day indeed and is the best of days because on such a day he finds a new life and is brought closer to God. In this respect, this day is a day of repentance (as many among you have today vowed that on this day they repent from their sins and in the future, so far as is possible for them, they would abstain from sins). In accordance with God's promises, I trust that every person who has repented with a true and sincere heart, shall be forgiven all of his previous sins by God. It is to such people that the Hadith [tradition of the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup>] applies, that:

The one who repents from sin is like the one who has not committed sin.

That is, we can say that it is as if such a person never committed any sin. However, I say this again that for the achievement of this objective, there is the condition that one should move towards true purity and true piety. Moreover, that the

repentance should not merely be a verbal repentance, but that it should be realized through action. It is no small matter that someone's sins should be forgiven – it is a most magnificent matter.

(*Malfoozat*, Vol. 7, pp.147-150)

Repentance is in reality a very effective means of aiding and stimulating the development of good morals and leads one to achieve moral perfection. In other words, for the person who wishes to bring about a change in his character in order to reform himself, it is essential that he should repent sincerely with a firm resolve.

It should be remembered that there are three conditions for repentance without the fulfillment of which true repentance cannot be achieved. The first of these three conditions is to rid oneself of ill thoughts that lead to bad inclinations and evil propensities. In reality, thoughts exercise great influence - every action has a notional existence in the form of 'thought' that precedes the action. Hence, the first condition for repentance is that evil thoughts and notions should be discarded.

For instance, if a man has an illicit relationship with a woman and desires to repent, it is necessary [in order to prepare himself mentally for this course of action], that he should think of her as unattractive and remind himself of her negative qualities. This is so because, as I have just stated, thoughts and fancies exercise a powerful influence. I have read that some Sufis carried their powers of thought to such extremes that they actually 'saw' some people in the form of an ape or a pig. In other words, thought influences that which is perceived. The first condition of repentance, therefore, is that all ideas and thoughts which are considered to give rise to evil pleasures should be discarded altogether.

The second condition of true repentance is remorse, that there should be some expression of regret and embarrassment. Everyone's conscience admonishes him over every evil but an unfortunate person leaves his conscience suspended. A person should express remorse over his sin and evil action and should reflect upon the fact that the pleasure to be derived [from bad deeds] is temporary. He should also consider that each repetition of an

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**THE FIRST OF THESE THREE CONDITIONS IS TO RID ONESELF OF ILL THOUGHTS THAT LEAD TO BAD INCLINATIONS AND EVIL PROPENSITIES. IN REALITY, THOUGHTS EXERCISE GREAT INFLUENCE – EVERY ACTION HAS A NOTIONAL EXISTENCE IN THE FORM OF ‘THOUGHT’ THAT PRECEDES THE ACTION. HENCE, THE FIRST CONDITION FOR REPENTANCE IS THAT EVIL THOUGHTS AND NOTIONS SHOULD BE DISCARDED.**

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evil deed causes a lessening of pleasure derived from it and that in the end, in old age, when his faculties are weakened, he will perforce have to give up all such pleasures. Why then indulge in that which in the end has to be given up, even in this life? Most fortunate is the person who turns in repentance and becomes determined to discard all corrupt thoughts and evil fancies and having succeeded in ridding himself of these impurities he should feel remorse and regret for his past ill deeds.

The third condition (of true repentance) is a firm resolve that he will not revert to those previous vices. If he adheres to this resolve, God will bestow upon him the strength of true repentance and he will be rid altogether of his vices (and he will be enabled to) replace these with good morals and praiseworthy deeds and this is a

victory over one's morals. However, it is for God Almighty to bestow the power and strength for such a victory for He is the Master of all power and all strength, as He has stated (in the Holy Qur'an):

أَنَّ الْقُوَّةَ لِلَّهِ جَمِيعًا

*All power belongs to Allah.*  
(Ch.2: v.166)

(*Malfoozat*, Vol.1, pp.138-140)

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It is quite apparent from that which God Almighty has informed us of through the Prophets and to which real events bear witness, that God has established a system of laws of punishment and reward that begins in this very world. The purpose of the punishment received in this world for whatever mischief and misdeed a human being commits, whether he himself feels it to be so

or not, is reprimand so that a mischievous person may create a significant change in his condition through repentance and turning to God. In addition, that he may, by becoming aware, establish and strengthen the relationship of serving God which had been hitherto overlooked.

The example of punishment received in this world by way of reprimand is like that of a school. Just as in a school light punishment is given to children because of their forgetfulness and laziness. The teacher's purpose in this is not to deprive a child from knowledge but to inform him of his own aim so that the child may be alert and careful in the future. Likewise, when God punishes wickedness and mischief, the purpose of it is this that the foolish human being whose actions are harming his own life, should refrain from his mischief. Moreover, that he may be informed of the consequences and as a result may fear God's omnipotence and turn to Him.

I have repeatedly stated this fact and now repeat it before you that when a person performs an action, an act of God consequently follows upon it.

For example, if we eat poison in sufficient quantity, the necessary consequence of this will be that we will be killed. Here taking the poison is our action over which God's act unfolds in that it kills. Or, as a further example, when we close the windows of a room in our house, this is our action upon which God's consequent action would be that there will be darkness in the room. This is the way in which the law of God's acts operates in the world in that the actions of a person are followed by a consequence that is God's act. Just as this system is apparent in the visible sphere and we daily find its examples in the physical world, it has a similar relationship with the inner realm of one's being. It is the very principle that is essential for understanding the law of punishment, that every action of ours, good or bad, carries an effect which comes into being after our action has taken place.

We can now easily understand the ideas of *Azab* and *Rahat* (i.e. torment and pleasure) which is given as a punishment for sins or as a reward for good deeds and I make this claim in the full knowledge that all other religions are completely unable and inadequate in explaining

this philosophy. Everyone who believes in God affirms that the human being has been created for God. That is why the climax of all his happiness and the basis of all his pleasure can only be in his becoming totally God's and establishing the relationship that should exist between *Uloohiyyat* and *Aboodiyyat*, (i.e. between the Divine, the one who is worshipped and the one who worships). In other words, this relationship is given but until a person establishes it firmly and brings it within the sphere of action (to promote it), he cannot attain true happiness.

The reason for the advent of Prophets is exactly this and they come with this important purpose that they wish to return to human beings the long lost treasure of the true relationship between the Divine and the one who submits completely with devotion to the Divine, i.e. between *Uloohiyyat* and *Aboodiyyat*. However, when a person distances himself from God, he detaches himself from the chain of love which should exist between God and his servant. Such action on the part of a human being is followed by an act of God which comes into operation and (as a

consequence) God too keeps away from such a person. It is as a result of this distancing from God that darkness appears on the human heart. Just as closing the door to the sun fills the room with darkness and invisibility, so turning away from God begin to fill the human heart with darkness. As he becomes more and more distanced, the darkness increase until the heart becomes completely blackened and it is this *Zulmat* (darkness) that is called *Jahannam* (hell) because from it emanates torment. However, if such a person were to adopt the means of escape from this torment such that would enable him to abandon actions which were the cause of his distancing from God, then God would turn to such a person with his mercy. Just as opening of windows removes darkness by returning the lost light, so the light of goodness which had vanished, is returned to the person who turns to God and he begins to benefit from it fully. Such is the true reality of repentance, example of which is clearly witnessed by us in the physical laws of nature.

(*Malfoozat*, Vol. 3, pp.22-24]



# Aspects of Belief

*Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad, the Fourth Head of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, from time to time offers to people of all nationalities, faiths and beliefs the opportunity of raising questions and issues that are of interest to them. Presented below are answers to some questions that were raised in sessions held in London on the 29th January 1995 and in Germany on the 25th May 1996 respectively.*

*Compiled by Amatul Hadi Ahmad*

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## **Questioner:**

There are people who are 'non-believers' [i.e. they are not Muslims] but they follow all the rules, commandments and the good things taught in [their own] religion. How would they be dealt with on the Day of Judgement?

Although Allah is Merciful and Forgiving and Gracious but I am also told that 'whoever is an enemy to Allah, Allah is an enemy to Him' and that 'there is a humiliating punishment for the *disbelievers* as they will be put into a humiliating fire'.

I don't think Allah is an enemy to anybody. Would you please tell us how this issue may be resolved?

## **Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad:**

This is a very important and fundamental question of universal applicability that you have raised. You have provided me an

opportunity to address this for the benefit of all the guests. I am grateful to you for this.

First of all, on the issue of those people who are basically and soundly good, who believe in revelation, of whatever form, as being from God. They believe that it is God who has given the injunctions and they follow these sincerely. The question is what would happen to such people? How would God treat them on the Day of Judgement?

This is a question that was raised, perhaps to your surprise, fourteen hundred years ago by God speaking to the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> of Islam. It is raised three times directly in the Holy Qur'an with a slight variation of words but always to the same effect, without exception. It speaks of those who believe in Prophet Muhammad<sup>(sa)</sup>. It speaks of those



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**HAVING LAID THIS FOUNDATION, THE HOLY QUR'AN THEN STATES THAT THERE IS NO FEAR FOR PEOPLE WHO DO GOOD DEEDS AND BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY ON THE DAY OF JUDGEMENT – THIS BEING A VERY IMPORTANT CONDITION THAT IS LAID DOWN, THAT IS, BELIEF IN BEING HELD TO ACCOUNT AFTER DEATH FOR THE DEEDS HERE ON EARTH.**

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who were Jews, who had believed earlier in certain Books and Prophets, and it speaks of Christians, referring to both of these groups by name and it speaks of all other people who believe in Divine Books.

Having laid this foundation, the Holy Qur'an then states that there is no fear for people who do good deeds and believe in the Resurrection and accountability on the Day of Judgement - this being a very important condition that is laid down, that is, belief in being held to account after death for the deeds here on earth.

This is the meaning of believing in the Day of Judgement. The Holy Qur'an states that there is no fear for such people - there is no remorse. Their reward will be with God and they are guaranteed peace and eternal heaven.

One cannot imagine a better promise from a benign God to all the people who in His eyes are good, true believers in whatever religion they believe in but, more importantly, act in accordance with the message of their own religion. They do righteous and good deeds and believe in their being answerable for their actions. This is very important.

The Holy Qur'an repeatedly emphasises the aspect of religion that one may say one believes in God, but if a person does not put God's injunctions or God's expectations into practice in his own life, then he will find that he is believing in a mythical God without realising it. This happens when one does not really believe in life after death and does not believe in the question of accountability. If such is the case then one may be living in a mythical world of one's own beliefs without achieving any change in one's

attitude to God or towards other human beings. Accountability, therefore, is highly important. This is in answer to the first part of your question.

I now turn to the latter part of your question regarding the punishment of fire for the 'non-believers'. The issue of 'hell' and 'heaven' is to be understood with reference to the Holy Qur'an where there is no ambiguity on the issue. It very clearly points out one fundamental fact. First of all, the verse you have quoted states that those who hate God, incur the hatred of God in return. You added, however, that God hates nobody. I would say that this is true because hatred begins not with God, but with others. So, what does it mean when it is said that *'God hates those who hate God'*? If you hate a creator, you hate his creation. If you were an enemy of even an artist, you would burn his works of art and destroy all his efforts. Hence, it is unreasonable to expect human beings to believe in a principle that a person must escape the consequences of the madness of his destruction of goodness.

Pursuant to this would be the belief that one should be left free to do whatever one likes and not be

answerable for it even after one's death. If you accept this then you deny that fundamental principle to which I referred earlier, that is the question of accountability. Remove accountability and there would be no order left in the world even in the government of those who do not believe in God. It is always accountability that keeps order in a state through man-made laws. It is the monitoring of the fact that people adhere to the law, not only to the letter of the law but also to the spirit of the law, that determines the state of peace in any particular society. The more people are mindful of their duty to the letter of the law as well as to the spirit of the law, the more peace would prevail. The less you think yourself to be accountable, the stricter become the legal measures to find you, to capture you and to bring you to face the law. But if there is a total lack of faith in people in the principles of law, in the principles of accountability, then nothing can be done for such a society.

So God is an enemy of those who are first themselves enemies of God and this is something from which there is no escape. If you do [escape from this], you escape into chaos. You apparently escape from the hell

of the hereafter, but you create a 'hell' for yourself here on this earth.

So far as the concept of hell is concerned, it is made very clear in the Holy Qur'an that each person makes his own 'hell'. There is nothing that comes from outside and the 'hell bound' souls that are created here in this world [by people's own deeds] know that they are 'hell bound'. They are never happy and content. They commit crime upon crime and keep on burning in a 'fire' that coaxes them on to further crime yet they never find any happiness or peace.

True happiness is found only in goodness and with reference to one's own personal experience. One knows oneself better than anyone else, that whenever you have created a 'heaven' for yourself here, you enjoy eternal bliss.

According to the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad<sup>(as)</sup> of Qadian, it is this creation of our own 'heaven' here on earth, and the creation of our own 'hell' here on this earth that would eventually materialise into some spiritual form to which we would be sent after death – the heaven of our own

creation, or the hell of our own making!

**Questioner:**

My question is why I should be a Muslim, a follower of Prophet Muhammad, and how can I become one?

**Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad:**

If you become a believer in God, that is the first step towards religion and when you become a believer in God the best approach to this issue should be to ask, which is the religion that can help you get closer to God quicker than other religions, with greater certainty and with less danger? As such, when you look upon religions in comparison with Islam, Islam's distinctive features will rise above upon the horizon where they could not be confused with the features of other religions.

For instance, when you believe in God, you also believe in the universality of God. It is impossible for you to believe that God sent His Messengers only to one particular people, at one particular time and forgot all His other creations everywhere else in the world. If it is such a God, it is better not to believe in Him. God can only be believed in if He is universal. So, find the

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**SO FAR AS THE CONCEPT OF HELL IS CONCERNED, IT IS MADE VERY CLEAR IN THE HOLY QUR'AN THAT EACH PERSON MAKES HIS OWN 'HELL'. THERE IS NOTHING THAT COMES FROM OUTSIDE AND THE 'HELL BOUND' SOULS THAT ARE CREATED HERE IN THIS WORLD (BY PEOPLE'S OWN DEEDS) KNOW THAT THEY ARE 'HELL BOUND'. THEY ARE NEVER HAPPY AND CONTENT. THEY COMMIT CRIME UPON CRIME AND KEEP ON BURNING IN A 'FIRE' THAT COAXES THEM ON TO FURTHER CRIME YET THEY NEVER FIND ANY HAPPINESS OR PEACE.**

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elements of universality in religion. In whichever religion you find universality depicted and maintained, that is the best religion.

For instance, when one becomes a Christian, it is not essential for one to believe in Buddha<sup>(as)</sup>, to believe in Krishna<sup>(as)</sup>, to believe in Zoroasthra<sup>(as)</sup> or in any other Prophet of God. Belief in Christ alone is considered to be sufficient. One cannot even believe in the truth of Prophet Muhammad<sup>(sa)</sup> because if one did, one would not remain Christian.

In Islam, it is exactly the opposite. A belief in Islam requires a person to believe in Buddha<sup>(as)</sup>, to believe in Krishna<sup>(as)</sup>, to believe in Jesus<sup>(as)</sup>, to believe in Moses<sup>(as)</sup>, to believe in all the Prophets of God who appeared all across the world. What, then, is

to be considered a better teaching? Islam, obviously! It is a universal religion. It relates to the concept of God having created all human beings.

If you were to compare Islamic teachings with the teachings of other religions, you will be led to Islam by the force of argument, by the force of rationality. There will be no other choice left for you.

That is one way of reaching Islam. The second is by praying to God. If you want to reach God, why not ask Him which is the best path? If you turn to Him with all sincerity, with a resolution that if you are led by Him to a faith, whatever that may be, you will follow it, God will, then, take care of you. This is the surest and the easiest path to God.

**Questioner:**

If Islam has an objective to unite people why is it that the believers are so disunited today and what has the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association done towards uniting people?

**Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad:**

It is correct that those who believe in Islam today are disunited. Those who believe in Christianity today are also disunited. Those who believe in other religions are also disunited. The fact is that truth does not disunite – it unites.

If one were to apply the same standard to the Ahmadiyya Community, one would find that Ahmadis, whether they are in Kosovo or in Mauritius, in Europe or in America, wherever they are, they are all united. This is the strength of the Ahmadiyya Community. This is why we claim that our objective is to unite people. We have demonstrated our unity.

The Ahmadiyya Community is a united body even though it is spread all over the world. Some non-Ahmadi scholars have also noted this fact and they say it is amazing that Ahmadis are the only religious people who are united not only in

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**IN ISLAM, IT IS EXACTLY THE OPPOSITE. A BELIEF IN ISLAM REQUIRES A PERSON TO BELIEVE IN BUDDHA<sup>(AS)</sup>, TO BELIEVE IN KRISHNA<sup>(AS)</sup>, TO BELIEVE IN JESUS<sup>(AS)</sup>, TO BELIEVE IN MOSES<sup>(AS)</sup>, TO BELIEVE IN ALL THE PROPHETS OF GOD WHO APPEARED ALL ACROSS THE WORLD. WHAT, THEN, IS TO BE CONSIDERED A BETTER TEACHING?**

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their beliefs but around a central authority of the Caliphate which moulds their character alike. For instance, Immigration Officers who have seen and interviewed Ahmadis arriving in the UK from all over the world for the Annual Convention, remark that they are amazed at the fact that all Ahmadis share a certain similarity of conduct and general demeanour. It is the unity of Ahmadis that is proof of the truth of Ahmadiyyat.



# Lives of the Caliphs – Part 1

by Dr. Fareed Ahmad - UK

*This is the first part of an article first published in the Muslim Herald magazine in the November/ December 1974 issue. It covers the events of the lives of the Caliphs (Khulafae Rashideen), the first four successors to the Holy Prophet Mohammad(sa).*

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After the death of the Holy Prophet Muhammad(sa) in the year 632 CE, the Muslims were led in turn by four great leaders - the early Caliphs of Islam. The story of the lives and achievements of these extraordinary men - Hadhrat Abu Bakr(ra), Hadhrat Umar(ra), Hadhrat Uthman(ra) and Hadhrat Ali(ra) – is in itself the story of Islam during its miraculous rise into the world.

These great Caliphs had been intimates of the Prophet(sa) and had been among the early converts to Islam. They had fought side by side in the Muslim ranks since the historic battle of Badr and had served the Prophet(sa) steadfastly in every crisis. Now, when each of these men was called to the Caliphate, each fulfilled his responsibilities to the utmost in guiding Islam through its critical years. They ruled for a total of 30 glorious years and their term, of office has been designated as that of

the *Khilafat-e-Rashidah* or the Guided Caliphate. For, within these years and spanning only a single generation after the Prophet(sa), the Muslim empire had extended from the Oxus to the lands in North Africa and the armies of Rome and Persia had been annihilated.

Tragically, however, dissensions within the Muslims themselves were to lead to the downfall of the Caliphate. The closing years of the Guided Caliphate are a sad chapter in the history of Islam. These infamous years were riddled with rebellion and civil war. The days of the Prophet(sa) were forgotten, Muslim fought Muslim, the great conquests were brought to a temporary standstill and the Muslims were split into rival factions. The true Caliphate, with its numerous spiritual blessings, was thus brought to an untimely end.

In this age. God Almighty, out of

His Grace, has again established for us an upright Caliphate in the persons of the Caliphs of the Promised Messiah<sup>(as)</sup>. The early Muslims faltered in their loyalty to the Caliphate and their actions thrust millions into a spiritual wilderness. Now, we have the opportunity to study the events of the Khilafate-Rashidah, and in studying its greatness, we must also reflect upon the mischievous intrigues which led to its downfall.

In understanding the mistakes of the Muslims in those days, we must make sure that these are not repeated, and in doing so ensure that we are never deprived of the great gift of Caliphate ever again. When the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> died peacefully in the summer of 632 CE, Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> was not in Medina. On the morning of the day of the Prophet's death, Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> had obtained permission from the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> to visit an oasis a few miles from the city.

Stunned with grief, the people of Medina began to gather in the great mosque. Umar<sup>(ra)</sup>, who was later to become the second Caliph, was also present but he was utterly flabbergasted with shock. For many

years, Umar's life had been dominated by devotion to his leader, and his mind seemed incapable of accepting that the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> had died. He even drew his sword and threatened to kill anybody who said the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> was dead. Meanwhile, a messenger had been rushed to Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> with the news, who then immediately hurried back to Medina. A man of 60, frail and slightly built, Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> walked silently through the crowd and across the courtyard of the great mosque into Aisha's room and asked her: 'Has the Prophet died?' 'Yes', replied Aisha.

Then, he went straight to where the Prophet's body was lying, uncovered the face, bent down and kissed the forehead. Tears welling from his eyes, he said,

'God is our Witness. Death will not come upon you twice over.'

Having uttered this great sentence over the peaceful features of his master, Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> emerged to address the Muslims. As he stood, Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> too stood by him, determined that if Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> said the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> was dead, Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> must pay with his life. As Abu

Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> started to speak, Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> tugged at his shirt threatening him but Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> refused to stop. He then recited the verse from the Qur'an:

*And Muhammad is only a Messenger. Verily, all Messengers have passed away before him. If, then, he die or be slain, will you turn back on your heels.?*

(Ch.3: v.145)

The verse made clear that Muhammad<sup>(sa)</sup> was simply a man who had delivered a Message from God as other Messengers had done before him. Those before him had also died. If then, Muhammad<sup>(sa)</sup> should die, would they turn back on everything that they had been taught? The wise Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> then added a word of his own: 'Those amongst you who worship God.' he said, 'let them know that God is still alive and will forever remain alive. But those amongst you who worshipped Muhammad, let them know it from me that Muhammad is dead.' The Companions recovered their balance at this timely speech and even Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> began to realise the full portent of the words of Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> and he collapsed.

In those few but significant words, Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> had exhibited his greatest quality, the complete understanding he had of the mission of the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup>, and his total faith that Allah's hand would lead Islam through the stage of crisis.

### **Hadhrat Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup>**

The Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> had left no precise instructions as to his successor but the gentle Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> had been his dearest friend and was the most respected amongst the Companions and he was chosen as the first Caliph of Islam. The years of his Caliphate were to be spent in consolidating the people of Arabia and setting the stage for the great expansion of Islam which came later on. It was, however, in his first days as Caliph, that he suddenly became faced with a dire situation.

No sooner did the news spread that Prophet Muhammad<sup>(sa)</sup> was dead than a number of tribes stopped paying Zakat on the pretext that they had concluded a treaty with the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> and therefore did not owe Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> any allegiance. This rebellion is known in Islamic history as the *apostacy*. Many of the representatives of the Caliph who had been sent to these now hostile



tribes were killed and others forced to flee back to Medina.

At the same time, there began to spring up certain men all over Arabia who started claiming that they were also prophets. Among the most notable were Tulaiha who was chief of the Bani Asad tribe and another named Musailama. Urgent action needed to be taken. There was at this time in Medina a Muslim army which had been preparing to go to the Roman frontier in revenge of an enemy attack at Mota. Due to the Prophet's illness preceding his death, the army's departure had been delayed. Considering the fresh danger which had now arisen, and with hostile tribes heading for Medina, Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> advised that the Muslim soldiers remain in the city to be on hand to deal with the emergency. But Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> immediately overruled him:

‘Never shall I consent to alter the smallest detail of an order given by the Prophet of God’.

The troops were led by the 20-year-old Usama ibn Zaid whose father had been the freed slave and adopted son of the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup>, and who had died in action at Mota. Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup>

walked alongside the army for a short distance to bid the soldiers farewell. Usama was on his horse and immediately remarked,

‘O Khalifa, mount and ride, or else I will dismount and walk beside you’.

But Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> replied firmly:

‘I will not ride. I will walk and soil my feet for a little space in the way of God’.

Then, after saying a prayer and giving his final orders, Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> walked back to Medina, which was now virtually undefended. Meanwhile, some of the insurgent tribes sent messengers to Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> offering peace if the Zakat was abolished. The Caliph sent back a determined reply. Not even a piece of old rope would be deducted from the tax. Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> then called a gathering of the Companions where he declared war on the dissenting tribes. He asked for advice as to the mode of action, but everyone kept silent. Then Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> stood up, and in a thundering voice said:

‘O ye Muslims! What has happened to you? Why do you

not welcome the command of the Khalifa so that he may cause you to attain eternal life?’

At this, Khalid bin Saeed stood up and said:

‘Sir, we are all willing to obey’.

The Companions volunteered to form a militia and were sent out to quell the rebellion. Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup>, himself a brave man, led many of the sorties in person but the Companions tried to dissuade him from doing so by telling him that the Caliph should not take such risks. But Abu Bakr was quite adamant. ‘I will go out with you and be your comrade and one of yourselves’, he replied.

It was not until September 632, however, when Usama returned with the main Muslim army that a major offensive could be launched. Now, Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> launched eleven independent columns to operate simultaneously in different directions. At the same time, he sent messages to the insurgent tribes offering them pardon if they repented. One of the great commanders at his disposal was Khalid bin Waleed and he was sent

into the Najd desert with 4,000 men to deal first with the false prophet Tulaiha and his tribe Bani Asad. The two armies met at Buzakha and Khalid won the battle outright. Tulaiha himself escaped with his family to Syria, was later pardoned, became a Muslim and fought bravely in the wars against Persia. Khalid's army marched on further, now with the aim of destroying the other pretender to prophethood, Musailama. Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> sent in reinforcements from Mecca and Medina and a bloody battle was fought at Yemama. and in the final stages, in a vast orchard now remembered as the *Garden of Death*.

Musailama's army had numbered 100,000; Khalid's forces a mere 13,000. Casualties were terrible and many of the close Companions of the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> died. Musailama was slain and 7,000 of his men perished. Three thousand Muslims were martyred, among them 500 who knew the Qur'an by heart. It was the loss of so many eminent Muslims that inspired Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> to approach Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> and advise that the Qur'an be collected together in the form of a proper book.

In other areas of Arabia, the Muslim columns were marching on triumphantly. Ikrima, the son of Abu Jahal, advanced into Oman, defeated the enemy and then entered the Yemen and captured the province. All these events occupied exactly one year of the Caliphate of Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup>. Now, all Arabia was united under one firm rule and the Muslims were now in a position to deal with the designs of the Persians and the Romans.

The first incidents of the Muslim conquests took place on the Persian border. In March 633, the Muslims, under Khalid bin Waleed defeated a Persian contingent at Kadhima near the Persian Gulf and chased the fleeing Persians to within 100 miles of the capital, Medina. On the Roman frontier, three Muslim armies marched into Syria and Palestine. In July 634, the Roman emperor Heraclius raised a vast army to deal with the army of Amr ibn al Aasi who was supreme commander on the Syrian front. Word of the Roman advance reached Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> who immediately sent orders to Khalid to leave the Persian front and make all haste to reinforce Amr's army. Khalid bin Waleed was at this time

over a thousand miles away but on receiving the orders, and realising the gravity of Amr's situation, he set off across the uncharted desert to pull off one of history's greatest rescues. Mile after mile, Khalid's army marched on, often with little rest and no sleep. After days of forced marches, Khalid at last linked up forces with Amr at Ajnadain. He was just in time, because the Romans were already forming up in battle readiness. A tremendous battle was fought and the Romans were completely defeated.

Meanwhile, in Iraq which was then part of the Persian empire, Muthana ibn Haritha had been placed in command of the Muslim forces. A man of renowned courage, Muthana captured a number of Persian positions before stopping the offensive because of lack of numbers. He decided to ask Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> for more reinforcements and set off in person for Medina. On the day he arrived, Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> was very ill. Nevertheless, the Caliph immediately gave him audience and Muthana made his request.

Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> ordered Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> to raise fresh levies and send them to strengthen the forces in Iraq. Later

on that day, the gentle Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> passed away. It was the 23rd August, 634. Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> had been born three years after the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> and was therefore about 60 years old when he became Caliph. He ruled for exactly 2 years, 3 months and 11 days. The first year of his caliphate had been spent dealing with the apostates, but in his second year of office, the Muslim armies had swept northwards and Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> was able to conduct the pilgrimage in person. Two years before, the Holy Prophet Muhammad<sup>(sa)</sup> himself led his Farewell Pilgrimage and Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> wept as memories of those blessed times flooded back to him.

Sitting in the public courtyard of the Ka'aba, he called on anyone who had complaints against him to come forward and seek justice, but tradition asserts that no man with a grievance could be found. As a young man, Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> had been held in great esteem and had been elected chief of the tribe, Bani Teem. He had been a close friend of the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> since childhood. When the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> received his first revelation, Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> who was then a simple merchant, was not in Mecca. When he returned, he was approached by the Meccans and

urged to beware of his friend Muhammad<sup>(sa)</sup>, who they said, was making strange claims. Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> was not deterred and went directly to the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> and asked him what had happened. The Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> embarked on a long explanation but Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> said that all he wanted to know was whether the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> had really had a message from God.

The Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> again tried to explain, and again Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> requested that he wanted a simple answer as to whether God had addressed him, or not. The Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> replied, 'Yes', and Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> immediately declared his faith. He had known the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> long and intimately and could not for a moment doubt his integrity. Having declared his faith, he said that any argument would have detracted him from the true value of his faith. From then on, Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> devoted his services to the cause of Islam.

During the persecution of Mecca, he paid the ransoms of many slave converts who were being maltreated by their masters. One of these slaves was Bilal<sup>(ra)</sup>, the Abbyssinian African who was to become the first *muezzin* (caller to prayer) in Islam.

Once, when the Prophet(sa) was in prayers, some of the Meccans pulled a mantle around his neck and started pulling him. Admonishing the attackers, Abu Bakr(ra) said:

'You seek to kill him, because he says God is His Master?'

Abu Bakr(ra) himself was not immune from persecution. Once he was even forced to flee the city. Outside Mecca, he was met by one Ibn-ud-Daghinah who asked him on what errand he was going. He replied that he had left Mecca because of persecution by his people. Ibn-ud-Daghinah persuaded Abu Bakr(ra) to return and rebuked the Meccans for persecuting such a good-natured man. When the majority of Muslims emigrated to Medina leaving the Prophet(sa) in Mecca, Abu Bakr(ra) finally accompanied him on the dangerous escape from the city. The two took refuge in the cave Thaur, a few miles from Mecca. The Meccan trackers managed to follow them and arrived in the precincts of the cave. Standing at the mouth of the cave, the tracker said that Muhammad(sa) was either in the cave or had ascended to heaven. Abu Bakr(ra) heard this and his heart sank.

'The enemy has nearly got us', he whispered. "Fear not, God is with us", replied the Prophet(sa). 'I fear not for myself', went on Abu Bakr(ra), 'but for you. For, if I die, I am but an ordinary mortal, but if you die, it will mean death to faith and spirit'. (Zurqani)

This great concern for the Prophet(sa) and for his mission is virtually the epitome of the life of Abu Bakr(ra). During the period in Medina, the Prophet(sa) once asked the Companions for monetary contributions towards the cause of Islam. Umar(ra) went home and brought half its contents and placed them before the Prophet(sa). But he was well surpassed by Abu Bakr(ra) who brought out everything from his house to offer to the Prophet(sa).

The Prophet asked,

'Abu Bakr, have not you left anything at home?'

Abu Bakr replied:

'No, Messenger of Allah, the name of Allah and that of His Prophet will alone suffice at home'.

He remained close to the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> at all times, always next to him during battle and guarding over him at night. He was one of those ten fortunate persons whom the love of God had so blessed according to a saying of the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup>, that he was one of the men of Paradise. During the closing months of the Prophet's life, the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> rose to address the Faithful:

‘Today, I have had a revelation:  
“When the help of Allah comes,  
and victory, and thou seest men  
entering into the religion of  
Allah in troops, extol thou the  
glory of Thy Lord with His  
Praise and seek forgiveness of  
Him. Verily, He is Oft-Returning  
with Compassion, Merciful”’  
(Ch.110: Vs.2-4)

That is to say, the time is coming when with the help of God multitudes were to join the fold of Islam. It was then to be the duty of the true believer to thank Allah by praising Him and praying that all obstacles be removed in the establishment of the Faith. The Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> then related a short parable. He said:

‘God said to a man, “If it pleases

you, you may return to Me, or you may work a little longer at reforming the world”. The man replied that he preferred to return to his Lord’.

Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> was among the audience. He had been listening to this last address of the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> with fervour and anxiety, the fervour of a great believer and the anxiety of a friend and follower who could see in this address the hints of the Prophet's nearing death. On hearing the parable, Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> broke down and began to weep. The other Companions, who had only taken a surface view of the Prophet's speech were amazed when Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> started crying and Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> in particular was more annoyed than the rest. The Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> was relating the coming victories of Islam, and yet this man was crying. But only the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> understood what was happening. Only Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup>, he thought had really understood him. Only he had perceived that the verses which heralded future glory for Islam also portended the Prophet's approaching death.

The Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> went on to say:

‘Abu Bakr is very dear to me. If

it were permissible to love anyone more than others, I would so have loved Abu Bakr. But that degree of love is only for God. O my people, all the doors which open to the mosque should be closed from today except the door of Abu Bakr.'

There was no doubt that this last instruction of the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> constituted a Prophecy that Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> would become the first Caliph. To lead the faithful in prayers, he would have to come to the mosque five times a day and for this he would have to keep open the door of his house into the mosque. It has been said that one of the strongest arguments in favour of Prophet Muhammad's sincerity is indeed the life and character of Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup>. Simplicity was his mode of life. During his first six months as Caliph, he used to travel back and forth daily from al-Sunh where he lived in a modest household with his wife Haribah, to his capital Medina. He received no income, and all business was transacted in the courtyard of the mosque.

One Western historian, John Bagot Glubb in his book *The Great Arab Conquests*, brilliantly sums up the

life of Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> as follows:

'For Muhammad's first successor was a man of simple character and transparent devotion. Following the example of the Prophet, the great victories and rapidly increasing wealth of the Muslims made no difference to his way of life. He lived in what we should call a hut, made of sun-dried mud and bricks and roofed with palm-fronds. As ruler of a rapidly expanding empire, his clothing still consisted of a cotton shirt and a rough cloak, similar to those which he had worn fifteen years earlier as a common citizen of Mecca. He was not above milking the goats for his little family, even while his armies were driving back the legions of Caesar and the levies of the King of Kings'.

During his last days, he determined to appoint a successor and sent for a few leading Muslims. All favoured Hadhrat Umar ibn al Khattab<sup>(ra)</sup>. He told Uthman<sup>(ra)</sup> to write out an ordinance appointing Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> to succeed him and gave instructions for this testament to be read out to the people assembled in the mosque.

When near his end, he enquired what day of the week it was, and was told it was a Monday, the day on which the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> had also died.

‘If I die tonight’, he said ‘do not delay my burial till tomorrow, for the dearest of days for me is that on which the Apostle of God also died’.

Then he urged Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> who was beside him, to restrain the violence of his temper and to use mildness and persuasion. Soon after, he breathed his last with a prayer on his lips and was buried next to the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup>.

#### **Hadhrat Umar ibn al Khattab<sup>(ra)</sup>**

The new Caliph was to prove as capable and as devoted to his task as Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup>. Both had one quality in common: they were determined to follow in every detail the actions and words of the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup>. This determination made them both humble and pious for they were not seeking their own advantage and grandeur. Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> was physically a very strong man and is said to have been so tall that he towered above the crowd when walking through the streets of Medina. In his young age he was greatly feared because of his

violence and quick temper, but with age and responsibility, he was transformed into a man of great humility and compassion. The conversion of Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> to Islam, although over seven years after the Prophet's Call, could be said to be as inspiring as that of Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup>.

Originally, Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> had been greatly opposed to the new movement. One day, he decided that it was time to put an end to all the trouble which had erupted in Mecca and he drew his sword and set off to kill the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup>. On the way, a passer-by told him that his own sister and her husband had professed Islam. Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> was so enraged at hearing this that he changed direction and rushed to his sister's house. When he reached the steps, Umar's sister and his brother-in-law were reading the Qur'an. Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> angrily denounced them for their being converted and then struck his sister a blow on the face causing her to bleed. Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> was suddenly overcome at the sight of the wound he had inflicted on his sister and he asked to be allowed to read the Qur'an. Having read a few verses, he admitted that he was truly impressed by their beauty and straitforwardness. Immediately, he set off to pay allegiance to the



Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup>. So great was his hurry that he even forgot to return his sword to its scabbard and when the Companions saw his tail frame heading towards them, they were startled.

The Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> went forward and opened the door of the house and Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> stepped in. The Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> asked: 'How do you come, Umar?' 'I have become a Muslim, O Prophet of God', said Umar<sup>(ra)</sup>, and the Companions marvelled at the miracle which had occurred. Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> was 33 years old when he accepted Islam, and his conversion greatly strengthened the position of the Muslims. Thereafter, he spared no pains to assist the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> and his fellow Muslims. At the time of the Hijra, while the other Muslims were leaving the city in strict secrecy, Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> went to the courtyard of the Ka'aba where all the Quraish chiefs had assembled. He went round the Ka'aba and said his prayer. Then he addressed the chiefs saying:

'You detestable creatures! Whosoever of You wants his mother sonless, his children orphaned and his wife a widow, let him come and fight with me here'.

None dared to take up the challenge. He accompanied the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> through all the major campaigns and exhibited exemplary perseverance. The first acts of Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> as Caliph were to appoint Abu Ubaid as supreme commander of the Syrian campaign over Khalid bin Waleed and at the same time to raise a new levy for Iraq as Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> had instructed. In October 634, the Persians under their General Rustem, overwhelmed Muthana ibn Haritha's army in the Euphrates valley. But a year later, Muthana got his revenge at Buwaib and the Muslims advanced to the gates of the Persian capital, Medain.

Meanwhile, in Syria, Khalid was pressing on to the *Queen of Cities* - Darnascus, and in September 635, the Roman garrison surrendered. In accordance with Abu Bakr's parting lecture to the troops the year before, the terms of surrender which were to become a model for future captures were as follows:

'In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful. This is what Khalid bin Waleed would offer to the inhabitants of Damascus if he enters therein. He promises to give them security for their lives, property

and. churches. Their city wall shall not be demolished, neither shall any Muslim be quartered in their houses. Thereunto we give them the pact of Allah and the protection of his Prophet, the caliphs and the believers. So long as they pay the poll tax, nothing but good shall befall them’.

The leniency and tolerance of these conditions so impressed the Christian tribes of Syria that the Muslim armies found new friends everywhere in the territory. The following year, an immense Roman army numbering between 100,000 to 200,000 made the final attempt to push the Muslims out of Syria and Palestine. In a desperate three-day long battle, the Christian armies were exterminated and the fate of Syria was settled once and for all.

Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> recalled his victorious general, Khalid bin Waleed, and appointed Abu Ubaida as governor of Syria. He then placed Amr ibn al Aas as commander of the forces advancing on Jerusalem. The Holy City fell without bloodshed in January 637 and the surrender terms were identical to those offered to the inhabitants of Damascus. Once

again, the Christians were not to be molested and their places of worship were to be safeguarded by the Muslims. It was fitting also that Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> himself should come to Jerusalem to sign the treaty, at the request of the defeated Greek governor, Sophronius. Setting out in his usual patched and modest clothing, Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> rode up to Palestine. Abu Ubaid and Yezed ibn Sofian rode south to meet him, dressed in rich robes and their horses gaily decorated. Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> was greatly annoyed.

‘Do you come to me dressed like that?’ he demanded angrily. ‘Have you changed so much in two years?’

The abashed generals, tradition relates, replied that the change was only on the surface and that beneath they had their normal armour. But Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> was pacified with difficulty. The terms of surrender were drawn up in the cantonment of Jabiya south of Jerusalem and Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> then set off on the last stage of the journey to the Holy City itself.

Seated on a donkey and wearing his normal clothes, Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> taught the throng of Christian commanders and

bishops a good lesson in humility. He accepted the surrender at the city gates. By chance, Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> was viewing the church of the Holy Sepulchre when the time came round for the Zuhr prayer. An attendant was about to spread his mat on the floor of the church when Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> intervened and said that if he prayed in the church, then the Muslims might want to seize it as a mosque. Accordingly, he went outside and prayed outside the wall, and the place is marked by a small mosque. Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> seems to have behaved with special modesty and courtesy towards the people of Jerusalem. During the course of this visit, he attended to other affairs concerned mainly with the administration of the new provinces. Finally, in the Spring of 638, the simple ruler rode away into the desert back towards Medina.

Such were the events on the Roman front, but in Persia too, the Muslim armies had not been idle. Muthana ibn Haritha had died of wounds sustained at the battle of Biwaib and Saad ibn abi Waqqas, a veteran of Badr, was now in command. In April 637, Saad defeated the entire Persian army at Qadasiya in a savage battle fought over four

bloody days. Nearly 10,000 Muslims were martyred, and the great Persian commander Rustem was killed in retreat. By the time Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> returned from Jerusalem in April 638, Saad was at the gates of Medain, the supreme capital of the Persian empire.

In a daring operation, Saad managed to cross the river Euphrates on to the bank where Medain was situated and completely surprised the Persians. The city was taken, and the grateful Muslims found themselves in possession of the imperial regalia and all the riches of Persia. Saad established himself in the royal palace, the great banqueting hall became a mosque; the rule of Chosroes had ended. The Persian king, Yezdegird withdrew with the remainder of his shattered forces and waited for the opportunity to strike again. In the year 639, there was famine in Arabia. Long trains of camels with foodstuffs were summoned from Syria, Palestine and Iraq but even these supplies fell short. Umar<sup>(ra)</sup>, to set an example to the rest, refused all but the most meagre diet as that to which the poorest people had been reduced. During these desperate weeks, Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> used to go forth at night

accompanied by one servant and carrying a bag of flour and a goatskin of oil between them. There, in the dark streets of Medina, they would supply the needs of the poor whom they might encounter. Sometimes, the sack of flour would prove inadequate, and they would return to obtain another.

On one occasion, the caliph seated himself on the ground beside a hungry old woman and her small children, and helped her to light a fire and cook the food which he had provided. Like Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup>, Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> ruled the Muslims and looked after their needs as the Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> would have truly desired. The simplicity and democracy of his rule stunned the prisoners of war who streamed in from the cities of Persia and Syria. They were accustomed to seeing the great palaces and imperial grandeur of Persia and Rome when they came to Medina, it was but a simple mud-built town.

In the dusty square of the city, they would see a circle of Arabs sitting on the ground. One of these, a tall man with a patched cloak would prove to be Umar<sup>(ra)</sup>, the world's most powerful emperor. The story is related of a plaintiff coming to

Medina and asking how it would be possible to obtain an appointment to see the Caliph. He was told, 'There is no door between him and the people, you can speak to him every day in the street and in the mosque'. An extremely scrupulous man, he would constantly ensure that the treasures which arrived from the conquests were justly distributed.

Once, a chest of jewels was presented to him and he ordered them to be placed in the treasury room. But the presence of so much wealth worried his conscience and he sent for his servant and ordered that the contents be sold and the money distributed to the soldiers as quickly as possible. Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> once enquired of Salman, the Persian convert: 'Am I a king or a Caliph?' Salman answered: 'If you have levied from the lands of the Muslims one dirham, or more, or less, and applied it unlawfully, you are a king, not a Caliph'. And Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> wept. (*Al Tabari Ta'rikh ar Rusul-wa'l-Muluk*)

Tabari recounts how Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> said in a public speech that he never sent governors to the provinces that they might beat people and seize their goods, but that they be kind and instruct them on the teachings of

Islam. On another occasion, he is reported to have said that if he were able, he would wish to tour all the provinces, spending some time in each area so that he could be certain that every man under Muslim rule could come forward and address to his many complaints.

An interesting story is related of Umar's visit to Syria. When journeying northwards, he spent a night as the guest of the Christian bishop of Aqaba. When about to go to bed, Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> removed his shirt and pointed to a small tear and requested if it could be patched up by the morning. At dawn, the bishop returned with the shirt, duly sewn up, and underneath tactfully concealed a new shirt. The bishop was just about to leave when Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> noticed the second garment. 'What is this?' he enquired. The good bishop was embarrassed. 'We thought you might need a second shirt on your long journey', he said. 'My old one will be more comfortable', replied Umar<sup>(ra)</sup>, handing the new one back to the bishop.

It was during his visit to Syria that Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> discussed with Amr the possibility of an advance on Egypt.

Egypt was definitely not an easy proposition for the Muslim armies and Gibbon in '*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*' clearly outlines why:

'The magnanimous Omar trusted in his God and his sword, which had shaken the thrones of Chosroes and Caesar, but when he compared the slender force of the Moslems with the greatness of the enterprise, he condemned his own rashness. The pride and the greatness of the Pharaoh and his family were familiar to the readers of the Koran; ... the cities of Egypt were many and populous: their architecture was strong and solid., and the granary of the imperial city would be defended obstinately by the Roman powers'.

Nevertheless. the order was given, and on 12 December 639, Amr ibn al Aasi marched into Egypt. Although large areas of territory were captured, the capital Babylon on the site of present day Cairo, held out till over two years later. It was then that Amr, reinforced by troops under Zubair ibn al Awwam, a leading Companion, managed to storm the fort and occupy the city.

Later on, Alexandria fell too. When the surrender terms for Egypt were concluded, Amr ibn al Aasi sent a messenger post haste to relay the news to Medina. The messenger arrived in Medina one day at noon and made his camel kneel outside the mosque. A girl chanced to see him and asked who he was. He replied that he was a messenger from Amr. The girl immediately told Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> who invited the messenger in. Thus, simply was the news carried and received.

A sequel to the conquest of Egypt was that it came to the Caliph's attention that Amr had acquired great riches and commodities some of which were not accounted for. 'I have had enough experience of dishonest officials', relayed the caliph. 'My suspicion has been aroused against you, and I have sent Muhammad ibn Maslama to divide with you whatever you possess'. When the caliph's auditor had corrected the situation, Amr remarked that strange times indeed come upon him when the son of Hantama (the mother of Umar<sup>(ra)</sup>) was treating him thus. The clever Maslama immediately silenced him: 'Had it not been for this age of ibn Hantama', he said, 'you would be

today bending in the courtyard of your house, at the feet of a goat, whose abundance of milk would please you or whose scarcity would cause you dismay'.

The last decisive victory of Umar's golden reign was against the remnants of the Persian forces under Yezdegird in 642. The Muslims were led by Naaman ibn Muqarrin and the battle was fought at Nehawand to the north of the Zagros mountains. Naaman's army suffered heavy casualties; he himself was killed, but the Persian army was utterly routed and the might of the Persian empire was broken for ever.

The messenger sent with news of the victory related later that he had found Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> wandering through the streets of Medina, 'The others were just poor Muslims', interposed the caliph, 'but it is no loss to them if Umar does not know them, for God knows them'. The power of Rome and Persia had been destroyed and the Muslim armies advanced relentlessly. By June, 643, the major cities of Isfahan and Rei, and Tripoli in Africa were secure under Muslim control.

Umar al Khattab<sup>(ra)</sup> was truly one of

history's great rulers. He was the very embodiment of equity and justice and a pattern of caliphate. Undoubtedly, he was a statesman of intelligence and great foresight and an able administrator. He appointed governors to the provinces, appropriating them full power and sent agents to assist them. By keeping a tight reign on these lieutenants, he assured the unity of the empire. When new provinces were conquered, he left the land in the hands of the previous owners.

Among his many other notable achievements, he instituted the Hijra calendar in the realisation that the Emigration was the turning point in the fortunes of Islam. He also initiated the compiling of a register of pensioners, introduced the system of post and encouraged the writing of history and the art of coinage. In territories which had been definitely conquered, Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> endeavoured to set up efficient administrations and in such cases he replaced the military commanders by men with more experience in the organisation of civil affairs. For example, he employed Amr ibn al Aas in Egypt so long as the military situation warranted, but as soon as circumstances allowed, he appoint-

ed Abd Allah ibn Sa'd Abi Sarh, and to Syria he sent the venerable Companion, Abu Ubaida to replace Khalid bin Waleed.

He was a clever diplomat, always endeavouring to appease quarrels with words rather than force and he was always on the look out to restrain the ambitions of his commanders. He ordered the setting up of cantonements for troops which became urban centres. The most important of these were Basra and Kufa. The base at Kufa was founded by Saad ibn abi Waqqas. In Umar's reign, there were persistent complaints against the governors which had been placed in charge of the cantonement and although the Caliph continually changed the officers, the people of Kufa remained unsatisfied. The seeds of discord which were to spell the weakening of the Islamic empire were already making themselves apparent.

In October 644, Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> led the annual pilgrimage to Mecca as he had done ever since his elevation to caliphate. The old caliph, now about 60 years of age, had ruled for just over ten years. In those ten dramatic years, the whole world had been

turned upside down and the two greatest empires had been overthrown. Now, the empire was triumphant and at rest.

again the Muslim witness, '*There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger*', he quietly passed away.



***To be continued***

The following month, Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> was mortally wounded by a Persian slave as he stepped up to lead the Fajr prayers. The dying Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> was carried into his house and laid upon his bed. He was fully conscious and looking to his son Abdullah, beckoned him to go to Hadhrat Ayesha<sup>(ra)</sup> with the request that he be allowed to be buried with the Holy Prophet<sup>(sa)</sup> and Abu Bakr<sup>(ra)</sup> just as he did bear them company in their lifetime. Ayesha<sup>(ra)</sup> granted his request and said that although she had reserved that place for herself, she preferred him to herself. Umar<sup>(ra)</sup> was gratified, and addressing the Companions said:

'I charge my successor to be kind to the men of Medina for they gave a home to us and to the faith. Let him make much of their virtues and deal lightly with their faults. And let him treat the bedouins well, for they were the raw material of Islam'.

Then, on the morning of 3rd November 644, repeating again and



# Mobile Internet and the Web – Opportunities and Threats

*The last century saw huge advances in communication. The world saw the advent of radio communications, telephony, tele-vision, and then in more recent years, satellite communications, internet, mobile telephony and mobile internet.*

*With all technologies, there are advantages and disadvantages for mankind. This article explores the opportunities and threats from the perspective of morality and knowledge.*

by Fazal Ahmad – UK

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## The Age of Communications

The last hundred years saw huge strides made in travel and telecommunications. As people began to travel more, so the demand for flexible travel increased. With that came a greater demand to be able to communicate with colleagues and loved ones from any destination.

The industrialised world developed a communications infrastructure very fast, whereas the developing world appeared to lag behind.

With this sudden increase in voice communications, we have seen a revolution in the way that we live, and most recently, the Internet and Mobile Communications have had a huge impact.

## Internet

The Internet, or World Wide Web as it is also known, was originally developed by the US Military as a means for disseminating information around the battlefield without the worry of having a single point of failure. To the general public, this meant nothing until the Web came into the public domain in the early 1990's. Suddenly, people began to send email using computers, and then found a whole new medium to post and find information.

By the mid 1990's, many businesses had created web sites for themselves to interest and attract potential customers or to create interest in their views, but the amount of content was fairly limited. At that

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**HOWEVER, THE SITES THAT WE FIND THROUGH A BROWSER OR SEARCH ENGINE MAY ONLY MENTION THE DESIRED SUBJECT IN PASSING, OR MAY PROVIDE INFORMATION AGAINST THAT SUBJECT, OR WORSE STILL, MISINFORMATION.**

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point, people began to look on the web for other parties around the world who shared the same interests, and to get contacts to then take the discussion further.

In the last few years, we have suddenly seen a reliance upon the web for knowledge and information. Where people used to read books, they now 'surf the web'. Where people used to build up their own libraries of books for their own reference, they now 'download' information from the web onto their computers for reference.

Previously, only certain households or libraries had access to resources such as encyclopedias, now most people have access to a global encyclopedia on the web, and have endless possibilities to conduct their own research. Indeed doing research on the web has become very easy. Internet browsers or search engines allow the user to type in the subject of interest e.g. 'Islam, Spread in

Africa', the engine then checks the content of millions of web sites that it knows about, and returns addresses of all web sites that fit (even if only partially) the search criteria of the user.

We are moving towards a paperless world, but the danger we should consider is whether paperless also means zero accountability. We will cover this theme in detail later.

### **Mobile Internet**

Having witnessed the growth of the web, at the same time, we have seen the rapid reliance upon mobile phones in our daily lives. Nowadays in most industrialised countries around the world, children and adults alike carry around mobile phones. In late 2000, it was estimated that just for one service in Japan, there were 13 million users and this figure was growing by 45000 every day!

In the next four or five years, we are

moving away from voice traffic only mobile phones towards high speed data and content on a range of wireless devices, exploiting emerging technologies such as GPRS and UMTS, known in the market as 3rd Generation services. Imagine being able to access the internet from anywhere and at any time, to get any information!

### **Validity of Knowledge**

So whether it is on a home computer, or through a wireless device, we can access information and knowledge on any subject, whenever and wherever we need it. But to what extent can we trust what we see on the web. If we search for 'Ahmadiyyat' on the web, we would expect to find several authentic sites with information and useful contacts. However, the sites that we find through a browser or search engine may only mention the desired subject in passing, or may provide information against that subject, or worse still, misinformation.

In this environment, where information on a web site can easily be changed, the opportunities for spreading misinformation are immense. With a book or printed

reference, an author or editorial board are responsible for the material that they have printed. If the material is incorrect or abusive, the writers are legally liable. It is for this reason that publishers and authors are often very careful about the information that they commit to print. Once printed, this is a permanent record of the information, and views of the time.

With printed material, there are codes of conduct, and there are standards by which the authenticity can be checked. With the web, this is not the case at present. It is common to see one set of information on a web site at one time, and for the message to be totally changed at another time. How can a researcher use the web as a reference for work if the material may have changed since then.

Validity of knowledge on the internet is almost impossible, particularly over international borders. In this way, the internet has made the spreading of propaganda obscenely easy. This has been seen in international politics where a national leader can be defamed internationally in a matter of minutes. Nobody bothers to ask

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**WHILE IT IS POSSIBLE TO CONTROL THE IMPORT OF GOODS AND PEOPLE AT AIRPORTS AND BORDERS, NO SUCH BORDER PATROLS EXIST ON THE INFORMATION SUPER-HIGHWAY.**

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whether the information is correct; they assume that any 'information' on the web represents real knowledge.

### **Information Crime**

Most people will now be aware of internet crime. The obvious problems are viruses which can be transmitted across a large number of users in an instant, and can then cause disruption to serious users of computers globally. An example was the 'Love Bug' which was created in Asia, and took down the computers of corporations worldwide.

There are more subtle crimes being committed also. There are virtual communities forming around the internet who can discuss subjects and share information that they would not do in public. The internet has enabled global crime rings to operate more efficiently, and pornography is one area that is becoming a growing global menace

on the internet. Not only are they flourishing in their own communities, but innocent users of the internet can more easily get drawn in.

There are ways of decoding information so that illegal messages, images and documents can be transmitted over the web. One such example is Steganography in which material can be hidden amongst lines of text. A seemingly harmless message may contain extremely harmless material.

There are also cases where a user accesses a particular website for information, and doesn't realise that they have been diverted to another site temporarily, presented with a message and then re-routed back to the intended site. In such instances, the user automatically assumes that the message was intended by the site of interest, whereas that was not the case.

### **Who Owns the Problem ?**

So we are starting to understand the types of unacceptable behaviour that are emerging around these new technologies. The next issue is that if crimes are being committed, who has responsibility and legal jurisdiction over these crimes.

In an example in 2000, a US organisation had published material on the web which was anti-semitic. At the location where they host the material, publishing such material was not deemed illegal. However, this material can be accessed by people in other countries where it may be illegal. While it is possible to control the import of goods and people at airports and borders, no such border patrols exist on the information super-highway.

### **Impact Upon Morality**

We have seen a proliferation of mobile devices throughout the world. These devices range from handheld mobile phones, personal assistants (e.g. Palm tops) and newer mobile internet devices.

While we often get dazzled by the technology and features, the underlying theme is that you can get information and communicate from

anywhere at anytime with anyone. We see this with the emergence of services such as WAP and iMode.

In this concept, there are features which have obvious benefits for the business community where people are increasingly spending more time travelling around the world to prosper in the global economy. For them, to be able to call and access information no matter which hotel, plane, train or office they are in and no matter which country, makes them more efficient at generating business.

However, the danger comes when these devices are targetted at young children as we are seeing in Europe and Japan. Now children are encouraged to adopt consumerism at an earlier age, and to demand their own personal computers, personal television, personal mobile telephone etc.

The question for parents is a simple one. Ten years ago, you had a television in the living room which the whole family shared. This subtly applied some censorship to the programmes that children would watch. Now that they have a television in their own room, how

do you control what they watch, and how much influence this has upon their development and character.

The fact that children now carry personal communications and games devices with them means they can now play games out of the reach of their parents, where the content may have a violent or otherwise inappropriate element. This may seem harmless, but witness the growing incidence of children using firearms at school in America with devastating effects. Recent reports are starting to link violent and anti-social behaviour in children with the games that they play and the programmes they watch.

Now add the potential of mobile internet, where children can secretly make calls and have access to content that their parents would not have intended - at any time of day or night. Reports in Japan and Europe on mobile services have shown that children often use these services late at night, when their parents are asleep. Text messaging, or SMS is very popular among children. Studies have shown disturbing trends among children at a vulnerable age. Take the example of Iobox SMS in Germany for whom

the following was the case at the end of 2000:

- 40% of their customers were between 13 and 19 years;
- there were mainly girls in the 15-17 group;
- peak usage for this age group was 6pm and midnight;
- 40% of the messages said 'I Love You', while 15% said 'I don't Love you any more, goodbye!'.

Could this be described as a beneficial use of SMS, and a good reason to target children just over 10 years of age. The business provides a service, but how should parents regulate the behaviour of their children with these new toys, especially when the usage is out of earshot and out of sight.

So a seemingly harmless leap in technology could be reeking havoc with future generations.

### **Conclusions**

We get guidance from the Holy Qur'an on the utility of various resources for mankind. Take for example the simple case of alcohol.

Alcohol is widely used in Western society and its use has spread to the rest of the world partly through colonisation. However, it is well known that Muslims do not drink alcohol as it is forbidden in the Qur'an. However, the teaching in the Qur'an is bathed in Divine Wisdom:

*'They ask thee concerning wine and games of chance. Say, 'In both there is great sin and harm and also some advantages for men; but their sin and harm are greater than their advantage.'*

(Holy Qur'an: Ch:2: v. 220)

So in this verse, the Qur'an teaches us that there are positive aspects even to alcohol, however, on balance the disadvantages are greater and therefore it is prohibited for mankind.

These new technologies have advantages for mankind but also many potential disadvantages. Technology has moved on at a fast pace over the last few years, and Muslims have adopted many of these new fads and technologies without considering the potential impact upon themselves and their children.

It is the hidden use and abuse of these technologies which has already started causing harm in society and needs regulating.

There will be valid uses for these technologies, but responsible usage demands that we respect and understand the pros and the cons, and do not accept lifestyle changes without due consideration.



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