

“Call to the path of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation,
and argue with people in the best manner.” (Holy Quran, 16:125)

The Light

AND

ISLAMIC REVIEW

Exponent of Islam and the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement
for over ninety years

April – June 2016

In the spirit of the above-cited verse, this periodical attempts to dispel
misunderstandings about the religion of Islam and endeavors to
facilitate inter-faith dialogue based on reason and rationality.

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احمدیہ انجمن اشاعت اسلام لاہور

◆ Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore Inc., U.S.A. ◆

The Light was founded in 1921 as the organ of the AHMADIYYA ANJUMAN ISHA'AT ISLAM (Ahmadiyya Association for the Propagation of Islam) of Lahore, Pakistan. **The Islamic Review** was published in England from 1913 for over 50 years, and in the U.S.A. from 1980 to 1991. The present periodical represents the beliefs of the worldwide branches of the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam, Lahore.

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The main objective of the A.A.I.L. is to present the true, original message of Islam to the whole world — Islam as it is found in the Holy Quran and the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, obscured today by grave misconceptions and wrong popular notions.

Islam seeks to attract the **hearts and minds** of people towards the truth, by means of reasoning and the natural beauty of its principles.

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (d. 1908), our Founder, arose to remind the world that Islam is:

International: It recognizes prophets being raised among all nations and requires Muslims to believe in them all. Truth and goodness can be found in all religions. God treats all human beings equally, regardless of race, nationality or religion.

Peaceful: Allows use of force only in unavoidable self-defence. Teaches Muslims to live peacefully under any rule which accords them freedom of religion.

Tolerant: Gives full freedom to everyone to hold and practise any creed or religion. Requires us to tolerate differences of belief and opinion.

Rational: In all matters, it urges use of human reason and knowledge. Blind following is condemned and independence of thought is granted.

Inspiring: Worship is not a ritual, but provides living contact with a Living God, Who answers prayers and speaks to His righteous servants even today as in the past.

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Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad taught that **no** prophet, old or new, is to arise after the Holy Prophet Muhammad. However, **Mujaddids** will be raised by God to revive and rekindle the light of Islam.

About ourselves

Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore has branches in many countries including:

U.S.A.	Australia
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Achievements:

The Anjuman has produced extensive literature on Islam, originally in English and Urdu, including translations of the Holy Quran with commentaries. These books are being translated into other languages, including French, German, Spanish, Dutch, Russian, Chinese, and Arabic. The Anjuman has run several Muslim missions around the world, including the first ever in Western Europe.

History:

1889: **Hazrat** Mirza Ghulam Ahmad founds the Ahmadiyya Movement.

1901: Movement given name **Ahmadiyya** after Holy Prophet Muhammad's other famous name **Ahmad**.

1905: Hazrat Mirza appoints central body (Anjuman) to manage the Movement.

1908: Death of Hazrat Mirza. Succeeded by Maulana Nur-ud-Din as Head.

1914: Death of Maulana Nur-ud-Din. Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam founded at Lahore as continuation of the original Anjuman. Maulana Muhammad Ali elected as Head.

1951: Death of Maulana Muhammad Ali after fifty years of glorious service to the cause of Islam. Maulana Sadr-ud-Din (d. 1981) becomes Head.

1981–1996: Dr Saeed Ahmad Khan, an eminent medical doctor and religious scholar, led the Movement, at a time of intense persecution.

1996–2002: Prof. Dr Asghar Hameed, a distinguished retired University Professor of Mathematics, and learned Islamic scholar, served as Head.

2002: Prof. Dr Abdul Karim Saeed Pasha elected Head.

Interfaith – Islam, Christianity and Judaism

By Fazeel S. Khan, Esq.

[In March of 2016, the Muslim Students Association (MSA) at Otterbein College held its annual event to present an introduction to the religion of Islam to faculty, staff and students. The theme this year was based on Interfaith Relations, with emphasis on the Abrahamic faith traditions. The Editor was requested to be the keynote speaker again this year, and this article compromises the paper that was presented (along with a powerpoint presentation). In this article, the interfaith foundations to the religion of Islam is introduced, and some of the differences between the three Abrahamic faiths (including the respective understandings about the status of Jesus) is presented.]

Islam: Fundamental Interfaith Principles

I was asked to speak about Islam from an interfaith perspective, and specifically Islam's connection to Judaism and Christianity. So, to start, Muslims don't consider Islam to be a "new" religion *per se*. Rather, they view Islam as the *end point* in a long line of religious traditions all coming from the same source. Just as Christians understand Christianity to be a continuation or fulfillment of Jewish traditions and prophecies, so too do Muslims believe Islam is a continuation or fulfillment of Judaic/Christian prophecies and a completion of a divine plan of guidance from God to humanity.

Muslims view the religions preceding it originating from the same source. And it requires that the holy figures of those faith traditions to be respected and regarded as role models for humanity. As such, the fundamentals of Islam are based on the recognition of certain core principles that offer a paradigm for facilitating interfaith understanding and dialogue. And, in particular, there are three such core principles that I would like to focus on.

One Humanity

The first is the **Unity of Humanity** – that all people, regardless of race, nationality, color, gender, are equal and are created from the same essence. The Quran declares:

"Mankind is a single nation" (2:213)

Inherent in this principle, is the understanding that there is no group of people that is superior than any other simply because of the land from which they originate or because of their genetic makeup.

And we are further told, as in these verses ...

And of His (i.e. God's) signs is the creation of the

heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues (languages) and colors (races). (30:22)

O mankind, surely We have created you from a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other. (49:13)

... that the diversity in humanity is not something that is supposed to divide us, but rather something to be cherished, as it provides the opportunity to learn from one another and benefit from each other's unique experiences and perspectives.

One God

The second core principle, is that, just as all of humanity is one, so too is God – the Creator of all that exists – One. So, according to Islam, there is only **One God** of ALL people. Now, people may refer to God or using different names or may pray to God based on different understandings of what God entails, but ultimately there is one Supreme Being that is not only the Creator of this world (and the entire universe) but also the nourisher and sustainer of all creation.

And this principle is advanced in the very first verse of the Quran (the holy scripture of Islam); it states:

"All praise is due to God, the Lord of all the worlds." (1:1)

The word translated as "Lord" is from the Arabic word "Rabb". "Rabb" is literally defined as:

"The fostering of a thing in such a manner as to make it attain one condition after another until it reaches its goal of completion".

So, in addition to supporting the law of evolution working in the universe, this verse states that everything is being regulated by God, from lower to higher stages of progression. And this fostering of God's creation extends to ALL people (and in fact all worlds and everything that exists within them). The result being, no people is neglected from God's stewardship.

Spiritual Guidance Provided to All

And the third core principle, is the **Universality of Divine Favors** (i.e. all people have been blessed with spiritual guidance from God). According to Islam, just as God has provided all that is necessary for our physical development (the sun, the air, water, vegetation, etc.), so too does He provide for *all* people's spiritual development.

This guidance for one's spiritual development is provided in the form of the raising of prophets and messengers throughout the ages. Prophets served two primary functions:

- 1) To deliver a divine message to the people to which they were sent;
- 2) To serve as role models for how to live a life in accordance with that divine message.

This institution of prophethood according to Islam is based on the understanding that prophets were sent to *all* people on earth and were not limited to any particular group ... as reflected in these verses:

“There is not a people but a warner has gone among them” (35:24)

“For every nation there is a messenger” (10:47)

So, all people were equally blessed with God’s guidance.

The Quran makes specific mention of many Israelite prophets, for example in this verse it states:

“We believe in God and (in) that which has been revealed to us, and (in) that which was revealed to Abraham, and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and (in) that which was given to Moses and Jesus, and (in) that which was given to the prophets from their Lord, we do not make any distinction between any of them and to Him (God) do we submit.” (2:136)

In addition to Israelite prophets, the Quran makes specific mention of Hud and Salih of *Arabia*, Luqman of *Ethiopia*, a contemporary of Moses (generally known as Khidzr) of *Sudan*, and Dhu-l-Qarnain of *Persia*. And the Quran states that not all of the prophets have been specifically named in scripture (or may even be known to man today):

“And (We sent) messengers We have mentioned to thee before and messengers We have not mentioned to thee.” (4:164).

In one report Prophet Muhammad is recorded as saying that there have been 124,000 prophets in all.

Many Muslim scholars have argued that the founders of other faith traditions whose teachings resulted in scriptures being produced may be accepted as prophets of God as well. For instance, a popular American Muslim scholar, Sheikh Hamza Yusuf, argues that Buddha, although not specifically named in the Quran, may be accepted as a prophet. So too can the argument be made that Krishna of the Hindu tradition may have been a prophet of God, or the legendary chiefs of First Nations peoples, and so on.

The message revealed to the prophets, and which they in turn delivered to the people to whom they were sent, was essentially the same. And that was:

- 1) To believe in God (the Creator and Provider for all), and
- 2) To do good to your fellow man (what is commonly referred to as the “Golden Rule”).

All religions are founded upon this basic two-part formula.

And the purpose of EVERY religion is to provide guidance on how to develop spiritually – how to be a better person, a moral being, as opposed to simply living a materialistic life dictated by one’s selfish desires. This objective is characterized in Islam as attaining a true state of “peace” – peace within oneself, among people and between oneself and God ... as is reflected in these verses:

“O you who believe, enter into complete peace.” (2:208)

“And God invites to the abode of peace.” (10:25)

The name of the religion, “Islam”, is rather unique in this regard. This faith is not named after a person that founded the religion or the place from which it originated, as is the case with most religions, but rather is derived from the Arabic root word “*silm*”, which means “*peace*”. So the faith is actually titled after the objective to which religion aspires.

Reconciling the Differences

But what about the differences among religions, beyond the basic foundation of belief in God and doing good to others? How do we account for the differences then? Well, at least according to Islam, prophets were sent to specific nations and their teachings dealt with the conditions those particular people faced *at that time*. So, naturally, there would be differences because different people faced different conditions throughout history.

For instance, just because the Old Testament states “an eye for an eye” and the New Testament states “turn the other cheek”, doesn’t mean that one is right and the other is wrong, but rather that both these lessons have their legitimate place as they were appropriate under particular conditions at different times. Now according to Islam, the response to wrongdoing by another is not limited to one type of action; rather the Quran states: “*repel evil with what is best*”, which requires one to determine what would be most beneficial (in order to achieve the goal of peace) under the conditions he or she faces at the time.

And this what is meant by the Quran stating it is a “*verifier of previous scriptures*” – it authenticates the validity of these previous messages and legitimates the application of the lessons contained in them when the conditions are appropriate.

Abraham, the Patriarch

Another example of the view of Islam being a culmination of a long line of divine messages to humanity and a verifier of previous messages, is Islam upholding the status of Abraham as the Patriarch and archetype of monotheistic faith. Abraham is repeatedly pointed out in the Quran as comprehending that the True, Supreme, All-Powerful, Perfect God is One, and that it is to this One God that man is to submit himself completely. And it is this Abrahamic model of faith that Islam endeavors to **reestablish** ... as is shown in these verses:

“God speaks the truth; so follow the religion of Abraham, the upright one. And he (Abraham) was not one of the polytheists” (3:95).

“And who is better in religion than he who submits himself entirely to God while doing good (to others) and follows the faith of Abraham, the upright one? And God took Abraham for a friend” (4:125).

“As for me, my Lord has guided me to the right path — a right religion, the faith of Abraham, the upright one, and he (Abraham) was not of the polytheists” (6:161).

So, the God of Islam is the God of Abraham, the same God Jews and Christians worship. And this connection to Abraham is what binds Muslims, Christians and Jews.

For Jews, Abraham gave rise to a nation of Hebrews, which means people “on the other side”, as Abraham was born in Mesopotamia (what is today Iraq) but moved to Haran (the region in northern Syria and southern Turkey). And it is there that God made a covenant with Abraham. And Jews believe that they inherited this covenant through Abraham’s son, Isaac:

“Your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will name him Isaac. I will establish My covenant with him as an eternal covenant to his descendants after him.” (Genesis 17:19)

For Christians, ancestry through Abraham is also important, as the Gospels trace the genealogy of Jesus to Abraham. But, the connection to Abraham is somewhat redefined according to Christian theology, as I understand it. And that is that Jesus is understood as the true descendant of Abraham and that belief or faith in Jesus (regardless of one’s physical ancestry) makes one an heir of Abraham’s family.

“If you be Christ’s, then you are the seed of Abraham” (Romans 9:6).

For Muslims, as with Jews and Christians, a direct physical relationship with Abraham is present in Islamic

traditions. This physical connection is through Abraham’s firstborn, Ishmael. Just as the Israelite nation descended from Isaac, the Arab peoples descended from Ishmael. This is how Muslims trace Prophet Muhammad’s physical ancestry to Abraham, through the Ishmaelite lineage.

And the covenant between God and Abraham is accepted in Islam. However, according to Islam, the covenant extended to both of Abraham’s sons, Isaac and Ishmael.

“And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” (Gen. 17:8)

“And as for Ishmael I have heard thee; Behold I have blessed him and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation.” (Gen. 17:20)

And, like in Christianity, the connection to Abraham according to Islam is extended beyond ancestral relations only. According to Islam, it is the following of the *faith of Abraham* – the faith of submission to the One Supreme Being, the Creator and Provider and Nourisher of all creation – that makes one an “heir” of Abraham.

Jesus, the Messiah

Although Jews, Christians and Muslims trace their roots to a common source and, as such, are referred to as Abrahamic faiths, they differ in their understanding of the significance of Abraham in their faith traditions. Similarly, Jews, Christians and Muslims differ in their understanding of Jesus.

Like Christians, Muslims accept Jesus to be the “Messiah”. And Muslims understand the term “Messiah” to mean “the one who instills the spirit in the faith”. However, Muslims don’t accept the notion that Jesus was divine or a part of God. Rather, according to Islam, Jesus was a prophet of God and, like all prophets, was human.

Not only is Jesus revered in Islam as a great prophet of God and the Messiah, but also his mother Mary is praised as being an exceptionally spiritual person. In fact the Quran points to Mary as an example of a “true believer”. And, interestingly, she is referenced more times in the Quran than she is even in the Gospels, and entire chapter is actually named after her.

And Muslims believe that the “good news” Jesus shared with the Israelites was the foretelling of the coming of Prophet Muhammad. Muslims believe that when Jesus spoke of the coming of another after him – using

terms like “the comforter” or “the spirit of truth” he was prophesying the appearance of Prophet Muhammad. So, just as Jesus is considered by Christians to be a fulfillment of Judaic prophecies, Muslims consider Prophet Muhammad as a fulfillment of Judaic/Christian prophecies.

Conclusion

Despite there being differences in understanding among the different faith traditions, the Quran is very clear that freedom of religious belief is a fundamental human right that must be protected. In contrast to what we see being practiced in some parts of the world today by some who claim to be Muslims, the Quran emphatically states:

“*There is no compulsion in religion*” (2:256)

Everyone has the right to believe in the manner they deem appropriate. And, the Quran goes so far as to state that it is a duty for Muslims to protect and defend the houses of worship of people of all faiths because, regardless of the particular faith tradition, people go these centers to remember God, as is reflected in the this verse.

“*And if God did not repel some people by others, cloisters, and churches, and synagogues, and mosques in which God’s name is much remembered, would have been pulled down. And surely God will help him who helps Him.*” (22:40)

This is what Islam teaches about interfaith relations. Which brings me to an end to this presentation. Thank you, and I’d be happy to take your questions. ■

The Cave (Al-Kahf)

The Spiritual Meaning of Chapter 18 of the Holy Quran

By Hans Drost

[The author, Mr. Hans Drost, is from the Netherlands. He is an ardent student of Islam for over 40 year, and particularly studies the literary works of Maulana Muhammad Ali. He has also assisted in various projects in which books by Maulana Muhammad Ali were translated from English into Dutch. In this article, Mr. Drost provides a fascinating interpretation of chapter 18 of the Holy Quran (titled “The Cave”). He presents alternative views – based on meanings of metaphors and significances of allegories – which furnish tangible spiritual lessons to be learned from the otherwise literal reading of the chapter.]

Introduction

The Quran is both a literary and spiritual text. Since the meaning of its verses contain numerous intricate layers, various depths and a smattering of cultural nuances, they require much more than a cursory study.

Quranic verses may be literal or metaphorical, characterized by the following examples:

- Verse 3:7 states: “*He it is Who has revealed the Book to thee; some of its verses are decisive – they are the basis of the Book – and others are allegorical ...*”¹
- Verse 11:1 states: “*... its verses are characterized by wisdom, then they are made plain ...*”.
- Verse 39:23 states: “*...the best announcement, a Book consistent, repeating ...*”²

In the Quran, God endeavors to guide us toward world peace by applying a four step formula.

1. *Rabb*: establishes our place on earth.
2. *Rahmān*: encourages social justice and environmental responsibility.
3. *Rahīm*: indicates responsibility for mental and spiritual development.
4. *Mālik*: holds us individually accountable for our actions.

In my studies, I have found that over the last 450 years much of the meaning of the original Quranic revelations has been changed, skewed and misinterpreted in order for certain Islamic states to obtain, maintain and expand dominance. In the 16th century, secular and religious control were consolidated by two Eastern superpowers, the Mughal and Ottoman Empires (with all the disastrous consequences thereof). Keep in mind the system of *taqlid*, which resulted in curtailing and eventually banning open and free discussion of religious topics, themes and texts (called *ijihad*). Only state-approved interpretations of the Quranic revelations were allowed and any disobedience was punishable by imprisonment or even execution. As a result, these skewed interpretations became mainstream and a theological straightjacket for the general population. However, some reforms did ensue in the 19th century when literacy became more common place. Although today, the system of *taqlid* is still very much in evidence.

Metaphorical Classification

For ease of study, chapter 18 can be divided into four parts.³ Part one covers verse 1 to verse 31. Part two covers verses 32 to 59, part three verses 60 to 82 and part four verses 83 through 110.

Verse 9 is indicative of the metaphorical character of

chapter 18; it states:

“Or, thinkest thou that the companions of the Cave and the Inscription were of Our miraculous signs?”

This question refers to the often told story of the seven youths sleeping in a cave for three hundred years near the city of Efeze in order to escape persecution by the Roman emperor Decius (249 AD). Taken metaphorically, this question poses no problem (as shown later in this article). But taken literally, we need a supernatural occurrence. The only logical way to explain the related verses 9 through 26 is metaphorically. Verse 10 describes the *youths as seeking refuge in the Cave*⁴ and verse 15 explains the reason.

When studying the Qur’ān, it is important to note that words like *man*, *spouse*, *woman* and *youth* can be used metaphorically and are often interchanged. For example, the word *youth* in verse 10 really indicates a cross section of people (young and old). It is meant to describe a group of people who exhibited the general characteristics of the young, i.e. energetic, rebellious, intolerant of injustice and possessing a certain amount of recklessness. These attributes proved advantageous in the struggle against the powerful Roman Empire.

Verse 15 reads as follows:

“These our people have taken gods beside Him. Why do they not bring clear authority for them? Who is then more unjust than he who forges a lie against Allāh?”

By ‘*These our people*’ the Romans with their Grecian–Roman polytheistic belief in gods and half–gods are indicated. Their system of polytheism could not and did not inspire religious allegiance in many of the people the Romans conquered and ruled. Even more telling is the fact that their goal of social and religious dominance was only temporarily accomplished in spite of superior military might, cruel social oppression and brutal religious persecution. Consequently, the followers of Prophet Jesus had to go into hiding in order to keep spreading the word. It is remarkable to note that throughout recorded history, whenever monotheism threatened polytheism, be it in the time of the Pharaohs, the Romans or the Arabian Empires, religious and social upheaval ensued. Apparently, belief in the One True God exposed the ignorance, superstition and oppression of an idolatrous polytheistic system with all its social injustices. In contrast, monotheism encourages a peace–loving, unfettered and enlightened relationship with God and fellow man.

Part One (Verses 1 – 31): The Spiritual Cave of Monotheism

In chapter 18, the key verse of part one is verse 16, which reads as follows:

*“And when you withdraw from them and what they worship save Allah, take refuge in the Cave; your Lord will spread forth for you of His mercy, and provide for you a profitable course in your affair.”*⁵

This verse consists of three layers. The first refers to the time of Prophet Jesus and his followers (25–325 AD)⁶ and is an example of God’s doctrines, the second one covers the individual quest for spirituality, and the third underlines the rest of the chapter.

The translation of the Arabic word *Kahf* is “cave”. Its meaning in this chapter is metaphorical and indicates a ‘spiritual cave’, describing a place ‘*to surround oneself with*’. In other words, this Cave is a place of spiritual strength and enlightenment (and I will refer to this metaphorical meaning by using the capital letter “C” in the word Cave).

Verse 17 states:

“And thou mightest see the sun, when it rose, decline from their Cave to the right, and when it set leave them behind on the left, while they were in a wide space thereof. This is of the signs of Allāh. He whom Allāh guides, he is on the right way; and whom He leaves in error, thou wilt not find for him a friend to guide aright.”

To understand the metaphorical meaning of this verse is to picture a rainbow adorning a stormy sky. Standing out against a dark background, the rainbow is symbolic of the spiritual ‘Cave of light’ that illuminates a dark world. By comparison, one can expect an individual’s spiritual enlightenment to chase away the dark shadows of ignorance.

The heart of part one is described in verse 14, which states:

“And We strengthened their hearts when they stood up and said: Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth; never will we call upon another god besides Him, for then indeed we should utter an enormity.”

The fundamental principle here is the unity of God. This is such an important doctrine, that it is repeated many times in the Quran. Both our physical and spiritual wellbeing depend upon this principle. Any variation is detrimental to our welfare. This concept is analogous to the physical make up of a tree. No matter how lush its growth, the root remains its sole support. Verse 14

emphasizes this concept by placing the word ‘never’ (*lan* in Arabic) in the phrase ‘never will we call upon another god besides Him’.

By studying verse 14 in more detail, we note that the initiative to oppose the Romans lies with the youths. This is signified by the words ‘when they stood up and said’.⁷ ‘Standing up’ indicates an action of opposition on the youths’ part. Through their conviction and sincerity, their hearts were strengthened by God. They rejected the Roman world view and followed God’s design, the One God who created all and never would they worship another.

Verse 13 supports this interpretation:

“We relate to thee their story with truth. Surely they were youths who believed in their Lord and We increased them in guidance.”

I have covered verses 13 through 17 rather briefly in order to limit myself to the heart of the subjects. The reason for this is twofold. First, this article is but a summary and second, it is meant to encourage individual study of the above mentioned verses.

Verses 18 through 21

In these verses, the followers of Prophet Jesus chronicle the extent of their opposition to Roman rule. Verse 18 describes the constraints under which the youths had to operate. It states: ‘turning over to the right and the left’ and indicates a middle of the road strategy. Qur’anic revelations invariably emphasize the importance of a moderate approach to dissent.

The dog mentioned in this verse characterizes the relevance of the animal’s basic nature, i.e. loyalty. This is meant as an analogy, paralleling the loyalty of the dog to its master with the loyalty of mankind to God. The word *‘ruqūd’* is often translated as ‘being asleep’. But, in context, it actually means a ‘spiritual’ withdrawal and is akin to the metaphorical withdrawal of the youths from Roman society. This nonviolent method was employed to express their disenchantment with Roman rules, concepts and beliefs while keeping in accordance with the principle of verse 18.

Verses 19 and 20 discuss the following three subjects:

1. The youths recount the methods used to oppose the (in their view) unacceptable Roman mandates as well as their years of spiritual struggle, chronicled and condensed into the symbolic time span of a single day and/or a fraction thereof.
2. The youths’ arduous existence in Roman society. The conflict between their struggle against the Roman culture and their dependence on its civi-

lization for survival. Verse 19 mentions a silver coin with which the youths had to buy food. It is interesting to note that even an action as mundane as purchasing food could identify them as followers of Prophet Jesus. Therefore, they were warned against making any derogatory remarks about polytheism, not to single out questionable items in the marketplace and to avoid unwanted attention by refusing to purchase products associated with Roman gods and half gods.

3. The constant threat of persecution by the Romans as well as the importance of their survival in order to spread the word.

Verse 21 indicates that the youths prevailed in their difficult mission, and not only earned a place in history by successfully upholding the doctrine of monotheism but also a well-deserved place in Paradise.

Verse 22

This verse challenges the gossipers, who had no knowledge or understanding of the youths’ dangerous odyssey and blessed accomplishments. Therefore, in order to make up for their ignorance, the gossipers began to recount the youths’ story in the literal sense. By conveniently assigning a miracle to the physical impossibility of people sleeping in a cave for three hundred years, they succeeded in perpetuating this myth throughout history. However, as with all fabricated stories, the details kept changing and ranged from three youths and a dog to seven youths and a dog. In short, the message of verse 22 is clear. Do not gossip or invent stories. God created the earth and the laws of nature and has no need of any incidental miracles to magnify Him.

Recorded history reveals the fact that in times past man usurped God’s crown by depicting himself as a god, a half god or a sun god. Needless to say, even though the Egyptian pharaohs and the Roman emperors held on to this fallacy for many centuries, their respective hegemonies of polytheism ended with the monotheistic teachings of the prophets Moses and Jesus.

Verses 23 through 26

These verses emphasize several pearls of wisdom (also mentioned in previous verses):

1. Not to postpone until tomorrow what you can do today.
2. To guard against conceit.
3. To know that we are in charge of our own destiny.
4. That we always need the support and guidance of God.
5. To keep our promise to ourselves, to our fellow man and to God no matter what the cost or sacrifice.⁸

Verse 25 states:

“And they remained in their Cave three hundred years, and they add nine.”

The first word ‘they’ in this quote indicates successive generations of youths. The second word ‘they’ requires a mental leap from the height of the Roman Empire to the time of the prophet Muhammad when this verse was revealed.

Chapter 18 (revealed in Mekkah) stresses individual spiritual growth and development. Its verses 9 to 31 refer to the youths surviving for three hundred arduous years (25 AD to 325 AD). After 325 AD, the youths’ message of the One God was replaced by the Creed of Nicea when the Roman Empire adopted the concepts of Christ and the trinity. The second part of verse 25, ‘... and they add nine’, indicates that the doctrine of monotheism was firmly established in Mekkah and Medina in the year 634 and thereafter generally accepted worldwide.

It is possible that there is another meaning to verse 25 which pertains to the time span of three hundred years. In 934 there existed a thriving civilization from Córdoba to Bagdad. However, due to political incompetence and its resultant social upheaval, that civilization began to deteriorate approximately three hundred years later.

Verse 26 again describes our dependency on God and advises us to focus on developing ‘spiritual’ knowledge, performing good deeds and to be true to ourselves.

Verses 27 through 31

The followers of the prophet Jesus persevered in their self-sacrificing mission to spread monotheism throughout the Roman Empire, despite the lure and enticement of wealth all around. Verse 29 states that there is freedom of religion. It also states that no one is punished for not believing. Anyone, a believer or not, who leads an exemplary life will be rewarded while those who transgress will face punishment. By vaguely referring to Paradise as a picture, an image or a dream, verse 31 indicates that Paradise is a spiritual realm and therefore impossible to accurately describe.

Part Two (Verses 32 – 59): The Parables

As mentioned in Endnote #5, throughout the ages, religious stories and revelations were passed on by word of mouth. The storytellers were in effect living forerunners of printed books and manuscripts. They traveled from village to village, conveying the latest news, reinforcing cultural norms, relating historical events and disclosing religious doctrines. In order to keep the interest of the audience, they employed satirical/theatrical methods similar to latter day vaudeville and burlesque shows. As

accomplished play actors, they made use of various props, humorous anecdotes and comical parodies while relating their stories.

Over time, in order to keep up with political agendas, changing social norms and power driven clergy, the explanations of the revelations including the parables gradually changed. On top of that, because the scribes not only skewed the interpretations but also added their own explanations to the transcripts, the revelations were no longer subject for discussion. Eventually, probably due to lingering superstitions, illiteracy and self-seeking clergy, the explanations of the parables were taken literally instead of spiritually. However, since it was impossible to make sense of the literal explanations, successive scribes found that they had to make use of supernatural occurrences. It is therefore our task to rediscover and relate the spiritual meaning of the original texts and parables. I endeavor to accomplish this by using Maulana Muhammad Ali’s direct translation of the Quran from Arabic into English, including explanations and descriptions of his texts and footnotes.

For the most part, the invention of the printing press in the 15th century made storytelling obsolete. However, it also limited the embellishment and/or misrepresentation of any verbal accounts. Ironically, by the time the printing press was in full swing, the skewing of revelations had already taken place and were therefore (inadvertently) perpetuated by that pivotal invention.

Verses 32 through 53

Verses 32 through 44 contain the first parable which was meant to clarify as well as condense part one. It also carries an explanation of the unlikely success of the followers of Prophet Jesus. This parable compares two men of different social status and religious belief. One of them, used as a metaphor for the followers of the prophet Jesus, is poor in earthly possessions, but rich in spiritual wealth. The other, a metaphor for the wealthy Roman Empire and living in the lap of luxury, boasts about his riches and affluent lifestyle, as shown in verses 34 and 35:

‘... to have greater wealth and to be mightier in followers’.

‘I think not that this will ever perish’.

Verse 39 points out key values of life:

1. Not to consider oneself more important than another.
2. To guard against vanity.
3. To understand that *‘there is no power save in Allāh’*, i.e. to be true to our spiritual values.

Verse 41 states that polytheism is like water that *‘will sink into the ground’*, it feeds superstition, depends on

spiritual bondage and rules with depravity. Polytheism is like the corner stone of a fortress bound to collapse as evidenced by the ultimate fate of the mighty Roman Empire. Verses 42 and 43 state:

*'And his fruit was destroyed, its roofs fallen down
... and he had no host to defend himself.'*

The second parable is described in verses 45 through 49. Herein, life is compared to 'water that falls from the clouds'. In this context, the water is a metaphor for spirituality. Like too much or too little rain is detrimental to a successful harvest, too much or too little spirituality is detrimental to a rewarding and balanced existence.

Another metaphor, i.e. *'the mountains on the leveled earth'*, addresses the unjust rulers of some countries. Like mountains, these rulers were conceived as obstacles and stood in the way of progress. But unlike mountains, they would be held accountable and *'a book will be placed before them'*.

Verse 49 addresses an idiosyncrasy in man's character. It seems that when the 'guilty' are confronted with their misdeeds, they tend to focus on the unimportant details rather than on the serious aspects of their transgressions. Quite possibly, this maybe a subconscious attempt to downplay/minimize the severity of their offences in their own mind.

Verses 50 through 53 point out the positive forces of spirituality, i.e. the angels created by God for man to call upon for support. These same verses also admonish us not to call upon any other gods besides Him.

Verses 54 through 59

In this section we are told that the Qur'an contains *'every kind of description for mankind'*, which confirms that mankind has freedom of religion. We can talk about the ways 'of the ancients' and about 'the good old days'. But of course, there were also 'bad days'. Therefore, God sent messengers to deliver good news as well as issue warnings. We must ever be aware that at the end of our lives, we shall be rewarded or punished according to our actions. But God will forgive those who repent and strive to lead a peaceful life.

Part Three (Verses 60 – 82): The Quest of Prophet Moses

Parts one and two deal with the transition from polytheism to monotheism from the time of the Roman Empire to the revelation of chapter 18 in Mekkah around 615 AD. Part three covers the time of the prophet Moses. Again, the verses in this part are metaphorical and illustrate the arduous struggle of the prophet Moses and his people in their quest to escape the polytheistic bonds of the nefarious Egyptian Empire.

In the Quran, chapter 18 is divided into twelve sections. The texts of sections three through eleven begin with the word 'wa' (except for section ten) and correlate with the stories in verse 13: *'We relate to thee their story with truth'*. Section ten begins with the word 'fa' and is a continuation of section nine. Section twelve contains a conclusion.

Verse 60 starts with the story of the prophet Moses and his people. To understand their reasons for wishing to escape from the rigidly controlled polytheistic Egyptian Empire, Chapter 20 (Ta Ha), verses 1 through 76 should be read, and Exodus Chapters 3 through 14 of the Torah.⁹ The accepted interpretation of these chapters labels the seven plagues of Egypt as miracles. But in fact, the issue was about the arguments between the prophet Moses and the reigning Pharaoh regarding the polytheistic system of the pharaonic dynasties with its corrupt priesthood and stifling superstitions (enchanters). Throughout the centuries, the Pharaohs' religious quagmire concerned how to eradicate recurring trends toward monotheism.¹⁰ Verses 20:22–36¹¹ describe Moses' attempt to confront the Pharaoh with the revelations he had received from God.

Verse 60 discusses Prophet Moses' spiritual search for 'the junction of the two rivers' and adds: *"otherwise I will go on for years"*. Moses lived in Egypt, the stronghold of polytheism for many centuries. His goal was to find the starting point for a peaceful, compassionate and unfettered spiritual life. At this point, in verse 60, the two metaphorical rivers emerge. One of the rivers meanders along the confusing path of polytheism, the other follows a straight path to the spiritual enlightenment of monotheism.

The turning point in the struggle for monotheism is the moment Moses was shown "the junction of the two rivers". Left on his own, he would have searched for many fruitless years and in the end his quest for the Truth would have died with him. The fish mentioned in the story of the two rivers is the metaphorical symbol for the soul. Swimming in the river of polytheism the fish will die, but is resurrected after finding its way to the river of monotheism.

At the spring of the spiritual river, Moses meets a prophet, generally known as Khidr, who tells him to take three fundamental steps in order to cast off the scourge of polytheism. These steps outlined the lifestyle and personal conduct of Moses and his people in accordance to God's word, in particular:

1. Never again follow the river of polytheism;
2. Sever all ties with any other form of worship;
3. Build a steadfast devotion to monotheism and world peace.

The heart of Moses' discussions with the Pharaoh was to be free to embrace monotheism. He was so persuasive that in the end, Moses succeeded in converting the Pharaoh's wife¹² and the enchanters¹³.

The verses 20:1-76 explain the meaning of the discussions mentioned in the Torah (using parables and metaphors), as follows:

- a. Moses' staff morphed into a serpent and devoured the staffs of Egypt's wise men, wizards and sorcerers. This metaphor indicates that any arguments brought forth in support of polytheism were futile and bound to fail.
- b. In the Torah, God used the following metaphors to describe the consequences of adhering to polytheism.¹⁴
 1. Water turning to blood.
 2. Crop destroying hail.
 3. A multitude of pests unleashed on man and beast.
 4. God's revelations, quoted by Moses, were likened to locusts devouring the priests' false arguments, which demanded blind faith in polytheism, the priest-hood and the political power of the Pharaoh. [Verses Q Al-Kahf 18:109 and Q Luqmān 31:27¹⁵ state that God's words are more numerous than all the water in the sea. This metaphor encompasses God's omnipotence and everything He has created.]
- c. The three days of darkness and the 'death of the first born', mentioned in the Torah, are metaphors for drought and the crop failure of fruit, indicating that polytheism creates spiritual famine and a withering of the soul.

The most famous part of the story about Moses and his people is the parting of the Red Sea. Verse 20:77 speaks about a dry path in a sea by which they marched out of Egypt. Through recent excavations archeologists have concluded that the exodus was not by way of the Red Sea, but by way of the shallow reed sea located in the northeast of Egypt. The parting of the Red Sea is really a metaphor for the parting of Moses with Egypt and its religious beliefs. Moses and his people were saved by following the river of monotheism while the deceitful Pharaoh perished in the river of polytheism.

Part Four (Verses 83 – 110): The Nature of the Spiritual Struggle

Dhil-qarnain and the verses 102 through 110 present a conclusion of chapter 18 and refer to the origin of man. The words *Dhil-qarnain* mean 'with two horns', which can have two meanings:

1. In parables, the word 'tower' points to the degree of importance of a city, i.e. the more towers pres-

ent in its walls, the more influential the city. In the same way, the words 'two horns' allude to the degree of a civilization's wealth.

2. It may also mean the end of an era.

Verses 83 through 101 describe (metaphorically) the evolution of man, changing from a solely instinctive being to one blessed with a soul. The advent of modern man some 200,000 years ago, may be seen as a pivotal milestone, a 'two horned event'. *Dhil-qarnain* is indicative of an individual's physical and spiritual make up, encompassing healthful living and environmental responsibility as well as personal integrity and social awareness.¹⁶

Over time, man inhabited every continent except Antarctica. He traveled via Asia from Africa to Europe, Australia and the Americas. But he was not alone. In Asia he encountered hominids called the Denisovans and in Europe the Neanderthals. Both subgroups became extinct about 40,000 years ago.

Verses 83 through 91 describe these migrations and touch not only on man's territorial conquests, but also on his spiritual development. He is taught good from evil, right from wrong and is warned to stay within limits: 'to the right and to the left in our Cave'. These limits are also defined by the metaphors the 'setting of the sun' and the 'rising of the sun'. However, even within these parameters, there always exists the temptation to stray.

Verse 92 warns that even if one lives within these spiritual boundaries (*Dhil-qarnain*), he may still encounter 'tiny openings' through which he can be enticed to deviate from the path of righteousness. A path that can possibly lead to physical addictions, mental impairment and financial insolvency.

Verses 94 through 101 talk about Yādjūdj and Mādjūdj. Usually, Yādjūdj is translated as Gog (the leader) and Mādjūdj as Magog (the people). But by interpreting these verses metaphorically, Gog means the 'tempter' and Magog 'the gang of seducers'. Once Gog entices someone to stray from the path of righteousness and the lure of Magog follows, they can effectively destroy a person's life. Some examples of temptations are drugs and alcohol. Taken in moderation (Gog) they can be managed, but taken in excess (Magog) they can lead to alcoholism and drug abuse.

Verse 95 tells of 'spiritual strength' and verse 39 points out that there is 'no power save in God'. By applying these spiritual forces, we can arm ourselves against Gog and Magog. Think of this strength as a wall made of iron and copper that can be used to keep temptation and seduction at bay. However, we must always be aware of any cracks or fissures through which Gog and Magog can enter. It helps to keep these

‘openings’ closed by following a ‘middle of the road way of life’.

Verse 98 addresses the day of reckoning when we are held accountable for our actions on earth. (Death releases not only the physical form, but also Gog and Magog). Those who followed Gog and Magog in life, will face hell after death (for purification). This verse further explains that physically we are as fragile as a butterfly, but spiritually as strong as steel if only we believe in God. He gave us a conscience, moral guidelines and created the angels to support us in times of need.

This interpretation of the words *Dhil-qarnain*, Gog and Magog can be verified by reading the verses 21:94–112 in their entirety. These verses also run parallel to those in chapter 18.

Verses 102 through 110

These verses contain a conclusion and summarize chapter 18. This conclusion holds that you may choose to abide by God’s word, you are responsible for your actions, and will be held accountable for any misdeeds.

Finally, verse 110 again declares that there is but one God. That we should ‘*join no one in His service*’. We can interpret this last part as to not relate to, be involved in or associate with anyone who may come between you and God.

Conclusion

As is often the case with literary texts, the first paragraph is best understood by reading all the verses of the chapter in question. So is the case with the beginning verses (1 – 18) of this chapter. Chapter 18 (revealed in Mekkah) stresses the development of individual spirituality and righteous living. At the same time, it warns against the polytheistic–based belief in a son of God.

Verse 6 points out that the prophet Muhammad understood the simplicity and power of the unity of God. However, in several qur’anic verses God made sure not only to remind Prophet Muhammad that he was just a messenger, but also that people have freedom of religious choice. Verse 9 indicates that chapter 18 is a metaphorical text. Verse 10 discusses people seeking refuge in ‘their Cave’ in order to safeguard monotheism. Verse 12 describes God’s guidance through the revelations, the prophets and the Quranic verses.

Combined, they form an unshakable platform from which compassion, understanding and spiritual strength flows. ■

Endnotes

1. From the translation by Maulana Muhammad Ali: “The Holy Qur’ān, with Commentary”.
2. Footnote 23a by Maulana Muhammad Ali explains: “repeat-

ing especially the Unity of the Divine Being and the accountability of human actions”.

3. Each part covers a different time period. Part one talks about the Roman Empire. Part two contains the parables that describe the transition of polytheism to monotheism. Part three deals with the rule of the Pharaohs. Part four goes back to the beginning of civilization and encourages the search for Truth.
4. Verse 10: “When the youths sought refuge in the Cave, they said: Our Lord, grant us mercy from Thyself, and provide for us a right course in our affair.”
5. The words “them” and “they” refer to the Romans.
6. Since there were no theological text books in times past, God’s spoken word was passed on from one generation to the next by word of mouth. This was also true for the followers of the prophet Jesus, who are now called ‘Gnostics’. The Gnostics’ creeds and teachings were adapted in the course of three centuries under influence of the Roman system of polytheistic worship. This was initiated by the Bishop Irenaeus in the second century AD. He adapted the creeds to the ‘Apostles Creed’, introducing the concepts of ‘Christ’, ‘the Holy Spirit’ and ‘the Virgin Mary’. Later, the Nicene Creed added the ‘Trinity’. These adaptations conformed to many of the doctrines prevalent in the ancient Roman system. These creeds were then passed on orally and eventually written down between 900 – 1200 AD and became part of the New Testament.
7. “when they stood up and said” actually means: “when they came into action by proclaiming their creed”. In the original Arabic text this word ‘and’ is written as ‘fa’. The meaning of this word, contrary to ‘wa’, involves a combined spiritual and physical action.
8. The words ‘insha–Allāh’, these days used without cognizance, actually denote an important concept. Namely, the intention of keeping one’s promise regardless of cost or sacrifice. But only so long as the means justifies the end.
9. The history of Moses is discussed in more detail in verses Quran 7:100–171.
10. During the reign of the Pharaoh Akhnaton (1353-1336 BC) and his wife Nefertiti, a form of a monotheistic (also called a Henotheistic) period flourished. They build the town of Amarna and dedicated it to the only deity they recognized, the sun god Ra. After their deaths, their successors, in order to legitimize their claim to the throne, tried (unsuccessfully) to erase all evidence of their existence and reestablished the traditional religious practice of polytheism.
11. Also see Maulana Muhammad Ali’s respective footnotes.
12. See verse 66:11.
13. See verse 20:70.
14. These can be explained as follows:
 - a) ‘Water turning to blood’. This metaphor indicates that the lack of spirituality in the polytheistic pharaonic society incites blood spilled in war and conquest.
 - b) In this kind of society, people behave like ‘frogs’, they all croak the same (as in any totalitarian society people must follow the existing state of affairs or be ostracized).
 - c) The swarms of gnats and gad–flies are bloodsucking

insects that (metaphorically) drain man of creativity and inspiration.

15. See also the respective footnotes 109a and 27a by Maulana Muhammad Ali.
16. By using only the texts of the Quran, my interpretation of the words Dhil-qarnain is original. In accepted translations, Dhil-qarnain is said to mean a ruler or a conqueror. But in the Qur'ān no rulers' names are mentioned, only their characteristics – history books describe their achievements.

Climate Change and the World to Come

Common Christian and Islamic Perspectives

By Prof. Belinda F. Espiritu

[This article examines both Christian and Islamic responses to the topical issue of climate change. The author, Belinda Espiritu, is an associate professor in the Mass Communication Program of UP Cebu. She holds a PhD degree in Communication from the University of the Philippines College of Mass Communication in Diliman, Quezon City, and is published in a variety of fields including interpersonal/intercultural communication between Muslims and Christians. In this article, by relating common teachings on preservation of the environment based on Christian and Islamic perspectives, Prof. Espiritu identifies shared ground upon which these two major religions may work collaboratively towards the mutual goal of conservation efforts.]

According to Sir David King, the United Kingdom Government's Chief Scientific Advisor from 2000 – 2007 and now the permanent Special Representative for Climate Change, “the problems arising from global warming are the biggest challenges facing governments” (as quoted in McDonagh, 2007, p. 1). Climate change is induced by global warming, which in turn is induced by human activity. There is now a consensus among scientists, especially those involved in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), that the current warming of the planet is due to human activity, specifically the burning of fossil fuels over the past two centuries since the beginning of the industrial revolution.

The signs of climate change are with us now: more frequent and violent storms, extreme weather, melting glaciers, rising sea levels, thermal expansion of water, desertification, increase in health problems, threatened extinction of plant and animal species, peoples and cultures under threat, and the impact of global warming on agriculture, marine life, and forests.

Christian Leaders on Climate Change and Unsustainable Economic Growth

Sign of Peril, Test of Faith, Accelerated Climate Change, the document published by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in May 1994, challenged the validity of the global socio-political system where economic growth is extolled as the panacea for all problems by pointing out that unlimited growth is manifestly impossible in a finite world (McDonagh, 2007). The drafters of the document recognize that governments are much more responsive to the vested interests of powerful economic groups who are committed to the present economic growth-oriented system for as long as they can make profits from it.

Let me illustrate concretely these general ideas by describing factually what is happening in my country, Philippines. While the Syrian people are undergoing extreme hardships as they flee from the war and violence in their towns, cities, and villages, indigenous peoples in the Philippines have also been fleeing from their ancestral lands in the mountains as military and paramilitary groups burned their schools and homes and threatened to kill them if they stay. They have already killed some of their leaders together with a number of anti-mining activists and development workers who have been helping them to put up schools and assisting them in their livelihood which the Philippine government failed to do for them. The reason for the killings is connected with the government's favoring of the so-called “foreign investments” in the form of transnational mining corporations, cash-crop plantations, and coal-fired power plants –which are all driven by the economic model known as “neoliberalism”.

The mining liberalization, in particular, which began in the 90s, paved the way for the entry of transnational mining corporations in different parts of the Philippines, causing untold destruction to Philippine ecology and environment, the pollution of rivers and seas with mining tailings, the displacement and loss of livelihood of indigenous peoples and poor Filipino communities, militarization of mined areas, and extrajudicial killings. It has also aggravated climate change as mining corporations and cash crop transnational corporations denude thousands of forest areas and use up a lot of water, leading to drought in certain parts of Southern Philippines where hundreds of mining permits were given while heavy floods and landslides result in other places.

As I researched further, I found that corporate plunder is done not just in my country, but in other countries where minerals and resources can be found such as Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Central Asia, India, African countries, and Latin American countries.

Pope Francis in his book *Laudato Si'* quoted Patriarch Bartholomew of the Eastern Orthodox Church who stated the following words: “For human beings... .to destroy the biological diversity of God’s creation, for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to contaminate the earth’s waters, its land, its air, and its life – these are sins”. The Pope further quoted the Patriarch who said “For to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God”.

Pope Benedict was quoted as saying: “The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast. Therefore the earth’s treasures no longer serve to build God’s garden for all to live in, but they have been made to serve the powers of exploitation and destruction”.

It can be said that today’s environmental crisis is, at its roots, a moral crisis. Dan Story, an evangelical Christian writer and teacher, sees indifference and an apathetic attitude as among the causes of the environmental crisis when he wrote: “The same indifferent and apathetic attitude that compels people to dump rubbish illegally on national forest likewise prompts the factory owner to dump toxic waste into rivers, pollute the atmosphere with poisonous gases, and destroy vulnerable habitats for economic expediency”. He is one with the great leaders of the Catholic Christian Church in affirming the necessity of having a shift in moral values in order to “tame humanity’s intrinsic exploitative behavior and inspire the human race to obey God’s charge to be His caretakers over creation”. This requires that our ethical behavior must no longer be confined solely to our relationship with God and other human beings but also extend and include our relationship with all creation (McDonagh, 2007).

The Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change

Muslim academics, scholars, and international environment policy experts express the Islamic viewpoint on creation and climate change in the Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change drafted during the International Islamic Climate Change Symposium held in Istanbul on August 17-18, 2015, in the following words (from www.islamicclimatedeclaration.org):

We recognize that we are but a miniscule part of the divine order, yet within that order, we are exceptionally powerful beings, and have the responsibility to establish good and avert evil in every way we can. We also recognize that –

We are but one of the multitude of living beings with whom we share the Earth;

We have no right to oppress the rest of creation or cause it harm;

Intelligence and conscience behoove us, as our faith commands, to treat all things with care and awe (taqwa) of their Creator, compassion (rahmah) and utmost good (ihsan).

The said Declaration expresses the urgency felt by the Muslim leaders to halt actions leading to an increase in global temperature as they stated that leading climate scientists now believe that a rise of two degrees centigrade in global temperature, which is considered to be the “tipping point”, is now very unlikely to be avoided if we continue with business-as-usual; other leading climate scientists consider 1.5 degrees centigrade to be a more likely “tipping point”. The drafters of the said Islamic Declaration stated that a rise of two degrees is the point considered to be the threshold for catastrophic climate change, which will expose yet more millions of people and countless other creatures to drought, hunger and flooding, and acknowledged that the brunt of this will continue to be borne by the poor, as the Earth experiences a drastic increase in levels of carbon in the atmosphere brought on in the period since the onset of the industrial revolution.

The Declaration succinctly enumerates the urgent actions needed to be done by people of all nations and their leaders:

We call on the people of all nations and their leaders to –

Aim to phase out greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible in order to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere;

Commit themselves to 100% renewable energy and/or a zero emissions strategy as early as possible, to mitigate the environmental impact of their activities;

Invest in decentralized renewable energy, which is the best way to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development;

Realize that to chase after unlimited economic growth in a planet that is finite and already overloaded is not viable. Growth must be pursued wisely and in moderation; placing a priority on increasing the resilience of all, and especially the most vulnerable, to the climate change impacts already underway and expected to continue for many years to come.

Set in motion a fresh model of wellbeing, based on an alternative to the current financial model

which depletes resources, degrades the environment, and deepens inequality.

Prioritise adaptation efforts with appropriate support to the vulnerable countries with the least capacity to adapt. And to vulnerable groups, including indigenous peoples, women and children.

The proponents of the Islamic Declaration on Climate Change particularly call on the well-off nations and oil-producing states to –

Lead the way in phasing out their greenhouse gas emissions as early as possible and no later than the middle of the century;

Provide generous financial and technical support to the less well-off to achieve a phase-out of greenhouse gases as early as possible;

Recognize the moral obligation to reduce consumption so that the poor may benefit from what is left of the earth's non-renewable resources;

Stay within the '2 degree' limit, or, preferably, within the '1.5 degree' limit, bearing in mind that two-thirds of the earth's proven fossil fuel reserves remain in the ground;

Re-focus their concerns from unethical profit from the environment, to that of preserving it and elevating the condition of the world's poor.

Invest in the creation of a green economy.

The drafters of the Islamic Declaration on Climate Change also call upon corporations, finance, and the business sector to do the following: change from the current business model which is based on an unsustainable escalating economy, and to adopt a circular economy that is wholly sustainable; pay more heed to social and ecological responsibilities, particularly to the extent that they extract and utilize scarce resources; and assist in the divestment from the fossil fuel driven economy and the scaling up of renewable energy and other ecological alternatives.

Birth Pangs of the World to Come

Personal responsibility to contribute to the mitigation of climate change is a call of both Islamic and Christian leaders. The need to reduce our consumption, reduce our carbon footprint, live a simpler lifestyle, and apply the maxim “reduce, reuse, and recycle” in different ways is imperative for everyone to address the global environmental and moral crisis.

But if our efforts do not seem to match with the gravity of the problem, we should not despair but continue

our journey with hope since the crisis we are facing now can be considered as one of the birth pangs of a world that is to come - a world free from war and violence, corporate greed, callous government leaders, sins of various kinds, erratic weather patterns, hunger, sickness, pain and suffering, tears, sicknesses, and death. The other birth pangs of this renewed world to come are prevalent earthquakes, signs from the sky, calamities, wars and rumors of war, and deterioration of morals and values.

Pope Francis ends his book *Laudato Si'* with the section “Beyond the Sun” (just before the Conclusion) wherein he evocatively writes the following words: “Even now we are journeying towards the Sabbath of eternity, the new Jerusalem, towards our common home in heaven.....Eternal life will be a shared experience of awe, in which each creature, resplendently transfigured, will take its rightful place and have something to give those poor men and women who will have been liberated once and for all.”

Similarly, Maulana Wahiddudin Khan, in the November 2015 issue of *Spirit of Islam* magazine, writes that “a conversion shall take place on a far grander scale, changing this far from ideal world into an ideal one. This in religious terms would be Paradise”. He quoted the following verse in the Quran:

When the earth is changed into another earth. (The Quran 14: 48).

Maulana Wahiddudin Khan further writes that as the final phase of civilization approaches, the bad individuals will be separated from the good, and they will be deprived of the resources of the earth as the earth will be entrusted solely to the good. A cosmic optimism is at the heart of both Islam and Christianity. Dan Story (2012) writes of this yearning for Paradise, the perfect world God originally designed and intended to be our home, but which was lost in the horrible tragedy of the fall. He goes to explain that because God has not given us any desires that do not have a fulfillment, this yearning for Paradise will be fulfilled in a future, renewed “new heaven and earth” where nature will be restored to its former glory.

In the perfect world of Paradise, there will be no pollution of any kind. “Calamities will cease to occur, and all disadvantages such as disease, accidents, old age and death will be eradicated forever” (Maulahana Wahiddudin Khan, 2015). In Paradise, humans will make unending discoveries. All activities will be a source of entertainment and enjoyment. Deified humans in heaven will live a life of joy, peace and happiness in a state of perfection enjoying the blessed state of seeing and communing with God and His saints for eternity.

Meanwhile, we have the responsibility to take care of the present world, our common home. In the words of Pope Francis: "...we come together to take charge of this home which has been entrusted to us, knowing that all the good which exists here will be taken up into the heavenly feast....Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope." ■

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Striving for Allah

Jummah Khutba (Friday Sermon)
from March 19, 1948

By Maulana Muhammad Ali
(Translated by Dr. Mohammed Ahmad)

[This article comprises the text of a Jummah Khutba (Friday Sermon) delivered by Maulana Muhammad Ali on March 19, 1948, and recently translated from its original Urdu into English by Dr. Mohammed Ahmad. In this article, Maulana Muhammad Ali focuses on the Quranic verses which call for Muslims to "strive for Allah". Maulana Muhammad Ali explains that the significance of this command is to strive for one's spiritual development, or attain the spiritual stage of "meeting with Allah". He goes on to explain that Sufis have elaborated on this concept and prescribed various devotional acts based on it. Similarly, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, instituted the annual convention for the Movement's members, which was meant not only as a means for self-purification of the individual but also for the purpose of determining how to spread this knowledge to others. Maulana Muhammad Ali ends with frank advice to local members of the Movement (residents of Lahore) to motivate them to cease this opportunity to "strive for Allah".]

I bear witness that none deserves to be served besides

Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is the servant and messenger of Allah. After this, I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil. In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

And strive hard for Allah with due striving. He has chosen you and has not laid upon you any hardship in religion — the faith of your father Abraham. He named you Muslims before and in this, that the Messenger may be a bearer of witness to you, and you may be bearers of witness to the people; so keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate and hold fast to Allah. He is your Protector; excellent the Protector and excellent the Helper! (22:78)

And those who strive hard for Us, We shall certainly guide them in Our ways. And Allah is surely with the doers of good. (29:69)

The Holy Quran has raised man to the pinnacle of spiritual excellence. Its guidance saves him from all kinds of evil even from its most subtle forms and advances him in goodness and submission to an excellent degree. All of this results in moral and spiritual development at its best. Above all of this is the stage Islam leads us, which the Holy Quran refers to as "meeting Allah" (*liqa-Allah*). This has been greatly stressed by the word of God and is referred to as the ultimate goal of human existence. The Holy Quran enjoins us to put in a great effort to acquire this goal as expressed in the words:

O man, thou must strive a hard striving (to attain) to thy Lord, until thou meet Him (*fa-mulaqihi*). (84:6).

One can only but conjecture, what this meeting with Allah implies in the Life hereafter. The truth is that the Holy Prophet Muhammad helped man to reach the stage of "meeting Allah" ("*liqa Allah*", from the Arabic root *mulaqi*) in this life and continues to do so for those who follow his example.

Precious observations by non-Muslims

Our periodical, The Light, has recently published an article by Major Arthur Glenn Leonard, or perhaps it has been taken from his book. After reading the article it appears that these people whom we call non-believers have perhaps a better understanding of the status of the Holy Prophet than Muslims. I cannot narrate the whole article but would like to point out two or three things that he has mentioned. He says that Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) saw Allah even in a blade of grass or a bubble of water. He saw God everywhere. He made another wonderful remark. He says that the spirit of Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), is the life of Islam. Islam cannot die or go in a state of decline

as long as the spirit of the Holy Prophet remains with it. It will weaken or cease to exist only when his spirit is no longer there. He then writes that the mortal being of the Holy Prophet is certainly not there but his spirit is still very much alive and speaks in a voice which is the voice of many.

“Meeting Allah” is attained by following the example of the Holy Prophet

The truth is that our Holy Prophet perceived God in everything. Above and beyond this, not only did he see God himself but made the world aware of Him. As I have said, he himself reached the stage of “meeting with Allah” and also made others reach this spiritual developmental stage. What is this meeting with Allah? When two friends encounter each other, it is said that one is meeting the other. Exactly in a similar manner the Holy Prophet met God and made it possible for others to as well. He could see God’s presence in everything. Not only did he himself see God in this way, but those who sat in his company or came afterwards but followed his example were also led to this stage of spirituality. The presence of these saintly persons, called “friends of Allah” (*auliya Allah*), amongst the followers of the Holy Prophet Muhammad bears witness to the truth of the notion that following the example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad can elevate one to this exalted stage of spirituality.

The necessity of striving for Allah

The verses I have recited today in fact mention this. One of these verses is from the chapter “The Pilgrimage”; it states: “And strive hard for Allah with due striving.” The other verse is from the chapter “The Spider” and also states: “And those who strive hard for Us.” These are the only two verses that mention striving hard for Allah. All of the Holy Quran is replete with the subject of striving but striving for Allah is mentioned only in these two verses. Striving for Allah in fact means the effort man makes to meet Allah and helps others to do the same. The words, “And strive hard for Allah with due striving,” is a commandment to strive for Allah and our attention has been drawn towards putting it into practice. This verse is therefore about the deeds that need to be performed in order to meet God, become closer to Him and to help others in doing the same.

The second verse: “And those who strive hard for Us, We shall certainly guide them in Our ways,” engenders the strength of conviction and faith that gives man the ability to rise to this stage of spiritual development. It results not only in him seeing God but also enabling others to see Him. This should be understood as the spirit of Islam. The Holy Prophet Muhammad created the faith and conviction to see God amongst his companions and those who came afterwards and followed

his example. If we look through the pages of history, we discover that each and every one of them reached the stage where they could see God and also made others see Him.

The efforts of Sufis

This manifestation of righteousness of character and meeting with God was the real objective of the Holy Prophet’s mission and this is what he generated in his followers. Seeing God, showing Him to the rest of humanity, meeting Him and making it possible for others to meet Him was the task of our eminent religious personages and the saintly followers of the Holy Prophet. There have been a great number of such saintly followers of the Holy prophet who befriended Allah through their righteous deeds. These practices that were evolved among the *Sufis*¹ were also meant for the purpose of purifying the soul of man. As the human soul becomes purified to the state of excellence, it also becomes capable of purifying others. There is no doubt, though, that the practice of *Sufism* also caused some harm. It resulted in the system of religious mentors (*pirs*) and some of their followers becoming so submissive to these religious mentors that they started to worship them. But it is also true that there were many amongst the *Sufis* who kept alive the real mission of the Holy Prophet. To have such righteous followers who became capable of seeing God and whose attributes remained in front of them as the goal and purpose of their life. This was irrespective of whether they were moving about conducting the business of daily living, sitting down or resting.

Purpose of annual convention

Just as the Sufis produced devotional practices to achieve closeness to God, so too did the Reformer of this age (Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement) also prescribe a small but practical method of devotion in the form of our three-day long annual convention. His purpose in proposing the annual convention was nothing other than having those who have faith in Allah getting together once a year. When people who are likeminded congregate, their common goals and thoughts gain strength. They become much stronger in their determination. The unmindful attitude resolves and a wave of fresh enthusiasm is created. Any ordinary gathering of people, no matter what its intent or purpose, is strengthened by the collective meeting of minds.

The purpose of this annual convention is to not only purify the souls of the members of this organization, but to enable them to purify the souls of others. He stated that you should get together to think about ways by which the world can be brought towards righteousness and purity. The real purpose of our Holy Prophet

Muhammad's mission was to facilitate the spiritual evolution of people's character through the development of the divine attributes within them. This is the path that the Reformer of our age also put us on. He specified many means to achieve this, one being the annual convention. These days are meant to be a spiritual exercise for you. Cut yourself off from worldly activities during these three days and devote this time purely for God. This devotion should be such that the dominant thought and feeling in your heart is that you are standing before God. The strength of faith generated within you should be such that you are convinced that you are also capable of joining others with God. Put these two goals before yourself – not only that you are to meet and see God but also that you have to make the rest of the world capable of this as well. This is the purpose of the annual convention that Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad had in mind. All the devotional practices that individuals have prescribed in the past have been for self-purification. The objective of our annual convention is not only self-purification, but to think of ways to invite the rest of the world towards God and to purify their souls as well.

Advice to local members to become motivated

Do not consider this to be an impossible undertaking. It is very easy but needs our full and dedicated effort: "And strive hard for Allah with due striving." We are not putting in the full effort needed to get closer to God. In these three days you should only be thinking about how you can genuinely put in the effort needed for this striving. I must point out that people from outside of this city come here at a loss to their businesses, bearing the travel expenses and facing other difficulties. The local members who do not have to face any of these challenges seldom show up. You must remember that every endeavor needs some effort. These three days also require some effort and hard work. Members of our organization from Lahore, our Center, do not allow any change in their routine. Even during these three days it is business as usual. Some just consider it a huge favor to come and listen to some one's lecture. Their minds are not focused on self-purification and participation in the striving to spread the word of Allah. Even the thought does not pass through their minds to dedicate these few days for God's work and to set aside their daily business for this purpose. Why, may I ask, is it that while people from outside of the city of Lahore participate in spite of great difficulties, the residents of Lahore remain unmotivated? It is indeed regrettable that the organization at the Center cannot even bear to put in this degree of effort.

I am telling the members from the city of Lahore that these three days are meant for striving in the way of

Allah. Set aside your daily occupations. If people from outside can come to attend the convention, why can you not do the same? I accept that my words are not effective but you also need to consider why your commitment is lifeless. Ponder upon this: Is it that your hearts have become hardened like stone and are not affected by the words of one who is calling out to you? Just as your brothers from other areas leave off everything and gather here, you should also part from your occupations and participate. Why is this so essential? It is in order that you can purify your own souls and also find ways for the world to accept God. Serve the guests in whatever way you can. It is also part of the striving. Also participate regularly in the lectures, prayer services and consultations. Come for the *Fajr* (morning) prayer. People who live within a distance of two miles can easily do so. For those living at a distance of four or five miles, it is no doubt difficult. There is Quranic lessons (*dars*) after the morning prayer – stay and attend it. Afterwards you can go home for breakfast and come back at ten o'clock to attend the convention.

The world will certainly come towards Islam

You should dedicate these three days for God. This convention is unique in its purpose. In this day and age you will not find such individuals who gather together to spread the name of God. God has rewarded manifold the small efforts you have made in that they have borne abundant fruit. Keep up this endeavor. The world will certainly come towards Islam. Every one, young and old, should understand that the world cannot remain in this condition. The teachings of Islam will definitely gain acceptance and people will come towards it. I therefore urge you to strive for this cause and prepare your souls to face some hardship.

Think about the tremendous difficulties the refugees have had to face.² You are reluctant to face even small difficulties in Allah's way. Those who are coming from outside should also not think that they will have comfort over here. If they do not find good food or comfortable quarters, they should not complain. If they do have some complaints they need not talk about it amongst themselves but make aware those who have been put in charge of administrative duties. Even if you are given dry bread for sustenance, accept it and consume it. Only keep the goal of striving for the progress of God's religion and purification of your own souls in front of you. ■

Footnotes

1. Reference is being made to the refugees who sought refuge in Pakistan after the partition of British India in 1947.
2. Members of ascetic, mystical Muslim religious orders.

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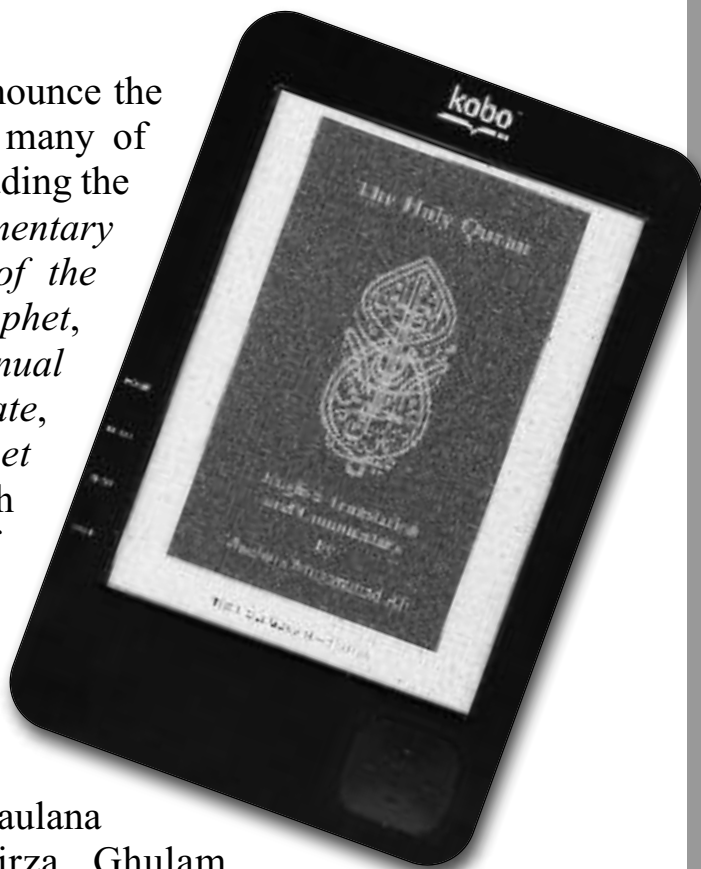
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