

“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 eighty years

January - March 2006

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.

Vol. 83

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احمدیہ انجمن اشاعت اسلام لاہور

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P.O. Box 3370, Dublin, Ohio 43016, 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.

ISSN: 1060–4596

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The main objective of the A.A.I.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.

Non-sectarian: Every person professing Islam by the words *La ilaha ill-Allah, Muhammad-ur rasul-ullah* (There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah) is a Muslim. A Muslim cannot be expelled from Islam by anyone.

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:

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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.

Undermining the Quran's Teachings: Shari'ah, the New Definitive Source of Islam

By Fatima Zainab Rahman

[This article comprises a critical analysis of "shari'ah" law. Although generally accepted as the ultimate and comprehensive source of law in Islam, Ms. Rahman directs our attention to some of the regulations contained in shari'ah that are inconsistent with clear, authoritative principles of Islam. By examining the legitimacy of some of the rules and regulations contained in this code of law, Ms. Rahman convincingly argues it is the Holy Quran alone that is to be given the status of supreme law in Islam and anything contradicting the Holy Quran must be dismissed as unIslamic.]

As we turn on the TV, switch on National Public Radio, or open up any news website online, we are undoubtedly struck by yet another controversy involving Islam. The media's constant inundation of extremist political Islam and violence, shrouded under the term, Jihad, has become a norm in our lives. One of the latest controversies consuming the media has been the apostasy trial of the Afghan Abdul Rahman and the possible death penalty under Afghanistan's Shari'ah law. Unfortunately not only the media but also Muslims throughout the world often use the term Shari'ah interchangeably with Islamic law. Thus, Shari'ah has become synonymous with the teachings and principles of Islam. This equating of a complex Shari'ah which is compiled from a variety of sources with the pure and simple principles of Islam as found in the Quran and taught by the Prophet Muhammad is creating consequences not only for the Islamic world but also for the portrayal of Islam worldwide.

My argument is that Shari'ah, which is an all-encompassing body of law, contradicts many of the fundamental principles found in the Quran and practiced by the Prophet Muhammad; yet despite its flaws, it has become the accepted authority of Islamic teachings, replacing the Quran as the ultimate source of Islam. In doing so, it portrays a negative image of Islam contradictory to Quranic teachings and has made Islam an easy target for criticism.

Before the implications of Shari'ah are discussed, it is useful to define, explain, and provide a historical background of what constitutes Shari'ah. Shari'ah is an

all-encompassing system of laws and customs that govern Muslims and Islamic societies in the daily life, family, professional, legal, and economic realms. A more detailed explanation is given by Wiechman, Kendell, and Azarian who co-authored, "Shari'ah Law: Myths and Realities:"

Islamic law is known as Shari'ah Law, and Shari'ah means the path to follow God's Law. Shari'ah Law is holistic or eclectic in its approach to guide the individual in most daily matters. Shari'ah Law controls, rules and regulates all public and private behavior. It has regulations for personal hygiene, diet, sexual conduct, and elements of child rearing. It also prescribes specific rules for prayers, fasting, giving to the poor, and many other religious matters. Civil Law and Common Law primarily focus on public behavior, but both do regulate some private matters.ⁱ

They elaborate writing that,

Shari'ah Law can also be used in larger situations than guiding an individual's behavior. It can be used as guide for how an individual acts in society and how one group interacts with another. The Shari'ah Law can be used to settle border disputes between nations or within nations. It can also be used to settle international disputes, conflicts and wars. This Law does not exclude any knowledge from other sources and is viewed by the Muslim world as a vehicle to solve all problems civil, criminal, and international (Wiechman, Kendell, Azarian).ⁱⁱ

Thus, Shari'ah has a comprehensive nature which in essence governs all matters in societies that wish to follow it. The laws and traditions of Shari'ah are most generally considered to be derived from a conglomerate of sources including the Quran, Sunna and Hadith, interpretations of Islam by the four great Imams of the 8th and 9th centuries as well as later rulings, edicts, and judgments of later Islamic scholars known as *mujtahids*. Although there are four different schools of thought based upon each Great Imam as well as a Shia interpretation which lend to slight variations within Shari'ah, many portions which I will address overlap.

I will first show that the origins of many of the laws comprising Shari'ah are not based upon Islamic sources and subsequently contradict the Quran's most primary principles. One of the most fundamental flaws within Shari'ah which derides its credibility as the ultimate "Islamic Law" is that it is rooted within pre-Islamic faiths and traditions which are not found in the Quran or

Hadith. The Encyclopedia of the Orient explicates that, “Shari’ah is often referred to as Islamic law, but this is wrong, as only a small part is irrefutably based upon the core Islamic text, the Koran.”ⁱⁱⁱ Among the most notable pre-Islamic sources upon which Shari’ah is based are the traditions and social norms of Arabia before the complete revelation of the Quran. Traces of these pre-Islamic traditions are found throughout Shari’ah including the family law section. The Encyclopedia of Britannica Academic Edition describes marriage laws as prescribed by the Hanafi and Jaafari (Jaafari is the interpretation followed by the Shia) interpretations as, “minor girls may be contracted in compulsory marriages.”^{iv} The institution of forced marriage including that of minors was amongst the numerous abuses against women in Arabian society before the advent of Prophet Muhammad. The world renowned Islamic scholar and attorney Maulana Muhammad Ali has described the position of women in Arabia before the Prophet’s time as, “(the) woman was looked upon as a mere chattel. Instead of having any right of inheritance of property, her own person formed part of the inheritance, and the heir could dispose of her as he liked.”^v It was within such a depraved society that women without any rights including minors were forced into marriages by their fathers, previous husbands, or masters. It was precisely this abuse that Islam eradicated as the Quran provided Arab women new-found freedoms including the freedom to choose their spouses. The Quran states, “Prevent them not from marrying in a lawful manner” (2:232). Maulana Muhammad Ali elaborates on the conflict between Shari’ah’s ruling on this subject and what was practiced by the Prophet in accordance with the Quran. He explains that although an accepted norm before the revelation of the Quran, the Prophet in compliance with the Quran did not allow for marriage without the consent of the minor.

It is true that Jurisprudence, following the general law of contracts, recognizes, in the case of marriage contract, the legality of the consent of a guardian on behalf of his ward, but there is no case on record showing that the marriage of a minor through his or guardian was allowed by the Prophet after details of the law were revealed to him at Madinah.^{vi}

Thus, the evidence indicates that the concept of forced marriage including that of minors, although prevalent in Arabic society before the advent of Islam was a practice eradicated by the Quran. Its presence in Shari’ah law, therefore, contradicts the freedom of choice found in the Quran, undermining it as a source compatible with Islam. In addition to the inclusion of pre-Islam Arabic traditions, certain laws within

Shari’ah, especially those in the penal code, derive from Biblical Jewish traditions. In fact, one of the Shari’ah laws which contradicts the Quran’s principle of forgiveness and mercy is rooted in old Judaic law, namely the punishment for adultery. Although not accepted by all Muslim countries, many of them that partially or completely base their legal system on Shari’ah accept stoning as a possible punishment for adultery. Among these countries is Saudi Arabia which follows the Hanbali interpretation of Shari’ah and accepts stoning as a viable, Islamic punishment for adultery according to the Library of Congress’s Federal Research Division Country Study.^{vii} This form of punishment finds no support in the Quran and is instead rooted in the Old Testament. The Old Testament calls for the severest punishment for adultery. “If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death” (Leviticus 20:24). Not only death but specifically death by stoning as sanctioned by Shari’ah is also specifically prescribed by traditional Jewish Law. “According to Biblical Halakha, where adultery is forbidden in the Seventh Commandment, the penalty is stoning for both the man and the woman.”^{viii} Jewish scholars and experts agree that Jewish law endorses death and stoning for adultery. Rabbi Dan Polish in his article, “Judaism and the Death Penalty,” writes, “Indeed, the Torah specifies a full litany of offenses for which a person may be put to death, including murder, idolatry, blasphemy, adultery...the punishments for each transgression are noted as well—stoning, burning, and slaying by the sword.”^{ix} Verifying this, Ismar Schorsch, the chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary also verifies that, “Jewish law treats adultery with utmost severity...”^x

The Quran conversely never once mentions stoning for adultery let alone death for it, nor was it ever practiced during the Prophet’s time. In fact, the Quran specifically stipulates flogging as the punishment (Quran 24:2), which is to be done with light materials like a stick or shoe with the wrongdoer clothed^{xi} in an attempt to admonish and humiliate the individual, not physically torture him or her. However, this practice like that of forced marriage of minors was performed before Islam eradicated it during the Prophet’s time. Thus the incorporation of stoning to death as the punishment for adultery is rooted in Judaic law not in the Quran.

Islam’s promotion of mercy and humanity were specifically intended to eliminate the immoral practices of pre-Islam Arabia and to reform the archaic and draconian laws found in the Bible. The promotion of Shari’ah reverses the development that Islam brought

for humanity. The incorporation of these ancient traditions and norms pre-dating Islam came about partially because the development of a formal Shari'ah Law began about thirty years after the Prophet's death under the Umayyad Dynasty. This Dynasty was governing a large expanse of territory where non-Islamic laws and traditions were practiced and where non-Muslim believers lived.^{xii} Thus, when the Islamic law came into being, many pieces of ancient Bedouin, Jewish, Roman-Byzantine, and Persian law were incorporated into Shari'ah. Thus far, an examination has been undertaken of some of the non-Islam based sources that have influenced Shari'ah as well as their recurring consequences for the humane principles that Islam established for society. The incorporation of laws and traditions from pre-Islam Arabia, Jewish Law, and the Roman, and Persian legal systems into Shari'ah is not the only basis for the endorsement of principles contradictory to the Quran, even more prevalent are misinterpretations of Hadith which although contrary to Quranic verse, have over the years become established into Islamic law. The most blaring example of this is the punishment for apostasy. The Islamic scholar N.A. Faruqi in his discussion regarding apostasy writes, "the misconception that the punishment in Islam for apostasy is death is unfortunately common among Muslim Ulema".^{xiii} This widespread belief among Muslims unfortunately undermines the notion of freedom of religion which is emphasized by the Quran. The Quran stresses freedom of belief unlike any other religion as one of its hallmark verses proclaims, "there is no compulsion in Religion" (Quran 2:256). This verse is continuously verified by other verses throughout the Holy Book such as, "Say, the Truth is from your Lord; then whosoever wants to, let him believe; and whosoever wants to, let him disbelieve" (18:30). The Quran clearly stipulates that freedom of religion is a foundational principle inherent in Islam, yet Shari'ah contradicts this through the call for death as punishment for apostasy.

The formation and inclusion of this law is rooted in the Hadith tradition which permitted Muslims to kill apostates who had first *attacked* them and were *fighting* them on the battlefield. Ali clarifies this in his book, The Religion of Islam:

At a time when war was in progress between the Muslims and the unbelievers, it often happened that a person who apostatized went over to the enemy and joined hands with him in fighting against the Muslims. He was treated as an enemy, not because he had changed his religion but because he had changed sides.^{xiv}

Therefore, permission to kill is in self-defense on the premise that the individual has attacked the Muslim not because he or she has apostatized.

This misinterpretation undermines the notion of religious freedom which is not only a principle valued in the Quran but is also considered one of the central democratic principles, and is therefore creating an unnecessary conflict with democratic and secular values. This conflict is publicized through the media and persistently undermines the egalitarian nature of Islam. Muslim countries that follow a combination of Shari'ah and secular law are vulnerable to this conflict, including Egypt. Egypt's current legal system is built upon both Shari'ah law as well as secular law.^{xv} Dr. Johanna Pink, in her article entitled, "a Post-Quranic Religion Between Apostasy and Public Order: Egyptian Muftis and Courts on the Legal Status of the Bahai," explains that Articles 12 and 13 of the Egyptian Constitution guarantee freedom of belief but Article 2 upholds Shari'ah which amongst other belief upholds punishment for apostasy (Pink).^{xvi} Article 2 reads, "...and the principle source of legislation is Islamic Jurisprudence (Shari'ah)." Pink examines how the courts in Egypt reconcile secular and Shari'ah law in apostasy cases relating to non Christian-Judeo faiths. Referring to an apostasy case in which this contradiction came into play she writes:

Grand Mufti Ahmad Haridi was explicitly asked for a fatwa by the public prosecutor in the case of a man who was registered as a Muslim, had been arrested as a member of a Baha'i community. Haridi decided that if the person was born Muslim and had embraced the Baha'i faith thereafter, then he was to be treated as an apostate. In this case, the court or religious scholars should explain his error to him, and he should be given the opportunity to repent. If he did not repent, he must be killed.^{xvii}

This example represents the problem that countries following misguided Shari'ah laws are facing within their legal system, problems that could be avoided if prominence was given to the Quran and Hadith in light of the Quran rather than Shari'ah.

Thus, based solely on the laws and regulations that constitute the Shari'ah, this so-called "Islamic Law" contradicts some of the most fundamental principles of the Quran, thereby undermining the significance of the Quran as the ultimate and pure Islamic source. These misguided notions have far-reaching repercussions which includes the portrayal of Islam as violent and intolerant and fermentation of an ideological hatred towards Islam that promotes political action against Muslim countries.

Most of the criticism directed towards Islam is rooted in Shari'ah because the discussed laws are vulnerable to attacks of inhumanity, intolerance, and backwardness. The recent response to the apostasy trial in Afghanistan was used by many as an attack against Islam, alleging that Islam is an intolerant religion. The same was true for the 2002 death sentence of a Nigerian woman committed of adultery.

However, beyond the repercussions of the rules and laws themselves, an underlying concern with the concept of a holistic law in which there are fixed interpretations of what Islam endorses is that it produces and sustains an indolent attitude amongst individuals that hinders the use of the intellect to study and understand the Quran and its application to life. This in itself undermines one of the Quran's stressed teachings which is the use of the mind. That the Quran is a book for all mankind and humanity, it is by definition within the grasp of the individual's comprehension, so long as he or she makes a meaningful attempt to understand it and its context. In fact, the Quran empowered the common man and prohibited the creation of a clerical institution such as a clergy or priesthood to comprehend religion. But Shari'ah provides an easy access, short-cut to avoid the more intellectually strenuous path to understanding Islam as practiced during the Prophet's time. And present day scholars of Islam who are considered not only great spiritual but learned, intellectual leaders of Islam such as Shaikh Abdal-Hakim Murad advocate that the common Muslim is incapable of utilizing his or her reason to understand Islam. Shaikh Murad in his article, entitled "Understanding the Four Maddhabs: the Problem with Anti-Maddhabism writes,

Given the depth of scholarship needed to understand the revealed texts accurately, and the extreme warnings we have been given against distorting the Revelation, it is obvious that ordinary Muslims are duty bound to follow expert opinion, rather than rely on their own reasoning and limited knowledge.^{xviii}

However, the Quran warns against such blind following that Murad preaches and foreshadows the consequences, "And they say: Had we but listened or *pondered*, we should not have been among the inmates of the burning Fire" (67:10). The Quran also points to those individuals who are unwilling to discover Islam because they find it easier to follow the religion of their forefathers: "And when it is said to them, Come to that which Allah has revealed and to the Messenger, they say: Sufficient for us is that wherein we found our fathers. What! Even though their fathers knew nothing

and had no guidance!" (5:104). This verse is also relevant to the current mindset of the majority of Muslims who satisfied with accepting Islam as presented by Shari'ah and as interpreted by their forefathers centuries after the Prophet's time, fail to utilize their mind to look into the actual message of the Quran.

To conclude, Shari'ah which has been granted the status of "Islamic law" contradicts many of the basic principles such as freedom of choice, freedom of religion, mercy, and forgiveness as found in the Quran and practiced by Prophet Muhammad, because of origins in non-Islamic sources and misinterpretations. Yet despite its flaws, it is given great prominence in the Islamic world and practically takes precedence over the Quran and Hadith because the faulty laws are nonetheless accepted. The distinction given to Shari'ah has consequences that are ultimately portraying an image of Islam that negates the spiritual, humanitarian, and intellectual development that it brought about. The Great Reformer of Islam, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad reintroduced the concept of rational and tolerant interpretation of the Quran as practiced by Prophet Muhammad. He gave back the Quran its glory that continues to be undermined by parts of the Shari'ah and unfounded fatwas and edicts of so-called Islamic experts today. His wisdom is invaluable in rekindling the use of the mind that the Quran established and reestablishing the basic principles of equality and mercy practiced by Prophet Muhammad. ■

Footnotes:

- i Azarian, Muhammad, and Jerry Kednall, and Denis Wiechman. "Islamic Law Myths and Realities." (taken from <http://www.iuu.edu.my/deed/lawbase/ilw_myth_real.html>).
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- xi Ali, Maulana Muhammad. The Religion of Islam. Columbus: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam, 1990, pg. 559
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- xiii Faruqui, N.A. Ahmadiyyat in the Service of Islam. Newark: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam, pg. 57
- xiv Ali, Maulana Muhammad. The Religion of Islam. Columbus: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam, 1990, pg. 440
- xv The Judiciary, Civil Rights, and the Rule of Law. Country Studies. <<http://www.country-studies.com/egypt/the-judiciary,-civil-rights,-and-the-rule-of-law.html>>.
- xvi Pink, J. (2003). A post-Quranic Religion Between Apostasy and Public Order; Egyptian muftis and courts on the legal status of the Bah’ faith. *Islamic law and society*, 10(3), 409-434.
- xvii Pink, J. (2003). A post-Quranic Religion Between Apostasy and Public Order; Egyptian muftis and courts on the legal status of the Bah’ faith. *Islamic law and society*, 10(3), 409-434.
- xviii Murad, Abdul-Hakim. “Understanding the Four Madhhabs: the Problem with Anti-Madhhabism (revised edition).” Islamica Magazine 1995. (taken from <<http://www.iiu.edu.my/deed/lawbase/newmadhhab.html>>).

Islam’s Teaching on Response to Abuse and Mockery

By Dr. Zahid Aziz

[In this article, Dr. Zahid Aziz examines the appropriate response to abuse and mockery of one’s faith according to Islam. In light of the recent controversy over the Danish cartoons portraying the Holy Prophet Muhammad in various obscene ways, this article is a timely source of wisdom for Muslims who rightfully feel hurt and anger over the distasteful publications. Rather than turning to rage, as many Muslims unfortunately resorted to in this case, Islam prescribes the showing of patience under such provocation. Furthermore, Islam mandates the disregarding of abuse and the turning

away from abusers. Thus, ‘freedom of speech’ is protected in Islam, an entrenched doctrine that is not defeated by even the act of ridiculing the Holy Prophet Muhammad.]

According to the religion of Islam, Muslims can only respond to verbal abuse, mockery and lampooning of their faith and its sacred figures in the following forms:

1. Any criticism of Islam, or allegations against it, which underlie the abuse must be refuted and answered by means of words and speech.
2. Apart from answering specific criticism, all possible efforts must be made to present the true and accurate picture of Islam in general. With more enlightenment and less ignorance prevailing about Islam and its Holy Prophet Muhammad, the instances of abuse, vituperation and mockery will decrease.
3. As regards the offence or hurt that Muslims naturally feel as a result of such abuse, they are aught to respond by:
 - a) bearing the provocation with resolute patience,
 - b) ignoring the abuse,
 - c) separating themselves temporarily from the company of the abusers while the abuse continues,
 - d) exercising forgiveness in view of the ignorance of the abusers.

All this is stated plainly and categorically in the Holy Quran and is evident from the actions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. It is not allowed by Islam to respond intemperately with fury and rage, call for physical retribution and punishment, or threaten or attack anyone with physical violence. It is entirely false and totally unfounded to allege that Islam teaches Muslims to attack or seek to murder anyone who verbally abuses their religion, mocks it, or offends their feelings towards their faith.

Islamic Teaching on Responding to Abuse and Mockery

Below we give arguments from the Holy Quran and incidents from the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad to prove the above points. We are confident that no one can cite any text from the Holy Quran which contradicts the position set out below.

We may preface our discussion with the following saying of the Holy Prophet Muhammad:

The Muslim who mixes with the people and bears patiently their hurtful words, is better than one who does not mix with people and does not show patience under their abuse.” [Mishkat, Book: Ethics, chapter: ‘Gentleness, modesty and good behaviour’].

What a noble and wonderful piece of guidance, which is so applicable in the modern world in which people of widely differing faiths and opposing views have to mix and come into contact so much!

Teachings of the Holy Quran

As a general point, it may first be noted that the Holy Quran itself records the many accusations made against, and the insults heaped upon, the Holy Prophet Muhammad by his opponents during his life (for example, that he was insane, or that he fabricated his revelation), and it answers these charges, but nowhere does it require Muslims to inflict any kind of punishment on the accusers. If such abuse or criticism requires to be silenced by force, then why should the Quran itself have quoted so much of it from its opponents’ mouths and thus preserved it forever?

The Holy Quran tells Muslims:

1. “You will certainly hear much abuse from the followers of previous books and from the idol-worshipping people. And if you are patient and keep your duty — this is surely a matter of great resolution.” — 3:185
2. “Many of the followers of previous books wish that they could turn you back into disbelievers after you have believed, but you should pardon and forgive.” — 2:109

In connection with these verses, it is recorded in the Hadith collection Bukhari:

The Messenger of Allah and his Companions used to forgive the idolators and the followers of previous books, as Allah had commanded them, and they used to show patience on hearing hurtful words. [Book: ‘Commentary on the Quran’, ch. 16 under *Sura 3*.]

Addressing the Holy Prophet, God says in the Quran:

1. “Bear patiently what they say.” — 20:130 and 50:39.
2. “And bear patiently what they say and forsake them with a becoming withdrawal.” — 73:10.
3. “Obey not the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and disregard their hurtful talk.” — 33:48

In the verses quoted above, Muslims are taught to bear their feelings of hurt and anger with patience, and to ignore the abuse.

Another verse having some bearing on this subject is as follows:

And if you invite them to guidance, they hear not; and you see them looking towards you, yet they see not. Hold fast to forgiveness and enjoin goodness and turn away from the ignorant. — 7:198-199

This directs us that when we have to deal with people who are blindly prejudiced and ignorant, and therefore fail to understand the guidance, we must not give vent to anger, fury and violence against them. We should treat them with forgiveness, do our duty of enjoining simple acts of goodness that everyone recognises as good, and then turn away from them, leaving the matter in the hands of Allah.

Withdrawing from company

Muslims are told:

When you hear Allah’s messages disbelieved in and mocked at, sit not with them until they enter into some other discourse. — 4:140; see also 6:68.

These passages deal with the case when the religion is being mocked and derided (as distinct from being criticised). A Muslim is required to do no more than to withdraw from such a company, and even that only while the mocking continues, and actually to rejoin the same company when they have changed the subject! How far from ordering Muslims to kill such people! Muslims are instructed to part company with them for the duration of their gratuitous abuse but still maintain other aspects of their relationship with those very offenders. Can any teaching be nobler and more uplifting? Any criticism underlying the abuse must, of course, be answered. But the response to any sheer abuse, ridicule or mockery is withdrawal of oneself from the company of the abusers. The following verse, addressed to the Prophet Muhammad, has already been quoted above:

And bear patiently what they say and forsake them with a becoming withdrawal. — 73:10.

The word for “becoming” here means literally ‘beautiful’. The ‘withdrawal’ therefore is to be done in a dignified, well-mannered way, not by descending to their level of misbehaviour and abuse.

Some incidents from the Holy Prophet Muhammad's life

1. A man called Suhail ibn Amar had a voice suited to oratory, and he used to employ this talent in making speeches against the Holy Prophet. He was captured by the Muslims at the battle of Badr and brought before the Holy Prophet. A Muslim suggested that some of Suhail's teeth should be knocked out to disable him from making speeches. The Holy Prophet replied:

If I disfigure any of his limbs, God will disfigure mine in retribution.

2. Once when the Holy Prophet divided some wealth among his followers, a man accused him to his face of being unfair and insulted him by telling him: "Fear God, O Muhammad". After the man had left, a Muslim asked the Holy Prophet's permission to go and kill him. The Holy Prophet refused to allow it and actually tried to find some good in the man by saying: "Perhaps he says his prayers". That Muslim replied: Even if he does, there are many people who pray, but are hypocrites and what they say is not what is in their hearts. The Holy Prophet replied: God has not told me to look inside people to see what is in their hearts. (*Bukhari*, Book: *Maghazi*, ch. 63)

3. Some Jews, when addressing Muslims, would sarcastically distort the greeting *as-salamu alaikum* ("peace be upon you") and say it as *as-samu alaikum*, which means "death be upon you." When they once addressed the Holy Prophet in this manner, his wife Aisha retorted back in the same words. The Holy Prophet disapproved of this reply and said that God did not like harsh words.

4. Once there were four men who spread an accusation of immoral conduct against the Holy Prophet's wife Aisha. Their allegation was ultimately proved to be false. One of them, called Mistah, who was poor, used to receive financial assistance from Aisha's father, Abu Bakr (the foremost follower of the Holy Prophet Muhammad and later the first Caliph of Islam). After this incident, Abu Bakr swore never again to help Mistah. The following verse was revealed to the Holy Prophet on this occasion:

Let not the possessors of grace and means among you swear against giving to the near relatives and the poor and those who had to flee in God's way. Pardon and overlook. Do you not love that God should forgive you? (24:22)

Hearing this, Abu Bakr exclaimed: "Indeed, I certainly love that God should forgive me." He then

resumed providing assistance to Mistah, as before (*Bukhari*, Book: 'Testimony', ch. 15). Note that this allegation was not made against just an ordinary Muslim woman, but the wife of the Holy Prophet, and therefore it struck at the holy household at the centre of the religion of Islam, which was required to be a model of purity for all Muslims. In view of this, the forgiveness taught in the above verse, and put into practice by Abu Bakr, the greatest of Muslims after the Holy Prophet, becomes all the more generous and magnanimous.

In incidents number (1) and (2) above, the Holy Prophet Muhammad *protected* from any harm those who had insulted and abused him. In number (2), *he did not even want to think ill* of his slanderer. In incident number (4), the Holy Prophet Muhammad received revelation from God asking Muslims *not only to pardon* a man who had slandered his wife with an accusation of immoral conduct but also *to continue providing financial help* to him. Obeying this, Hazrat Abu Bakr continued to financially assist a man who had stigmatised his daughter. One cannot imagine that anyone, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, faced with the same situation whether in those days or now, would ever forgive such a man. ■

Apostasy in Islam

By Maulana Muhammad Ali

[Because of the recent call to put to death the Afghan who converted from Islam to Christianity, there has been much attention placed on the idea that apostasy is punishable by death in Islamic law. In the excerpt from treatise The Religion of Islam given below, Maulana Muhammad Ali refutes the notion that apostasy in and of itself is punishable by death. He examines the sources that are the basis for Islamic law, the Quran, Hadith, and jurisprudence (in order of descending importance) and argues convincingly that death was never a punishment for apostasy alone. However, while tracing back the roots of this misconception, he reveals that the punishment of death was indeed rendered upon those who became apostates and joined the ranks of those waging war against the Muslims. The clear implication to this analysis is that killing of apostates in Islam is only permitted as a means of self-defense; that is, when an apostate is actively waging war against Muslims or killing Muslims. Of special significance in this article is the use of the words "murtadd" (apostate) and "irtidad" (apostasy).]

Apostasy in the Quran

The Quran is the primary source of Islamic laws and therefore we shall take it first. In the first place, it nowhere speaks of a *murtadd* by implication. *Irtidad* consists in the expression of unbelief or in the plain denial of Islam and it is not to be assumed because a person who professes Islam, expresses an opinion or does an act which, in the opinion of a learned man or a legislator, is un-Islamic. Abuse of a prophet or disrespect to the Quran are very often made false excuses for treating a person as *murtadd*, though he may avow in the strongest terms that he is a believer in the Quran and the Prophet. Secondly, the general impression that Islam condemns an apostate to death does not find the least support from the Quran. Heffeming begins his article on *murtadd*, in the Encyclopedia of Islam, with the following words: "In the Quran the apostate is threatened with punishment in the next world only." There is mention of *irtidad* in one of the late Makkah revelations:

Whoso disbelieves in Allah after his belief – not he who is compelled while his heart is content with faith, but he who opens his breast for disbelief – on them is the wrath of Allah, and for them is a grievous chastisement (16: 106).

Clearly the *murtadd* is here threatened with punishment in the next life, and there is not the least change in this attitude in later revelations, when Islamic government had been established immediately after the Prophet reached Madinah. In one of the early Madinah revelations, apostasy is spoken of in connection with the war which the unbelievers had waged to make the Muslims apostates by force:

And they will not cease fighting you until they turn you back from your religion, if they can. And whoever of you turns back from his religion (*yartadda* from *irtidad*), then he dies while an unbeliever – these it is whose works go for nothing in this world and the Hereafter, and they are the companions of the fire; therein they will abide (2:217).

So if a man becomes apostate, he will be punished – not in this life, but in the hereafter – on account of the evil deeds to which he has reverted, and his good works, done while he was yet a Muslim, become null because of the evil course of life which he has adopted.

The third chapter, revealed in the third year of Hijrah, speaks again and again of people who had resorted to unbelief after becoming Muslims, but always speaks of their punishment in the hereafter: "How shall Allah guide a people who disbelieved after their believing and

after they had born witness that the Messenger was true" (3:86); "Except those who repent after that and amend" (3:38); "Those who disbelieve after their believing, then increase in disbelief, their repentance is not accepted" (3:89).

The most convincing argument that death was not the punishment for apostasy is contained in the Jewish plans, conceived while they were living under the Muslim rule in Madinah: "And a party of the People of the Book say: Avow belief in that which has been revealed to those who believe, in the first part of the day, and disbelieve in the latter part of it" (3:71). How could people living under a Muslim government conceive of such a plan to throw discredit on Islam, if apostasy was punishable with death? The fifth chapter *Maidah*, is one of those revealed towards the close of the Prophet's life, and even in this chapter no worldly punishment is mentioned for the apostates: "O you who believe! Should any one of you turn back from his religion, then Allah will bring a people who He loves and who love Him" (5:54). Therefore so far as the Quran is concerned, there is not only no mention of a death sentence for apostates but such a sentence is negated by the verses speaking of apostasy, as well as by that *magna charta* of religious freedom, the 256th verse of the second chapter, *la ikraha fi-l-din*, "There is no compulsion in religion."

Hadith on Apostasy

Let us now turn to Tradition, for it is on this authority that the *Fiqh* books have based their death-sentence for apostates. The words in certain traditions have undoubtedly the reflex of a later age, but still a careful study leads to the conclusion that apostasy was not punishable unless combined with other circumstances which called for punishment of offenders. Bukhari, who is undoubtedly the most careful of all collectors of traditions is explicit on this point. He has two "books" dealing with the apostates, one of which is called *Kitab al-muharibin min ahl alkufr wa-l-ridda*, or "the Book of those who fight (against the Muslims) from among the unbelievers and the apostates," and the other is called *Kitab istitabat al-mu'anidin wa-l-murtaddin wa qitalihim*, or "the Book of calling to repentance of the enemies and the apostates and fighting with them," Both these headings speak for themselves. The heading of the first book clearly shows that only such apostates are dealt with in it as fight against the Muslims, and that of the second associates the apostates with the enemies of Islam. That is really the crux of the whole question, and it is due to a misunderstanding on this point that a doctrine was formulated which is quite contrary to the plain teachings of the Quran. At a time when war was in

progress between the Muslims and the unbelievers, it often happened that a person who apostatized went over to the enemy and joined hands with him in fighting against the Muslims. He was treated as an enemy, not because he had changed his religion but because he had changed sides. Even then there were tribes that were not at war with the Muslims, and if an apostate went over to them, he was not touched. Such people are expressly spoken of in the Quran:

Except those who join a people between whom and you there is an alliance, or who come to you, their hearts shrinking from fighting you, or fighting their people; and if Allah had pleased He would have given them power over you so that they would have fought you; so if they withdraw from you and fight not you and offer you peace, then Allah has not given you a way against them (4:90).

The only case of the punishment of apostates, mentioned in trustworthy traditions, is that of a party of the tribe of 'Ukul,' who accepted Islam and came to Madinah. They found that the climate of the town did not agree with them, and the Prophet sent them to a place outside Madinah where the state mulch-camels were kept, so that they might live in the open air and drink of milk. They got well and then killed the keeper of the camels and drove away the animals. This being brought to the knowledge of the Prophet, a party was sent in pursuit of them and they were put to death (Bu 56:152). The report is clear on the point that they were put to death, not because of their apostasy but because they had killed the keeper of the camels.

Much stress is laid on a tradition, which says: "Whoever changes his religion, kill him" (Bu. 89:2). But in view of what the *Bukhari* itself has indicated by describing apostates as fighters or by associating their name with the name of the enemies of Islam, it is clear that this refers only to those apostates who join hands with the enemies of Islam and fight with the Muslims. It is only by placing this limitation on the meaning of the tradition that it can be reconciled with other traditions or with the principles laid down in the Quran. In fact, its words are so comprehensive that they include every change of faith, from one religion to any other whatsoever; thus even a non-Muslim who becomes a Muslim, or a Jew becomes a Christian, must be killed. Evidently, such a statement cannot be ascribed to the Prophet. So the tradition cannot be accepted, without placing a limitation upon its meaning.

Another tradition relating to the same subject throws further light on the significance of that quoted above. In this it is stated that the life of a Muslim may only be

taken in three cases, one of which is that, "he forsakes his religion and separates himself (*al-tarik*) from his community (*li-l-jama'ah*) (Bu. 88:6). According to another version, the words are "who forsakes (*al-mufariq*) his community." Evidently separation from the community or the forsaking of it, which is here added as a necessary condition, means that the man leaves the Muslims and joins the enemy camp. Thus the words of the tradition show that it relates to wartime; and the apostate forfeited his life not for changing his religion, but for desertion.

An instance of a simple change of religion is also contained in the *Bukhari*. "An Arab of the desert came to the Prophet and accepted Islam at his hand; then fever overtook him while he was still in Madinah; so he came to the Prophet and said, Give back my pledge; and the Prophet refused; then he came again and said, Give me back my pledge; and the Prophet refused; then he went away" (Bu. 94:47). This tradition shows that the man first accepted Islam, and the next day on getting fever he thought that it was due to his becoming a Muslim, and so he came and threw back the pledge. This was a clear case of apostasy, yet it is nowhere related that anyone killed him. On the other hand, the tradition says the he went away unharmed.

Another example of a simple change of religion is that of a Christian who became a Muslim and the apostatized and went over to Christianity, and yet he was not put to death: "Anas says, there was a Christian who became a Muslim and read the *Baqarah* and the *Al 'Imran* (2nd and 3rd chapters of the Quran), and he used to write (the Quran) for the Prophet. He then went over to Christianity again, and he used to say, Muhammad does not know anything except what I wrote for him. Then Allah caused him to die and they buried him" (Bu. 61:25). The tradition goes on to say how his body was thrown out by the earth. This was evidently at Madinah after the revelation of the second and third chapters of the Quran, when a Muslim state was well established, and yet the man who apostatized was not even molested, though he spoke of the Prophet in extremely derogatory terms and gave him out be an imposter who knew nothing except what (the apostate) wrote for him.

It had already been shown that the Quran speaks of apostates joining a tribe on friendly terms with the Muslim, and of others who withdrew from fighting altogether, siding neither with the Muslims nor with their enemies, and it states that they were left alone (4:90). All these cases show that the tradition relating to the killing of those who change their religion applied only to those who fought against the Muslims.

Apostasy and Fiqh

Turning to *Fiqh*, we find that the jurists first lay down a principle quite opposed to the Quran, namely that the life of a man may be taken on account of his apostasy. Thus in the *Hidayah*: “The *murtadd* (apostate) shall have Islam presented to him whether he is a free man or a slave; if he refused, he must be killed” (H.I, p.576). But this principle is contradicted immediately afterwards when the apostate is called “an unbeliever at war (*kafir-un harabiyy-un*) whom the invitation of Islam has already reached” (H.I, p. 577). This shows that even in *Fiqh*, the apostate forfeits his life because he is considered to be an enemy at war with the Muslims. And in the case of the apostate woman, the rule is laid down that she shall not be put to death, and the following argument is given: “Our reason for this is that the holy Prophet forbade the killing of women, and because originally rewards (for belief and unbelief) are deferred to the latter abode, and their hastening (in this life) brings disorder, and a departure from this (principle) is allowed only on account of an immediate mischief and that is *hirab* (war), and this cannot be expected from women on account of the unfitness of their constitution” (H.I, p. 577). And the annotator adds: “The killing for apostasy is obligatory in order to prevent the mischief of war, and it is not a punishment for the act of unbelief” (*ibid*). It will be seen that, as in the case of war against unbelievers, the legists are laboring under a misconception, and a struggle is clearly seen going on between the principles as established in the Quran and the misconceptions which had somehow or the other found their way into the minds of the legists. It is clearly laid down that the apostate is killed, not on account of his unbelief but on account of *hirab* or of his being in a state of war, and the argument is plainly given that killing of unbelievers is against the accepted principles of Islam. But the misconception is that the mere ability to fight is taken as a war condition, which is quite illogical. If it is meant that the apostate possesses the potentiality to fight, then potentially even a child may be called a *harabiyy* (one at war), because he will grow up to be a man and have the ability to fight; even woman apostates cannot be excepted because they also possess the potentiality to fight. The law of punishment is based not on potentialities but on facts. Thus, even the *Fiqh* recognizes the principle that the life of a man cannot be taken for mere change of religion, and that, unless the apostate is in a state of war, he cannot be killed. It is quite a different matter that the legists should have made a mistake in defining *hirab* or a state of war. ■

Press Releases:

AAIIL(USA) Comments on the Danish Cartoon Controversy and the Afghan Apostasy Trial

By Fazeel S. Khan

In an attempt to publicize the views of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement regarding current world events in which Islamic principles are at issue, the U.S.A. branch of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement recently published Press Releases to two significant events that have received extensive media attention.

On February 10, 2006, AAIIL(USA) released its comments on the Danish cartoon controversy. The purpose for this particular press release was two-fold. First, to condemn Jyllands Posten for publishing the obscene and extremely distasteful pictorials of the Holy Prophet Muhammad which naturally fueled anger and disgust from all quarters. Second, to advise Muslims of the appropriate response to such provocations, as mandated in the Holy Quran.

The Danish Cartoon Press Release received an extremely favorable response. E-mails from around the world were sent congratulating AAIIL(USA) for publicly addressing this issue from a calm and rational perspective. Many popular media sources displayed the Press Release, including:

PR Newswire
 Yahoo!
 The Seattle Times
 eReleases
 Forbes
 Canada.com Network
 Yahoo! Canada
 Yahoo! UK & Ireland
 DallasNews.com
 Texas Cable News
 AZ Central
 The Press-Enterprise Inland Southern CA
 Hoover's Online
 Lycos
 CBS MarketWatch

The Danish Cartoon Press Release is reproduced below:

February 10, 2006
 For Immediate Release

AAIIL(USA) strongly condemns “Jyllands-Posten” for its cartoon depictions of the Holy Prophet Muhammad and advises Muslims to bear this attack with patience and defend its faith by informing the public of the true character of the Holy Prophet.

Columbus, Ohio, USA - AAIL(USA), the U.S. branch of the worldwide Muslim organization *The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement*, not only strongly condemns the Danish newspaper “Jyllands-Posten” for its irresponsible conduct of repeatedly publishing caricatures of the Holy Prophet Muhammad in which he is depicted in an extremely degrading manner but also advises Muslims to bear this attack on their beloved Prophet and on their faith with patience.

“Not only is it commonly known that the pictorial portrayal of Prophets of God is forbidden in Islam, the level of vulgarity displayed in these particular cartoons of a holy figure of a religion with over one billion adherents in the world is truly outrageous conduct on the part of Jyllands-Posten”, stated Dr. Noman Malik, Pathologist at Mount Carmel Hospital in Columbus, Ohio and Treasurer of AAIL(USA).

In Islam, pictures of any prophet of God, whether it be Adam, Noah, Moses, Jesus or Muhammad, is forbidden - the rationale being - so that the physical depictions of these holy personages do not become objects of worship. The Jylland-Posten caricatures, however, go beyond the simple issue of what is advised by a religion with regards to depictions of holy personages. These cartoons were a direct attack on the Holy Prophet Muhammad’s character and on the Islamic faith. Although a claim to “freedom of speech” is commonly employed as a safeguard by those who maliciously insult others, Fazeel S. Khan, Attorney at the law firm of Blaugrund, Herbert & Martin in Dublin, Ohio and Secretary of AAIL(USA) argues:

“Freedom of speech does not protect ‘hate speech’ - the type of communications that incite anger and violence against others. Furthermore, freedom of speech does not safeguard material that is ‘obscene’, as defined by the standards of the community. It can certainly be argued that the Jylland-Posten cartoons are excluded from the loosely used term ‘freedom of speech’ on both of these grounds. The Danish press as well as the Danish government surely had an opportunity to prevent the publication of these insulting and hurtful depictions without compromising its democratic ideals”.

Clearly, Muslims around the world are justified in feeling offended by the Jylland-Posten publications.

However, resorting to violence and rage is certainly not what is prescribed in Islam. Dr. Mohammed Ahmad, Physician at MedOhio Clinic in Columbus, Ohio and President of AAIL(USA) explains:

“Upon receiving abuse from persons of other faiths, the Holy Quran tells Muslims to bear such provocations with patience, ignore the abusive acts and to exercise forgiveness in view of the ignorance displayed by the abusers. For instance, the Holy Quran states: ‘Bear patiently what they say’ (20:130); ‘And disregard their hurtful talk’ (33:48); ‘Hold fast to forgiveness and enjoin goodness and turn away from the ignorant’ (7-199)”.

AAIIL(USA) would like to take this opportunity to respond, with patience, to Jylland-Posten by inviting it and all others to learn about the true character of the Holy Prophet and judge for oneself whether the cartoon depictions were fair or even based on an iota of truth. For those interested, a sample of the true character of the Holy Prophet Muhammad is available online at: <http://www.muslim.org/islam/pr-life/10.htm>. AAIL(USA) is available for more detailed discussions on this matter. To learn more about the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement, visit www.muslim.org.

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Similarly, on March 24, 2006, AAIL(USA) again issued a Press Release regarding the apostasy trial of Mr. Abdul Rahman in Afghanistan. The Press Release has been very well received by media outlets, internet discussion forums and individuals interested in world affairs. Internet resource sites such as encyclopedia.com and infoplease.com also provide links to the Apostasy Trial Press Release, which furthers the primary goal of educating non-Muslims about the true principles of Islam and correcting misunderstood beliefs held by Muslims themselves.

March 24, 2006

For Immediate Release

**In Islam, “There is No Compulsion in Religion”:
AAIIL(USA) Comments on the Apostasy Trial in
Afghanistan.**

Columbus, Ohio, USA: AAIL(USA), the U.S. branch of the worldwide Islamic organization *The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement*, appeals to the Afghan government as well as Muslims internationally to practically demonstrate that Islam is a religion of peace and humanity by denouncing the view that

according to Islam apostasy is a crime punishable by death.

“Although a mandatory death sentence for apostasy may be found in other religious scriptures, for example Deuteronomy 13:6-10, the Holy *Quran* does not prescribe any punishment for apostasy”, says Dr. Noman Malik, Treasurer of AAAIL(USA).

The subject of apostasy is referred to several times in the *Quran* (16:106, 2:117, 3:85-89, 5:54, etc.) but neither is death nor any other punitive measure imposed. On the contrary, the Holy *Quran* mandates unqualified religious freedom by declaring: “There is no compulsion in religion” (2:256), “The Truth is from your Lord; so let him who please believe, and let him who please disbelieve” (18:29), “We have shown him the way, he may be thankful or unthankful” (76:3), etc.

Dr. Mohammad Ahmad, President of AAAIL(USA) explains: “Much of the confusion surrounding the punishment for apostasy in Islam is due to a lack of careful study of *Hadith* reports ... upon close examination, these reports reveal that any apostate that was killed by the Muslims was either actively fighting the Muslims or was an enemy in war.”

Attorney Fazeel S. Khan, Secretary of AAAIL(USA) further explains: “Just as treason is a crime under the United States Constitution, the offender of which ‘*shall suffer death*’ according to Congress, so too does Islam allow the administering of capital punishment on those who desert Muslim troops, join enemy forces, and fight against a Muslim nation ... it is the ‘*act*’ of military desertion during wartime coupled with aiding the enemy that is punishable under Islamic law, not the mere change in one’s religious ‘*belief*’.”

It is axiomatic that the punishment of death for apostasy as accepted under current *sharia* law finds no sanction in the Holy *Quran*. It is equally clear that the sources of tradition cited as the basis for this practice are misapplied; the incidents therein concern crimes of treason and treachery, not simple apostasy. AAAIL(USA) implores the Afghan authorities to apply these facts to its analysis of what “contravene[s] the tenets and provisions of Islam”, as stipulated in Article III of its Constitution, and, accordingly, declare the case against Mr. Rahman is dismissed on the basis that freedom of religion and freedom of conscience are not in contravention with the principles of Islam.

For more information about the controversial subject of apostasy in Islam, please read [Jihad in Islam](#), a chapter from Maulana Muhammad Ali’s world-renowned book [The Religion of Islam](#), available online at:

<http://www.muslim.org/bookspdf/jihadinislam.pdf>. To learn about the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement, visit www.muslim.org.

Contact: Samina Malik, Vice-President, AAAIL (USA); aaail@aol.com; (614) 873-1030

In response to the Apostasy Trial Press Release, the popular blog “[OH!PINION](#)”, an internet forum for thoughtful commentary on ideas, events, people and policies shaping the world, posted an article entitled “[U.S. Muslims say apostasy not capital offense](#)”. Some of the comments in the article include:

“The U.S. affiliate of a worldwide Muslim organization begs to differ with its Afghan brothers about death being the prescribed penalty for those who leave the faith.”

“According to AAAIL(USA), which is part of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement, only people who leave Islam and end up fighting members of their former faith deserve the death penalty. And then, AAAIL(USA) maintains, the wrongdoing is treason, not apostasy.”

“We hope the humane and well-meaning folks at AAAIL(USA) will be able to get through to the Afghan clerics and others who all but had poor Abdul Rahman’s neck in a noose. If a big chunk of the civilized world had not gotten in their way, Rahman would surely be a goner by now.”

“Perhaps it would be helpful for the U.S. government to provide roundtrip airfare and per diem for AAAIL(USA) representatives to go talk to the Afghans. They probably wouldn’t change all the minds that need changing, but they might plant some helpful seeds.”

The Apostasy Trial Press Release has also been cited and quoted by individuals, interestingly primarily non-Muslims, defending Islam and Muslims from sweeping generalizations on discussion forums. In response to an article entitled “[Christians still persecuted in Muslim countries](#)” and subsequent comments by posters attacking Islam for the suggested intolerant principles it advocates, a contributor by the name of Steve, argued back: “But the Koran doesn’t call for the death of apostates” and provided a link to the Apostasy Trial Press Release displayed on the U.S. Newswire website. Similarly, in the internet discussion forum “[PakTribune.com](#)”, while discussing radical versus moderate views on apostasy, an American by the name of Michelle L. Zewe contributed to the discussion by copying the Apostasy Trial Press Release in full.

E-mails from individuals wanting to comment on the Apostasy Trial Press Release were also received. One such e-mail, in pertinent part, stated:

With much respect I address you,

... I am encouraged that you took this action, it is a beginning. I am SURE that, that newswire was very difficult and required MUCH courage to release. It surely puts you at odds with 90% of the Muslims in the Middle East and will have them publicly deriding you. It is a start and hopefully will be looked at and followed by other peaceful, courageous people of the Muslim faith. If others with courage, who are of a peaceful mind as you, follow your lead and begin denouncing those who misapply, misread and out and out lie about what is contained between the covers of the Holy Quran, there is hope. If the courageous do not speak up, the fanatic criminals will surely dismantle your religion from the inside, slowly having public opinion rising to a crescendo of intolerance and outright outrage about the way those who represent the Muslim religion are behaving.

It is our desire that the two press releases, as small a contribution as they are, may play a part in informing the public at large of the peaceful, tolerant, rational and inspiring nature of Islam. The responses received thus far are very encouraging. ■

Islam – a Social Democracy

By A.A.

[This article was originally published in the May, 1950 edition of The Light. The author, who chose to remain anonymous, examines the similarities between the system of governance advocated by Islam fourteen hundred years ago and the ideals upon which modern democratic governments in the West are based. The author also provides examples of the practical implementation of both systems and concludes that in Islam only can a true “social democracy” be found.]

Nearly fourteen centuries ago, the world was passing through a hell of oppression, suppression of fundamental rights, all round slavery and inevitable serfdom. In every nook corner of the universe, the same heinous conditions prevailed. There was no other way out for the humble subject but to dance to the tunes of their mighty kings; even nobles violently enforced their whimsical ordinances on their dependants and servants. There were no laws worth the name; truth was nonexistent and

a commodity unavailable. These autocratic rulers and their yes-men decided what are to be the laws, the maxims of truth and the criterion for veracity. The decisions varied as the characteristics, manners and temperament of those in authority changed. Others had no other alternative but to carry on the nefarious activities, ordered and prescribed by them towards the fulfillment of their personal desires and motives. Every king was considered to be a superman; he even donned the garb and role of a god. To sit before him was unlawful; to take the initiative in conversation with him was a sin; to complain against and criticize him was to invite death and destruction and to call him by name was disrespecting and dishonoring him. In India, “Rajas” were regarded incarnations of god; in Rome, the “Pope” claimed to be the heir of the son of God.

From the deserts of Arabia, then rose a Prophet with a solemn mission to metamorphose the whole situation. He with a master stroke broke the chains of slavery and serfdom. He, much to the surprise of the then humanity, ushered in an era of independence thought and action, self-respect, equality of rights and liquidation of kingship, nobility and imperialist demeanor. He preached that the king had no special privileges over the legitimate and natural rights of his subjects; that before God, all were equal, whether he be a king or beggar, a master or a slave. He presented Islam in all its glory, originality and splendor. Through Islam, a form of government was given a sincere trial, the like of which the world had not experienced till then or since then. He laid down regular human laws and democratic principles. He described what is meant by public rights and individual liberty and set forth their limitations. He pointed out sins and their consequent penalties and resultant punishments. He clearly enacted financial, administrative and state rules and regulations. He taught justice tempered with mercy. He denied to the few special privileges and personal exemptions, which they had so far enjoyed. He denounced autocratic rule and racial distinctions. To prove that Islam as preached by Prophet Muhammad, which formed the basis of all his directives, actions, likes and dislikes actually aimed at these lofty ideals, let us compare the type of government which Islam laid down nearly fourteen hundred years ago with the most modern type of government of our own days.

Principles of Government to which the West aspires

The best principles of Government which the political literature has produced since the French Revolution in the eighteenth century are:

1. The state is the property of people; it is not personal or family property.

2. All the citizens of the state are equal in the eyes of the law and have equal rights and opportunities.
3. The President is to be elected by the people and he has no special privilege over other citizens.
4. All the decisions affecting administration, foreign policy and judiciary have to be arrived at in consultation with the elected representatives of the people.
5. The treasury is the property of the state. Those in authority have no right to its expenditures except with the approval of the people.

Now let us deal separately with each point and see whether Islam has anything similar to or better than these fundamentals of social democracy.

Islamic Principles of Government

1. In the Islamic conception of state, the state belongs to the people and it is not a personal or family monopoly of anyone. The Quran states:

“In the ruling of the state, elicit the opinion of the people”.

Thus public opinion is a condition precedent and a pre-requisite to the running of an Islamic State. The very word “Islamic State” substantiates the fact that the state belongs to none except the people owing allegiance to Islam. The Prophet and the first four Caliphs gave a practical proof of this fact in that they never declared their sons or relatives as heirs and that the election of the Caliph was done by the electorate.

2. In Islam, the master and servant, the haves and the have-nots, the great and the small, kings and beggars are equal. Only piety, righteous actions and virtuous deeds are taken into consideration to decide the importance, status and quality of a man. Wealth, monetary considerations and family attachments do not count in determining the degrees of superiority of one person over another. The rule and the ruled, the Amir and the masses are equal in the eyes of the law. Advanced though the Western nations are democratically today, they are unable to produce an instance like the Caliph (the President) and the common man being made to stand before a judge to undergo trial and receive punishment without any sense of humiliation. Islamic history is replete with such elevating instances, when a man from the masses challenged his Caliph for some acts of commission and omission. They both then gladly went to a judge as plaintiff and defendant,

argued their respective cases and accepted unhesitatingly the judgment, whether favorable or un-favorable. A glaring specimen of the inequality existing among Western nations in spite of their loud professions of equality, liberty and fraternity, are the separate sitting arrangements in their churches for colored races and even for the lower status among the whites. The Mosque, on the other hand, proclaims to the world that in Islam, practices dare not differ from precepts and the charity of equality must begin from the place of worship. Iqbal, the famous poet, briefly explained this aspect of Islamic equality in his famous couplet:

While fighting, the time for prayer came,
Mahmud (of Ghazni) and his slave stood shoulder
to shoulder to bow before the Almighty.

3. Islam was observed strictly in practice during the first thirty years, i.e. during the time of the first four Caliphs. Thereafter, flaws and fluctuations crept in and the state gradually lost its Islamic coloring. So, any conclusions drawn to vindicate Islamic conception of rule should be from the period of the first four Caliphs. The election of these four Caliphs was nothing if not the first glimpse of democracy since the beginning of the world. These elections were the first of their kind in which the people or their accredited representatives voiced their choice. These elections had no semblance of arbitration. The Caliphs enjoyed on respect and reverence. They had no power or privilege to interfere with the proper course of law and dared not enter into any financial commitments of their own free will. The vote of the President in a democratic country is considered to be equal to two votes or it is allocated veto power, but the second Caliph Umar, said that though he was the Caliph, he had only one vote at his disposal. The Caliphs were called by the simple appellation of *Amir-ul-Mumineen* (Commander of the faithful). Leave alone the present kings and Presidents, even Prime Ministers who have titles and appellations, high sounding and long.
4. The Caliphs consulted particularly the *Majlis-i-Shura* (in modern terminology it can be called either cabinet or advisors) and generally Muslim public opinion on all important matters. There was full liberty for frank and constructive criticism. An individual had the right to point out either in public or in privacy the error of judgment and the Caliph had to retrace his steps, if he was actually

in the wrong. In *Majlis-i-Shura* was enjoyed the full confidence of the public and the Caliph

5. The “Treasury” was the property of the State. It was never spent towards personal ends but always for the general good of the masses and was, therefore, called *Baitul-Mal-i-Muslimeen* (Treasury of the Muslim masses). The Caliphs spent the minimum amount from the public funds on their persons and that too as remuneration for the onerous responsibilities which they had to shoulder. As against this the constitutional monarchs and heads of the modern democracies and presidents of reputed republics extract large sums of money from the public exchequer for their personal expenditure and the salaries of even lesser notables who do nominal work, funds from four to six digit figures of the standards of value in their own countries.

Islam is a Social Democracy

Thus, Islam can proclaim with full justification that the social democracy now preached and practiced by western countries was ushered nearly fourteen centuries ago and what more, the social democracy presented and propagated by Islam is head and shoulders above and better than the conception of social democracy presented by the literature produced since the French Revolution.

Another point which deserves consideration is that the western democracy, and the social structure-based on it, is applicable only in the case of Westerners and the white-skinned people. The laudable object of their social democracy is conspicuously absent where the coloured people under their domination and the colonials under their supremacy and care are involved. Islam has not limited the orbit of its social democracy to any country, colour or race. It is a common blessing for the whole world and all those who subscribe to the Unity of God and who subscribe to the Prophethood of Muhammad are entitled to the limitless benefits accruing from it, whether he be a Salman of Persia, a Bilal of Abyssinia or a Abu Sufian, the head of the Quraish and for decades an inveterate enemy of Islam.

Neither the democracy as practiced by Anglo-American Bloc nor Communism as preached by Soviet Russia will bring in the cherished return to peace and orderly conditions of life. Islam, which is an ideal social democracy, is the only code which if followed will usher in an era of peace, plenty, progress and prosperity. ■

The Five Daily Prayers: a representation of the five-fold condition of man in adversity

By Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad

[This article was first published in the May 1903 edition of the “Review of Religions”. Hazrat Mirza explains that the appointed times for the five daily prayers symbolically represent the five different emotional states of man in adversity. Prayer, being a source of spiritual benefit to man, is thus an opportunity throughout the day to seek protection from hardship and misfortune.]

What are the five daily prayers? They are photographs of your changing conditions. The life of man is subject to five different changes which he undergoes in the time of adversity. These five changes are necessary to human nature.

First of all, you are informed of the misfortune that is going to befall you, as for instance when a warrant is issued from a court of justice for your arrest. For the first time then your comfort and happiness is suddenly interrupted and a cloud of melancholy is cast over your sunshine of glory. This stage corresponds to the time for the first prayer immediately after noon. As the sun begins to decline from the zenith after noon, so too does a man who is at the height of his prosperity and success witness the first stage of his declination when he comes to know of an impending misfortune. This stage of the human condition finds its representation in the prayer which is said at the first decline of the sun, i.e. the *zuhr* prayer.

The sun declines farther to the west and the troubles increase. In the illustration already stated, the person upon whom the warrant is executed is brought before the magistrate. Difficulties then encompass him all around, and the light of comfort is on the verge of extinction. Corresponding to this state of man is the time of the day when the sun has declined far to the west and his light is turned pale so that the eye can rest upon him. The zenith of glory is left far behind and the setting of the sun after a short time is apparent. The later after-noon prayer, i.e. the *asr* prayer, answers to this spiritual state.

A third change then comes over the man. There is no hope left of being delivered from the trouble. To continue the illustration already suggested, evidence being taken against the accused person shows his guilt, a charge is framed by the Magistrate. He is then frightened out of his senses and deems himself already a pris-

oner. The son of glory is then set. This state corresponds to the time when the sun is actually set and the light of the day vanishes away. The evening prayer said after sunset presents this condition.

The culminating point of adversity is reached when darkness encompasses a man all around and its force is fully realized. The verdict goes against the person charged and he is thrown into a dungeon. Thus a night comes over the day of prosperity even as it actually comes after sunset when the last rays of light having disappeared, complete darkness pervades on the face of the earth. The prayer fixed for this time is the night prayer which is thus the fourth representative of a man's condition in adversity. The night passes away and the rays of light once more beam upon the person who has been surrounded with difficulties. The mercy of God takes the prisoner by the hand and sets him free. The

morning comes after the long hours of night and before its light dispels the clouds of darkness. This spiritual state of man is represented by the fifth or morning prayer.

It will be seen from this that the five daily prayers represent five changes in the fortune of a man and the time of the day at which Almighty God has appointed a particular prayer to be said represents a particular phase of fortune. The prayers are, therefore, for your own benefit. If you wish that the adversities which are in store for you should not befall you, say your prayers at the appointed time for they are images of the external and internal changes in your conditions. Prayer is a remedy for future adversities. You do not know what tomorrow has in store for you; therefore, pray to God before the new sun rises that the new day may bring you happiness and blessings. ■

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