

*“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**

**July - September 2007**

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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*Published on the World-Wide Web at: [www.muslim.org](http://www.muslim.org)*

**احمدیہ انجمن اشاعت اسلام لاہور**

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

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*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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Editor: Fazeel S. Khan

Assistant Editor: Fatima Z. Rahman

Circulation: Mrs. Samina Malik.

#### Contact information:

'The Light', P.O. Box 3370, Dublin, Ohio 43016, U.S.A.

Phone: 614 – 873 1030 • Fax: 614 – 873 1022

E-mails: aaiil@aol.com

Website: www.muslim.org

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#### 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.

# Defamation in the Name of Christ: Evangelical Revision of Islamic Teachings and History to Accommodate the Christian Fundamentalist Agenda

By Fatima Rahman

*[Members of the U.S. branch of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement have been preparing responses to each chapter of the book “Unveiling Islam” so that rebuttals to the arguments made therein, the same oft repeated allegations against Islam, may be compiled in one, easy to access publication. This article is the first of two parts of the response to chapter 3 of “Unveiling Islam”. Ms. Rahman tackles the subject of this particular chapter head on; she meticulously dissects each allegation then thoroughly analyzes its source, significance and validity. Ms. Rahman’s comprehensive work not only refutes the assertion that Islam is a religion of violence, but also provides valuable insight into the agenda of the resurrected Evangelical Movement in the U.S.]*

This essay is directly motivated by the book, *Unveiling Islam*, written by Ergun Mehmet and Emit Fethi Caner. *Unveiling Islam* is a prime example of the deliberate attempts of the Christian Fundamentalist, Evangelical Movement to slander the religion of Islam by propagating vile allegations that are not only false but also lack theoretical and historical foundation. The creation of the contemptuous image of Islam that is found in *Unveiling Islam* is one of the key goals of the Evangelical Movement, as it seeks to condition vulnerable minds and disseminate hatred aimed at the religion of Islam and the Muslim world at large.

This essay responds specifically to chapter 3 of the book, titled “The Story of Islam: A trail of Blood.” That chapter claims to provide a historical summary of Islam’s geopolitical past, linking it to so-called Islamic beliefs. Unfortunately, the sketch that is provided purposely distorts Islamic concepts and then attributes them to Islam’s history in order to completely disfigure the reality of the Islamic past, thereby portraying Islam as violent, militaristic, and intolerant.

The basic conclusion that the Caner brothers construct is that Islam’s fourteen hundred year history was comprised of offensive wars and conquests, marked by forced conversions and intolerance, and that this was all the result of Islam’s inherent violent teachings.<sup>1</sup> These

fabricated assertions lack originality as they reiterate the customary misconstructions that have become historically ingrained into the West’s memory since the Middle Ages.

The chapter bases its arguments on a gross misinterpretation of the concept of *jihad* as the motivation that spurred Islamic expansion. The concept of *jihad* is perhaps the most misunderstood and exploited concept in the West. It receives constant resonance in the media, political circles, and fundamentalist Christian groups because it is an easy and demonizing way to understand the opposition to American and Western foreign policy in the Muslim world. It allows the West to largely ignore the regional political issues residing in the Middle East such as the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, the presence of American-supported oppressive regimes in countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt which fuel the opposition and extremist groups. Ibrahim Kalin, a Professor of Islamic Studies at the College of the Holy Cross describes this phenomenon in his article titled *Roots of Misconception*:

The images of suicide bombers, hijackings, assassinations, street riots and uprisings, which have a profound impact on the European and American perceptions of the Islamic world, inform the coded language of militant Islam, and their *raison d’etre* is attributed in an astonishingly simplistic way to the religion of Islam or Muslim culture rather than to the particular political circumstances that have given rise to them.<sup>2</sup>

Historically, the vilified picture of Islam was used by Europe as a fathomable mechanism to rationalize the rapid spread of Islam which came about in the 7th century, while denying the rationality and intrinsic beauty of its teachings that challenged the purely faith-based foundation of Christianity. Faced by the spread of a competing religion that was gaining popularity, Christian theologians and Church leaders constructed ideas of violent invasions and forced conversions to malign Islam and label it as militaristic and immoral. Kalin traces the roots of the vilified image of Islam as he shows its continuation through the Renaissance period, and then further diffusion through the Orientalist period of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>3</sup> It is precisely these long-held, constructed stereotypes which are continuously portrayed in books like *Unveiling Islam*.

This paper will one by one analyze each of the allegations made in Chapter 3 of *Unveiling Islam*. It will begin by addressing the concept of *jihad* as explained by the Caner brothers, revealing the falsity of their definition. It will then demonstrate how the expansion of Islam in the 7th century was not the result of a religiously motivated offensive war by the Islamic nation of the

time, but rather the result of defensive victories in response to aggression. Next, it will look at the Biblical origins of “holy war” and its implementation in Christian history. It will then evaluate the assertion that Islam preaches intolerance of other religions, revealing that Islam not only theoretically supports equality and respect for other religions, but historically has proved to be the model of tolerance. It will then historically compare the treatment of non-Muslims under Islamic rule to the treatment of non-Christians under Christendom, finding that it is Christianity and not Islam that has a bloody history of persecution and slaughter. It will finally show that the extremist organizations based in the Muslim world have emerged within the past thirty years due to political objectives not because of original Islamic teachings. The conclusion drawn by this paper is twofold. Firstly, the Quran as the supreme source of Islam emphasizes the principle of unity among humanity through peaceful relations and respect for all religions; this approach has resulted in an Islamic history largely characterized by tolerant and integrative societies. Secondly, the concept of offensive war justified by religious ideology while alien to Quranic teachings is a concept rooted in Christianity that has historically manifested in many violent massacres of non-Christians.

### Defining Jihad

One of the stated conclusions in chapter 3 of *Unveiling Islam* is: “Muslims have initiated almost all wars, due largely to the philosophy of *jihad*. War is not a sidebar of history for Islam; it is the main vehicle for religious expansion. It is the Muslim duty to bring world peace via the sword.”<sup>4</sup> The Caner brothers’ definition of *jihad* is very briefly yet strongly worded as “holy war”<sup>5</sup> and “offensive war.”<sup>6</sup> It is very ironic that they use “holy war” to define *jihad* because that is the precise term originally used to describe the Crusades undertaken by the Christians which is now being simply transferred to define *jihad*, without any heed given to the Arabic meaning of the word. In fact, Michael Knapp, who is a leading Middle East analyst with the US Army National Ground Intelligence Center, clarifies the difference between *jihad* and holy war. “The word ‘*jihad*’ means ‘struggle’ or ‘striving’ (in the way of God) or to work for a noble cause with determination; it does not mean ‘holy war’ (war in Arabic is *harb* and holy is *muqadasa*), unlike its medieval Christian counterpart term, ‘crusade’ (‘war for the cross’).”<sup>7</sup> Not only “holy war” but also “offensive war” completely opposes the actual meaning of *jihad* as found in the Quran, Hadith, and practiced by the Prophet Muhammad.

Maulana Muhammad Ali, one of the most renowned Islamic scholars provides a very compelling analysis of *jihad*. In explaining the concept, he writes,

A very great misconception prevails with regard to the duty of *jihad* in Islam, by assuming that the word *jihad* is supposed to be synonymous with war; and even the greatest research scholars in Europe have not taken the pains to consult any dictionary of the Arabic language or to refer to the Quran, to find out the true meaning of the word.<sup>8</sup>

He then provides an Arabic based definition. “The word *jihad* is derived from *jahd* or *juhud* meaning ability, exertion, or power.”<sup>9</sup>

With this Arabic-based meaning established, an explanation of the practical meaning of the word reveals that *jihad* is exercised through two major forms. The first and most important form of *jihad* is the struggle to achieve spiritual growth of the soul by overcoming animalistic desires and incitation by the devil. John Esposito, one of the leading contemporary scholars of Islam elaborates on the concept. “*Jihad* as struggle pertains to the difficulty and complexity of living a good life: struggling against the evil in oneself in order to be virtuous and moral, making a serious effort to do good works and to help to reform society.”<sup>10</sup>

The second form of *jihad* is struggling against a visible enemy who attacks the Muslim community. It is this second type of *jihad* which is exploited by critics of Islam to argue that Islam endorses offensive war. However, they fail to acknowledge that it is only in self-defense that Muslims may undertake acts of violence.

Karen Armstrong, one of the leading Islamic academics emphasizes the defensive nature of war in Islam when it comes to engaging in the second type of *jihad*.

It (*jihad*) signifies a physical, moral, spiritual and intellectual effort. There are plenty of Arabic words denoting armed combat, such as *harb* (war), *sira’a* (combat), *ma’araka* (battle) or *qital* (killing), which the Quran could easily have used if war had been the Muslims’ principal way of engaging in this effort. Instead it chooses a vaguer, richer word with a wide range of connotations.<sup>11</sup>

The limitation to defensive war in Islam is rooted in the Quran which repeatedly emphasizes the detestable nature of aggression. Two of the prominent verses that define the defensive nature of war in Islam read as follows:

Permission to fight is given to those on whom war is made, because they are oppressed. And surely Allah is able to assist them- Those who are driven from their homes without a just cause except that they say: Our Lord is Allah. And if Allah did not repel some people by others, cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques, in which Allah’s

name is much remembered would have been pulled down (22:39,40).<sup>12</sup>

In these verses, it is made clear that Muslims may only fight when war is brought upon them. By defending themselves, their community, and religion, they are undertaking the second type of *jihad*, namely the defense of the community. The Quran reiterates the peaceful nature of Islam in the same chapter. “And fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, and be not aggressive; surely Allah loves not the aggressors” (2:190).<sup>13</sup> Here once again, it is clearly stipulated that Islam does not endorse any aggressive action upon others. However, if the Muslim community is attacked or aggressed upon, then they must fight back to defend themselves, their religion, and retain their dignity.

Thus, there is a wide discrepancy between the Caner brothers’ definition of *jihad* as “holy war/offensive war” and the Arabic meaning along with its practical application. Their false charge that Islam endorses offensive wars is a deliberate attempt to disparage the peaceful nature of Islam. Islam not only sanctions defensive fighting as the only form of violence, but it also goes beyond that by calling for peace even if that means accepting conditions that favor the enemy.

The Quran teaches that war is always abominable. Muslims must never open hostilities, for the only just war is a war of self-defense, but, once they have undertaken a war, Muslims must fight with absolute commitment in order to bring the fighting to an end as soon as possible. If the enemy proposes a truce or shows an inclination towards peace, Muslims are commanded by the Quran to end hostilities immediately.<sup>14</sup>

Just as the Quran clearly limits warfare for defensive measures only, it also clearly calls upon Muslims to accept peace if the enemy offers it. The Quran reads, “And if they incline to peace, incline thou also to it and trust in Allah; surely He is the Hearer, the Knower. And if they intend to deceive thee—then surely Allah is sufficient for thee” (8:61,62).<sup>15</sup>

Maulana Muhammad Ali elaborates on this verse writing, “the Muslims were told to accept peace in the middle of war if the enemy wanted peace. It should be noted that peace is here recommended even though the enemy’s sincerity may be doubtful.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, not only is the concept of an offensive war in the name of Allah prohibited by the Quran, but the Quran places such a high priority upon peace that Muslims are to accept a peace treaty even if it entails taking the losing position. Prophet Muhammad, like all other commands of God, exercised this injunction throughout his life. A prime example of the implementation of this command can be

seen in the Truce of *Hudaibiyah*. The Meccans threatened the Muslims that they would attack them if they went for the holy pilgrimage. Responding to the threat, the Muslims accepted a one-sided peace treaty favoring the Meccans, rather than engaging in a war. The Muslims agreed to not perform the holy pilgrimage and to return any Meccan converts to Islam back to the Meccans, while the Meccans did not have to return a single Muslim back to the Prophet. Although the Muslims had a solid track record of defending themselves in aggressions forced upon them, they still preferred an unfavorable peace treaty over the loss of lives on both sides. This reiterates the emphasis that Islam places on the value of life and contradicts the false assertions made by critics of Islam such as the Caner brothers that Islam calls for aggression.

Along with their erroneous explanation of *jihad*, the Caner brothers also chronologically blunder as they insinuate that the concept of a geopolitical division of the world, namely *dar-al-Islam* (abode of Islam) and *dar-al-harb* (abode of war) is an original Islamic principle that drove Muslims in the, “first millennium”<sup>17</sup> to expand the *dar-al-Islam* through the concept of *jihad*. This division of society that they refer to has no basis in either the Quran or the Hadith. It originated decades after the inception of Islam, well into the medieval era. It was primarily a theoretical concept to understand international relations and by no means was developed as a concept to expand Islamic territory.

Given that the concept of a holy war or an offensive war is completely unknown to Quranic teachings as is the concept of *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-harb*, the Caner brothers’ argument that the expansion during the 7th century was motivated by a religious zeal to expand the realm of Islam becomes completely unfounded. However, not only is the Islamic principle of aggression and expansion missing but a rational perspective of the geopolitical circumstances in which the Islamic world found itself during the 7th century demonstrates that it was no way thinkable for the leaders of the Islamic world at that time to initiate any war. A microanalysis of the internal and external conditions present at the time reveals just that.

### Analyzing the Early Wars

After the death of the Prophet, the small Islamic nation was surrounded by two massive empires: the Byzantine and Persian empires. According to Structuralist or realist theory, which is historically the most popular theoretical school in politics and warfare, it would have been completely irrational for the Muslims to wage war on these empires while it would have been rational for the empires to start a war with the Muslims for two major reasons.

Firstly, during the start of these wars, the Muslim nation which was Arabia, was completely insignificant as compared to the two mighty empires of Byzantine and Persia. During the start of these wars around 632 AD, Rome and Persia were better equipped in all the relevant areas of warfare. They had strong arms and logistics, were equipped with offensive and defensive weapons of war, and possessed a rich treasury, seasoned armies, and experience. Quite oppositely, the Muslims of Arabia had no such resources. They lacked a regular standing army, money, and experience in such warfare. After all, it had not been long since Islam had taken a foundation in Arabia, where as the Byzantine and Persian empires enjoyed a rich and established history. Thus, it would have been completely irrational for the Muslims to start a war with two overwhelming empires who had a major advantage in every tangible and theoretical aspect of warfare. One of the basic premises of Structuralist or Realist theory is that nations at a minimum look to survive. Given this assumption, it is completely unfounded that the Muslims would start a war with one or both of the leading empires in the world at that time. Starting a war in order to expand their territory, given such a huge disparity in power would surely mean destruction.

The second reason for the irrationality of starting a war with the empires was that at the time of the Prophet's death, and at the beginning of Abu Bakr's period of office, the Islamic nation was in a complete state of unrest and disorder. With the death of the Prophet, false prophets such as Tulaihaha, Aswad, Musasilimah, and Saja were instigating chaos by revolting against the central authority of Islam: Madinah.<sup>18</sup> With so much internal chaos, troops were needed to maintain internal peace. The last tendency for a nation struck by internal chaos is to start a war with empires who, given the circumstances, would destroy them. A nation would not purposely take on one, let alone two empires when it itself was facing destruction from within its territory.

Having established the unlikelihood of Muslims initiating these wars for the desire to expand their small territory, there is much evidence that it was in the interests of the Byzantine and Persian empires to wage war on the small, peaceful Muslim nation. Because Islam was a rising power in the region, the empires foresaw the future threat. With the Byzantine Empire to the north and the Persian Empire to the east, the Muslims held a strategic position, situating themselves between two of the mightiest empires. The Islamic nation was in the middle of trade routes to Europe and Asia, routes that were essential to both the economies of the empires. Its advantageous location is described by Esposito as, "Seventh-century Arabia was critically located along the profitable trade routes of the Orient.

As a result it was subject to the rivalry and interventions of its powerful imperial neighbors."<sup>19</sup> Although at the start of the wars Islam was still small and much less powerful as compared to its neighbors in the East and North, the two empires realized the growing popularity of Islam and its potential growth in the future. Sensing that their bipolar hegemony could falter in the future with this upcoming power, they felt it necessary to start a war and destroy the Islamic Empire right then and there when it was still small and easier to defeat.

Given this strategic background to the situation, it was not in the interest of the small, inexperienced Islamic nation to start a war, while it was in the self-interest of the two empires to do so. The steps that led to the outbreak of war further show that it was not Abu Bakr nor Umar who began the wars as argued by the Caner brothers.

Both the Byzantine and Persian empires were allied with the insurgents that were trying to quench Islam from inside. As allies, not only did the empires send in troops, reinforcements, and resources to the insurgents, but they actually instigated some of the uprisings, meaning they were the force driving the rebels. Given that a war is started when one nation encroaches onto the land of another sovereign nation and commits an open act of hostility, the actual initiation of the war by the Persian empire against Islam was when it openly sent reinforcements to the rebels of Bahrain. As an ally of the Bahrain rebels, Persia penetrated into the territory of Islam and actively helped the rebels against the government of Islam. This was officially the start of the aggression in addition to another conspicuous event that signaled Persian aggression. One of the leading insurgents during the time of Abu Bakr, Sajah, marched at the front of her large army against Madinah and the central authority of Islam. Sajah lived on the border of Persian and Arab land in the Mesopotamia area which was under the influence of the Persians because they ruled Iraq. Clearly, she was backed by Persia because it is unthinkable that a woman representing an insignificant tribe would have the audacity to march on the heart of Islam, unless she had the confidence and support of its powerful neighbor. Such an endeavor could not be undertaken unless a great power supported it. This aggression by Sajah was the equivalent of aggression by Persia and a declaration of war, because of two reasons: firstly, in the politics of warfare, when two groups are so closely allied as were the insurgents with Persia, that they even strategize on invasion plans, they essentially create an alliance block. In an alliance block, when one of the allies attacks another party it is essentially an attack by the whole block upon that party. Secondly, the mere fact that Sajah's tribe was under heavy Persian influence and located on the Persian border, equates her

tribe's aggression as an attack by Persia. Persia violated the independence of Arabia by encroaching onto its soil, instigating and strategizing insurgencies, and allying with rebels seeking to dismantle the Islamic government. These activities according to international law are all declarations of war.

A similar series of steps led to war with the Byzantine empire as well. Rome like the Persians exercised heavy influence in border areas from where the insurgents emerged. In fact much of the northern part of Arabia was under Roman sway. The Romans persuaded the Christian tribes on the Roman and Islamic border, such as in Syria, to rebel against the central Islamic authority. Specifically, the Romans had allied with Tulaihah, a self-proclaimed prophet. Openly aiding the tribes and strategizing battle plans, the Romans were no less guilty of an attack on Islam than were the Persians. In 634 C.E., war with Syria, which was under Roman rule, had begun.

What is remarkable is that despite these offensive attacks on Islam, the Muslims never directly retaliated because they did not want to fight a war. This decision was based on the earlier discussed Islamic concept of avoiding war as much as possible. In fact the Muslims responded to the aggression by simply fortifying their borders rather than countering with violence. This was the minimum that Arabia could do, given the circumstances. As rational actors, the Muslims had to at a minimum credibly commit by mobilizing. If they did not the Empires would view them as weak and would take further measures to destroy the Islamic nation. It would have been suicidal for Arabia to sit still while it was not only threatened but actually attacked. Yet it decided to defend itself by engaging in the least aggressive response, a simple fortification of its borders. Unfortunately, the fortification did not deter the empires as they intensively began attacking Arab territory and a long strenuous chain of battles ensued, in which the ultimate and surprising victor was Arabia.

The Structuralist or Realist theory of warfare proves that the two massive empires of the time aggressed upon the small Islamic nation, forcing it into war. That the wars were started by the empires is also easily proved by Institutional theory, which is the other most common theory in political science and warfare. Institutional theory states that because the costs of war are so great to all parties involved, it is only rational for the parties that a bargain be made so that costs of fighting a war are avoided. However wars do occur, and Institutional theory explains the occurrence of war by the following reasons: the presence of "war states" who have a preference for war under all circumstances, misinformation, and bargaining failures.

Bargaining failures normally occur when one party is unwilling to bargain because they feel that by fighting a war they can attain greater benefits than bargaining would bring. This is what occurred time after time during the wars of the 7th century. A reoccurring pattern emerges in which the Muslims would attempt to bargain because as mentioned earlier, the Quran calls for peace treaties. Yet every time, the Byzantine and Persian empires were unwilling to accept because given their power superiority, it was in their interest to wage the war and destroy the Muslim nation rather than accept a peace treaty in which the Muslim nation would survive. It was in fact the policy of Abu Bakr and Umar to offer peace to the aggressor before a battle took place. There are numerous examples, one for each battle. One of these was Abu Bakr's bargain attempt with Persia. During the end of Abu Bakr's reign, Arabia had cleared out the Persian troops out of the Arabian soil west of the Euphrates. If they wanted to, Arabia could have easily invaded Persian territory by crossing the river, and given their momentum and the degradation of the Persian army at the time, they probably would have been able to defeat Persia. But Arabia preferred to avoid war, because their preference was for peace as the Quranic injunction lays out (8:61,62).<sup>20</sup> The Muslims offered a bargain in which Islam would continue to stay on its territory west of the river Euphrates as long as the Persians promised not to attack Arabia again. Unfortunately, Persia was not ready to accept the bargain because it still felt that it could eventually defeat Arabia. The Persians, not accepting, planned a surprise attack of 10,000 troops and continued their hostilities against the Muslims.

To argue that the small Muslim nation engaged in wars in the 7th century against two massive empires with the religiously motivated desire to "conquest in the cause of Allah,"<sup>21</sup> as the Caner brothers argue is fallacious on several grounds, as shown. The argument contradicts the basic teachings of Islam which call for peace even when it disadvantages the Muslims, which condemn aggression and offensive war, and only allow defensive war. Their argument also opposes basic rational thinking as implemented by Realist and Institutional theories of warfare, which demonstrate that it was illogical for the Muslims to start any wars given their circumstances while it was rational for the Byzantine and Persian empires to do so.

### **"Holy War" in Christianity**

Although the concept of holy war is alien to Islam's past, it has had a rich history in the Christian faith. The concept of holy war is a Judeo-Christian concept that is rooted in the Old Testament and institutionalized into Christianity following the Constantinian period. Unlike the Quran which does not advocate war except in defen-

sive circumstances, the Old Testament openly calls for aggression. One of the most renowned scholars of Christianity, Ronald Bainton, bases the concept of holy war and the crusades in the Old Testament. David Little in his article, “*Holy War*” *Appeals and Western Christianity* writes, “There are in the Old Testament references to the use of force as specifically warranted and directed by God. Here, according to Bainton, is the basis for the crusading idea. A typical example is Deuteronomy 7:”<sup>22</sup>

And when the Lord your God gives (your enemies) over to you and you defeat them; then you must utterly destroy them; you shall make no covenant with them, and show no mercy to them.... And you shall destroy all the peoples that the Lord your God will give over to you, your eye shall not pity them. (Deut. 7:2, 16).

Or again, Deuteronomy 20:

In the cities... that the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall utterly destroy them... as the Lord your God has commanded; that they may not teach you according to all their abominable practices (Deut. 20:16-18).

He goes on to explain Bainton’s analysis of holy war in Christianity:

According to Bainton, ‘the crusade stemmed out of the holy war’ and ‘went beyond’ it...the crusade ‘was fought not so much with God’s help as on God’s behalf, not for a human goal which God might bless but for a divine cause which God might command.’ The authority and cause for fighting a crusade, together with the attitudes of the crusaders and the means of combat, are shaped exclusively and peculiarly by religious considerations. A crusade is fought ‘under the authority of God or of His representatives on earth. The cause is more than just, it is holy. The object is the vindication of religion or of something invested with the sanctity of religion.’ The crusaders regard themselves as “godly and their opponents (as)...ungodly’ for espousing blasphemous beliefs or ‘abominable practices.’ In executing the crusade, it is permissible to employ force indiscriminately and with the objective of totally exterminating the enemy.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, Bainton’s analysis of the concept of holy war reveals that the Caner brothers mistaken the Christian concept of violence in the name of God for an Islamic concept. Rooted in the Bible, the concept of waging war for God took an early foothold in Christian tradition. In fact Augustine of Hippo, who is considered one of the

leading theologians of Christianity, endorsed the idea of holy war. David Little writes, “St. Augustine, for example, showed some of the marks of the crusader...”<sup>24</sup> He then quotes Frederick H. Russell who writes:

Any violation of God’s laws, and by easy extension, any violation of Christian doctrine, could be seen (by Augustine) as an injustice warranting unlimited violent punishment. Further, the... guilt of the enemy merited punishment of the enemy population without regard to the distinction between soldiers and civilians. Motivated by righteous (religiously inspired) wrath, the just warriors could kill with impunity even those who were morally innocent.<sup>25</sup>

Therefore, the consensus of academic opinion shows that the idea of waging war for the implementation of Christian beliefs including indiscriminate violence has Biblical roots, was endorsed by Christian theologians, and practiced by Christians throughout history.

Violence justified by religion was the basis for the forced conversion and conquest of Native American land by Europeans. Franciscus de Victoria, the 16th century distinguished professor of theology at the University of Salamanca justified the use of military force for proselytization of Christianity and conquest of Native American land by Europeans. James Turner Johnson in his essay titled, *Sources of the Western Just War Tradition*, describes Victoria’s view.

He pursued the matter by arguing that of course Spanish missionaries had a right to preach Christianity to all who would hear, and that natural law guaranteed not only this right but also the right of free passage for them through Indian lands. If the Indians refused to let the missionaries enter, or if they made captives of the missionaries, the Spanish were justified in using military force to enforce the missionaries’ rights- in effect making war on the Indians.<sup>26</sup>

In fact, the majority of the conquests and offensive wars undertaken by Christian emperors and rulers have rested upon Biblical texts in which God commanded wars.

In Christian thought Ambrose and Augustine both employed the example of the Israelite wars commanded by God as warrant for their own justification of using Roman military force against heterodox forms of Christianity, and the same sources were taken up by later authors in the context of the medieval Crusades and the Protestant-Catholic conflicts of the Reformation era.<sup>27</sup> ■

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## Purpose of Fasting in Islam

By Nasir Ahmad

*[This article is an abridged version of a sermon delivered at the Berlin Mosque in November 2005. Mr. Ahmad very poignantly discusses the institution of fasting in Islam by examining the source of this practice and the objective of the exercise. He also relates the true significance of celebrations in Islam, in general. This article is an excellent concise resource for understanding the import of the holy month of Ramadan and the festival of Eid.]*

O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil. The month of Ramadan is that in which the Qur'an was revealed, a guidance to men and clear proofs of the guidance and the Criterion. And when My servants ask thee concerning Me, surely I am nigh. I answer the prayer of the suppliant when he calls on Me, so they should hear My call and believe in Me and that they may walk in the right way (2:183, 185,186).

A well-known *hadith* of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) is often repeated in the month of Ramadan which mentions that the first ten days are a source of Allah's mercy, the second ten days a source of forgiveness, and the last ten days grant one freedom from sin.

A believer can enjoy Allah's mercy, blessings and freedom from sin only when he makes special effort to derive these blessings by keeping fast, offering special prayers besides the five daily prayers, recites daily the Divine guidance revealed in the form of the Holy Quran, and acts in a more charitable way in his behaviour, dealings and gestures.

Brothers and sisters, Allah has given us a golden formula in the Holy Qur'an for making progress in our spirituality and nobility. It is mentioned in the words:

Surely good deeds take away evil deeds (11:114)

Islam does not command us to believe in an atonement, but exhorts us to make efforts in doing good deeds so that in this way we are not only saved from committing evil deeds, but to make efforts to perform good deeds thus bringing a wholesome change in our attitude, actions and relations with our fellow beings.

Brothers and sisters, in Islam, fasting, as an institution, is a spiritual, moral and physical discipline of the highest order. This annual spiritual exercise on a regular basis purifies one's inner self and gives right direction to one's thoughts and actions throughout one's life. Allah has also taught us a prayer to this effect in the opening chapter of the Qur'an for seeking such guidance in the words: "*Ihdi-nas siraatal mustaqeem*," that is, "guide us on the right path".

The true objective of fasting has been made plain in the verses which I recited in the beginning, "*L'-al-lakum tattaqun*," that is, "that you may guard against evil." This word, *tattaqun*, is derived from *ittiqa*. It means "the guarding of a thing from what harms or injures it, or the guarding of self against that of which the evil consequences may be feared" (Raghib). The word has also been freely used in the Holy Qur'an in the sense of fulfilment of duties, as stated in chapter 4, verse 1:

And keep your duty to Allah, by Whom you demand one of another your rights and to the ties of relationship.

All the spiritual exercises and commandments enjoined in the Holy Qur'an or demonstrated in the practice of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) are primarily meant to mould and guide a Muslim to attain perfect righteousness or *taqwa*. Chapter 107 of the Holy Qur'an beautifully summarises this primary objective to be achieved through righteousness and condemns those who observe the ritual and do not care to follow the spirit. It says:

So woe to the praying ones, who are unmindful of their prayer! Who do good to be seen and refrain from acts of kindness (107:4-7).

Attaining righteousness through fasting and other modes of worship has been the prime objective of all religions. We find Prophet Jesus (as) exhorting his disciples in the same strain:

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled (Matthew 11:7)

For I say unto you, that except your righteousness, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20).

Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: ..that thou appear not unto

men to fast, but unto thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly... (Matthew 6:16-18).

Thus, this chapter not only mentions some primary acts of charity meant for the welfare of the deprived sections of the society but it also enjoins taking special care of those areas of human relationship which are usually ignored as insignificant. In the latter case, small sacrifice or service rendered strengthens mutual relationship and generates love and affection between individuals bound by bonds of blood, friendship or neighbourhood. Islam does not leave our duty to verbal exhortations such as "love thy neighbour," but it prescribes how to offer help and show concern for those in need.

That is why a person who finds it extremely hard to keep the fast though exempted from keeping the fast yet has been enjoined to feed a needy person. As the Qur'an says: "And those who find it extremely hard may effect redemption by feeding a poor man" (2:184).

Thus a righteousness person should prove to be more humane, more responsible, more tolerant, more humble and more generous in his behaviour towards his dear and near ones in particular and the members of the society in general.

The Holy Qur'an also exhorts a righteous person to prove himself to be more responsible regarding his social obligations in these words:

Surely the noblest of you with Allah is the most dutiful of you (49:13).

Here I would like to quote a very meaningful *hadith* of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) which describes the nature of responsibilities which a Muslim owes to his family, to his fellow beings, and to the society at large, and about which he will be questioned in the life hereafter. It has been recorded in *Bukhari* in these memorable words:

Every one of you is a ruler and every one of you shall be questioned about those under his rule; the king is a ruler and he shall be questioned about his subjects; and the man is a ruler in his family and he shall be questioned about those under his care; and the woman is a ruler in the house of her husband, and she shall be questioned about those under her care; and the servant is a ruler so far as the property of his master is concerned, and he shall be questioned about that which is entrusted to him (*Bukhari*, 11:11).

There are, in Islam, two great festivals having a religious sanction. Both these festivals go under the name of '*Id*, which means *a recurring happiness*. The first of these is called '*Id al-Fitr*, and it takes place at the end of the month of Fasting. The other is called '*Id al-Adzha*,

and this is celebrated at the end of a ten-day period of worship in intense humility to the One and Only Creator of the Universe, the Almighty Allah. Both these festivals are connected with the performance of some duty. In the first case, the duty of fasting, and in the second, the duty is intended to show that true happiness lies in exercising patience and making sacrifice in discharging one's responsibilities. And Allah guarantees in the Holy Qur'an that such people shall be granted honour and prosperity in the land. It says:

And as for that which does good to men, it carries in the earth (13:17).

While celebrating the two great 'Id festivals, a Muslim not only remembers God, by attending a Divine service, but he is also enjoined to remember his poorer brethren. The institution of charitable contributions is associated with both 'Ids. On the occasion of the 'Id al-Fitr, every Muslim is required to give *sadaqa al-Fitr*, a compulsory charity which amounts to three or four kilos of wheat, barley, rice or any other staple food of the country, or its equivalent in money, per person in the family, including the old as well as the youngest members, males as well as females (*Bukhari*, 24:70). The payment is to be made before the service is held. On the eve of 'Id al-Adzha to commemorate the great sacrifice offered by Prophet Abraham (as), an animal is sacrificed, and one third of the meat should be given away to needy people.

This spiritual exercise of fasting should also ingrain in a Muslim's mind that he is to continue making efforts in his daily life to fight against his aggressive physical urges in order to achieve noble ideals in life. This continuous effort, in the terminology of the Holy Qur'an, is called a *jihad*, and in the words of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sas), it a greater *jihad* than going to the battlefield.

The blessed month has gone. Let us pray that this month-long spiritual exercise undertaken may continue to embellish our lives during the rest of the year. Thus, a true Muslim should prove that he is a conscientious and peace-loving citizen and a compassionate friend. I conclude this talk with a prayer:

“O Allah! Help those who help the religion of Muhammad (sas) and count us among them. And O Allah! Disgrace those who disgrace the religion of Muhammad (sas) and do not make us of those.

O Allah! Help the cause of Islam and the Muslims.

O Allah! Grant success to the cause of Islam and the Muslims.” ■

## Muhammad: The Last Prophet

By Fazeel S. Khan, Esq.

*[This article was presented at the AAIL(USA) 2006 annual convention held in Columbus, Ohio. The theme of the convention was “Spirituality in Islam” and this particular article was the second of a two part topic on “Revelation and Prophethood”. The first part was presented by Ms. Sarah Ahmad, her article being published in the January-March 2007 issue of The Light and Islamic Review. While Ms. Ahmad focused on examining the concepts of “prophethood” and “revelation”, this article discusses the specific issue of “finality of prophethood”.]*

### Finality of Prophethood

As explained by Sister Sarah in the previous lecture, prophets appeared in every nation – Almighty God, in His infinite mercy and justice, did not deprive any people of this most desirous blessing. These national prophets worked to morally uplift and spiritually regenerate the people they were sent to. By their personal example, these reformers showed their people how one can achieve closeness to God; that is, how to develop the Divine qualities within one's self. Although the message and means were the same, what differed between the prophets sent by God was the scope of their missions.

In the past, when nations lived in an isolated state, confined to distinct geographic areas, national prophets being commissioned to all different peoples was ideal. However, when humanity progressed to the point that man no longer lived a secluded life and communications between people evolved, the Divine scheme required a means for the spiritual unification of the entire human race.

Each nation, ignorant of the fact that the very Divine favors that they were blessed with was also gifted to others, began to think of themselves as “chosen ones” of God. This belief in Divine favoritism, a belief based on discrimination, prejudice and arrogance, in fact, has caused more bloodshed and violence than any other evil ideology since the beginning of time. Such views impeded any chance for a united human race living in peace. The pinnacle, therefore, in the divine institution of prophethood was the coming of one prophet for all nations. This “world prophet” appeared in the person of Muhammad (may the peace and blessings of God be upon him).

The Holy Quran declares that the Prophet Muhammad was the final prophet in the long chain of messengers sent to humanity, by stating:

Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Messenger of Allah and (*khatam an nabiyyin*) the last of the prophets (33:40).

The Quran is not alone in the regard. Similarly, we find other religious scriptures foretelling the appearance of this great world-prophet as well. Jesus, for example, is recorded as prophesying that one would come after him, sent by God, who would teach man “all things” and guide man into “all truth”. The message of this “comforter” or “spirit of truth”, Jesus explains, will “abide with man forever”.

The prophet that was to “guide unto all truth” was to be given a message of quite a different character; it was to be a “universal” message, beyond the limits of geography and constraints of time. The Holy Quran illuminates the concept of the advent of a “world prophet” being sent for all nations and for all times by stating:

Blessed is He Who sent down (*furqan*) the discrimination upon His servant that he may be a warner to all nations (25:1); and

Say: O Mankind, surely I am the Messenger of Allah to you all (7:158); and

And We have not sent thee but as a bearer of good news and as a warner to all mankind (34:28).

Therefore, the Prophet Muhammad came with a universal mission, looking to the whole of mankind for his ministry. Compare this to the mission of Jesus, the last of the national prophets. Prophet Jesus, by his own example, refrained from throwing “pearls” before “swine” (Mt. 7:6) and giving the “bread” of the children to the “dogs” (Mark 7:27; Mt. 15:26).

Was Prophet Jesus wrong or blameworthy in any way for safeguarding his mission, not allowing “outsiders” to partake in the blessings that appeared with his advent? Absolutely not, for “outsiders” were not within the scope of his mission, as he himself clarifies:

I have not been sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt. 5:24).

Thus, his mission was of a limited scope, restricted to a specific group of people. Although Christianity has become an international religion, comprising of adherents from all races, colors and creeds and expanding to the farthest corners of the globe, it cannot be denied that missionary activism abroad was quite a foreign concept to Prophet Jesus, on whom be peace.

Now, seeing that the institution of prophethood is a Divine favor – without which man’s spiritual development would be deficient, just as man’s physical evolution would be incomplete without essential vitamins and nutrients – some have questioned whether the final-

ity of prophethood is more of a curse than a blessing. Is mankind worse off now that prophets have ceased to appear since the 6th Century? This is obviously not the case. The object of sending prophets to a people was to make known the Divine will and provide an example the following of which could lead man to hold communion with God. This object was made complete through the great world-prophet, Prophet Muhammad. Prophet Muhammad’s message and practical illustration of that message was so perfect that it met the requirements not only of all contemporary nations, but for all future generations as well. This is what was meant by Prophet Jesus when he referred to him who would “guide you unto all truth”. The Holy Quran is explicit on this point; it states:

This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favor to you and chosen for you Islam as a religion (5:3).

The “perfection of the message” is not claimed by any other religious scripture. Furthermore, the “favor” mentioned in this verse is in reference to the institution of prophethood; thus, the perfection of religion and the completion of prophethood go hand in hand.

Understanding this concept allows one to fully appreciate the verse on the “finality of prophethood” quoted earlier:

Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Messenger of Allah and the last of the prophets (33:40).

This verse states that “Muhammad is not the father of any of your men”, meaning he does not have any sons or heirs as such to pass on his qualities to, like a father does to a son, “but”, the verse continues, “he is the Messenger of Allah and the last”, and therefore, most complete “of the Prophets”. The latter part of the verse reveals, by the grammatical use of the word “but”, which necessitates some sort of logical rebuttal or persuasive alternative, that even though he does not have any physical sons, he will be granted innumerable spiritual heirs for he is the final and most complete prophet whose example man will look to in order to achieve closeness to God. The verse indicates that Prophet Muhammad is the guide without whom one cannot know God in the complete sense; that is, without whom one cannot find a practical illustration of all of the Divine attributes.

As an aside, it is also in fact the greatest proof of the status of the Holy Prophet, for the Muslim nation has in every generation been blessed with saints who receive Divine revelations and reveal Divine signs solely due to their following Prophet Muhammad. The continuance of Prophet Muhammad’s spiritual children, who mani-

fest the Divine qualities on earth purely by following his example, like the moon reflecting light on earth solely due to borrowing it from the sun, is in fact a promise by God implied in the term “*khatam an nabiyyin*”.

### **Muhammad: the Ideal Prophet**

Can this grand status attributed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad be substantiated, or is this merely an unsupported, exaggerated and grandiose claim made by those following Muhammad’s religion? This is indeed the critical question. The Holy Quran declares:

Certainly you have in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar (33:21).

This verse points to the distinguishing characteristic of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. The Holy Prophet’s life was so multi-faceted, that he was able to provide a model of virtue for mankind under all circumstances. From an orphan to a king of a great empire, Muhammad passed through all phases of life. If he had not led armies, he could not have served as a model for a general leading armies into battle; if he had not fought personally, he could not have been an exemplar for a soldier laying down his life in the cause of truth, justice and freedom; if he had not made laws for the guidance of his followers, he could never have been regarded as an outstanding example to a legislator; if he had not decided disputes, he could not have served as a light to judges and magistrates; if he had not married, he would have left men unguided in practically half of their daily interactions and could not have shown how to be a kind and affectionate husband and a loving father; if he had not been a laborer, he could not have revealed the value and integrity in working with one’s own hands and earning an honest living; if he did not have life-long friends, he could not have shown the beauty in trust and true companionship; if he had not enforced punishment on tyrants for the wrongs inflicted on innocent persons, if he had not overcome his persecuting enemies and forgiven them, if he had not overlooked the faults of those attached to him, he could not have been an *excellent exemplar* and a *perfect model*.

Indeed, it is the distinguishing characteristic of Prophet Muhammad’s life that he not only gave practical rules of guidance in all walks of life, but gave by his life a practical illustration of all those rules. Unlike any other prophet, he himself worked out all the principles he taught to others! It is not through his sermons and teachings that we estimate his character, but rather through his actions and his deeds. Quite logically, only the one who has experienced all the circumstances forming the basis of the lessons he teaches, can truly be a perfect model for others.

I’d like to illustrate this point further. The quality of “forgiveness”, for example, is much revered as a noble trait by all religions. Every prophet taught in one form or the other that “forgiveness is divine.” However, one can only claim to have truly exhibited an attribute such as forgiveness, if the conditions under which one forgives are appropriate. To truly forgive, in the fullest sense of the word, three conditions must have occurred. First, one needs to be persecuted ruthlessly by others. Second, events must change so that the persecutors eventually fall at the oppressed person’s mercy. Third, the oppressed person must possess the power to mete out punishment the persecutors rightfully deserve. The mere preaching of forgiveness or mercy is no proof of actually acquiring this attribute; for this, one is required to be in a position to show it. Think about it: an oppressor would regard a claim of forgiveness as an insult to himself if it came from his helpless victim.

In all of religious history, there is only one noble example of a life comprising all three conditions precedent for the true exhibition of “forgiveness”. This was the life of Muhammad. The Holy Prophet and his small group of followers were met with the most severe forms of trials – humiliation, degradation, ostracization, torture and death. They were forced to flee their homes in Mecca because of these persecutions. Some initially fled to Abyssinia. Ultimately, a migration was made from Medina. In the midst of all of these atrocities, the Holy Prophet prayed to Almighty God in humility: “O Allah, forgive my people for they do not know”.

Indeed all prophets exhibited forgiveness and mercy under various conditions, but what separates Prophet Muhammad from any other person in history, is that eventually the tables turned: the very enemies of the Holy Prophet, the very tormentors and persecutors who attempted to kill him and annihilate his followers, were at the Holy Prophet’s mercy. Despite being at the point of the sword, the number of Muslims grew in Medina and after seven years of being away from home, and having made alliances with neighboring tribes, the Holy Prophet Muhammad prepared for an expedition back to Mecca. The Holy Prophet entered Mecca with 10,000 righteous followers, the mere sight of which forced the Meccans to surrender without resistance.

It could not have been regarded as inappropriate for the Holy Prophet to have administered punishment upon those who had made war upon him. The leaders, at least could have been made an example of to the masses. However, the Holy Prophet’s conquest was not one of bloodshed, but one of mercy and forgiveness. “There shall be no reproof against you this day”, he declared! A general amnesty was given, guaranteeing safety to all who showed they were not interested in fighting. The

perfection of the attribute of “forgiveness” and its display in the most complete form was, thus, provided by the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

Because Prophet Muhammad was provided with a life complete in its examples for man to find guidance in, he was able to display all of the teachings of the previous prophets in its correct context. He administered the justice of the Mosaic law when appropriate, yet practiced the meekness of Jesus when best suited. For these reasons, it is fully justified to accept the Holy Prophet Muhammad as the final and most perfect prophet, whose example it is incumbent upon mankind to follow in order to live a life in which one may truly know God.

### **Muhammad: a Truly Historic Figure**

Now, in order for the life of Prophet Muhammad to serve as an “excellent example” for all men, for all ages, the Prophet Muhammad’s lessons and examples would need to be available for others to learn from them. This is in fact an equally necessary condition for Prophet Muhammad to be considered a “complete” role-model and to have satisfied his mission as being a prophet to “all” mankind.

Like no other person in history, the entire life of Prophet Muhammad, in a most detailed and descriptive manner, is preserved in numerous collections of traditions from his own companions and contemporaries. This is another distinguishing characteristic of Prophet Muhammad’s life. In fact, Muhammad is the only prophet who may be called “historic” in the true sense of the word, it even being questioned today by cynics whether some of the other well-known prophets of God, such as Prophet Jesus, really existed because of the very little material available about him. As for Muhammad, however, this allegation has never been made. From his childhood to his death, almost every detail about his words, his deeds, his habits and his overall character, is on record. Muslims know more about the Holy Prophet than they do about their own parents. What an astounding concept – with all the knowledge and intimate details about his life, Muhammad still commands the respect and admiration of over 1 billion persons on earth today. With the mass of evidence contained in written traditions and other documentation, it is amazing that the hostile critics of the Prophet cannot find more faults to pick against him. People today know exactly what Prophet Muhammad liked to eat, what food he disliked, how he brushed his teeth, how he walked, how he smiled, how he shook hands, how many white hairs he had in his beard and even what type of jokes he told, for even these such details are recorded. Truly, Muhammad is a “living prophet”, for his life is just as accessible for

all to witness through voluminous authenticated records today, as his personal example was 14 hundred years ago in Arabia.

### **What others say**

Objective, neutral parties, studying the life of Prophet Muhammad as a historical figure have come to the same conclusion. Dr. Michael Hart, a scientist by profession, compiled a book ranking the top 100 most influential persons in history. He published his rankings in a book titled: “The 100”. Number one on his list was “Muhammad”. He writes:

He [Muhammad] was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the secular and religious level. It is probable that the relative influence of Islam has been larger than the combined influence of Jesus Christ and St. Paul on Christianity. It is this **unparalleled combination of the secular and religious influence** which I feel entitles Muhammad to be considered to be the most influential single figure in human history.

Rev. R. Bosworth Smith, in his book “Mohammad and Mohammadism” published in 1874, writes:

Head of the State as well as the Church, he was Caesar and Pope in one; but, he was Pope without the Pope’s pretensions, and Caesar without the legions of Caesar, without a standing army, without a bodyguard, without a police force, without a fixed revenue. If ever a man had the right to say that he ruled by a right divine, it was Muhammad, for he had all the powers without their supports. He cared not for the dressings of power. The simplicity of his private life was in keeping with his public life.

Similarly, Sir Bernard Shaw, Irish dramatist, literary critic, and a leading figure in the 20th century theater, a freethinker, defender of women’s rights, and advocate of equality of income and Nobel Prize recipient for Literature in 1925, writes:

I have always held the religion of Muhammad (pbuh) in high estimation because of its wonderful vitality. It is the only religion, which appears to me to possess that assimilation capacity to the changing phase of existence, which can make itself appeal in **every age**. I have studied him (Muhammad) - the wonderful man and in my opinion far from being an anti-Christ, he must be called the savior of humanity.

He was by far the most remarkable man that ever set foot on this earth. He preached a religion, founded a state, built a nation, laid down a moral

code, initiated numerous social and political reforms, established a powerful and dynamic society to practice and represent his teachings and completely revolutionized the worlds of human thought and behavior for **all times** to come.

The Encyclopedia Britannica, after exhaustive research and study, states:

....a mass of detail in the early sources show that he was an honest and upright man who had gained the respect and loyalty of others who were likewise honest and upright men.

It then concludes:

Of all religious personalities of the world, Muhammad was the most successful.

As it was necessary for the institution of prophethood to come to an end with the perfection of religious guidance, is there any doubt that Muhammad was the last prophet who made complete the Divine objective of providing a comprehensive role-model of righteousness for mankind? ■

## Responding to Abusers of the Holy Prophet: Patience and Tolerance is Key

By Maulana Muhammad Ali

*[This article is a transcript of a Jumma Khutba (Sermon) presented by Maulana Muhammad Ali on March 22, 1929. In this sermon, Maulana Muhammad Ali examines an issue that is very applicable to current times: that is, the appropriate response to abuse of Islam and the Holy Prophet Muhammad. Maulana Muhammad Ali methodologically discusses this issue by first addressing the source of the popular myths concerning this matter and then providing an explanation of the response that is actually mandated by the Quran and Hadith. Finally, he advises members of the community to instill the principles of patience and tolerance in their dealings amongst themselves because therein, he explains, lies the real strength and progress of the community.]*

### Slander

O you who believe, say not *Ra'i-na* and say *Unzur-na* and listen. And for the disbelievers there is a painful chastisement.

Neither those who disbelieve from among the People of the Book, nor the polytheists, like that any good should be sent down to you from your

Lord. And Allah chooses whom He pleases for His Mercy; and Allah is the Lord of mighty grace. (2:104-105)

A certain individual has written a book which discusses the subject of expansion of Islam. In the concluding remarks of his book he has written five or six points, the intent of which is to create an impression in the mind of the reader that the Holy Prophet (we seek refuge in Allah) was a cruel and heartless person. Whenever someone uttered a slanderous or rude remark about him, he was immediately put to the sword. To support his allegations the writer has quoted references from books of *Sirat* (biography).<sup>1</sup>

### Books of Hadith and Sirat

The truth is that in these books of *Sirat* (biography) all sorts of legends have been compiled without much investigation. Whosoever got hold of a narrative, he wrote it down in these books. This is the major distinction between books of *Hadith* (tradition) and *Sirat*. The compilers of *Hadith* took great care in documenting their content. In spite of this precaution some matters have crept in *Hadith* which are in contradiction to the Holy Qur'an. In the case of Books of *Sirat* no such precaution was taken in the collection of their material, therefore, the chance of such spurious elements having been recorded in them are much higher. The Holy Prophet's instruction in this matter is that, "You should reject any matter that contradicts the Holy Qur'an." It is thus absolutely essential to be very careful in accepting the veracity of such reports.

### The Holy Quran and Sirat

I have deeply pondered in this matter and have come to the conclusion that these reports are not even remotely connected with the persona of the Holy Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings of Allah be upon Him. The more we reflect upon the Holy Qur'an, we can see clearly that the Holy Prophet's character ascended far above such triviality. In fact, the Holy Qur'an is the only authority which keeps us on the right course. These reports have been tainted to a great degree by the thought process of the narrator. Whatever understanding of certain occurrences the narrator had, he described it according to his own perception. In particular they have greatly misunderstood the causes of the battles in which the Holy Prophet took part. The process of collecting these reports occurred at a time when Muslims had power and kingdom. Their mental attitude was that of a dominant power, where use of aggression against other nations was not considered objectionable. As a result of this mind set such reports made their way into books of *Sirat*.

### **Qur'anic Directive**

The Holy Qur'an brings about correction of such reports and reformation of this mentality. The Holy Qur'an states, "Say not *Ra'i-na* and say *Unzur-na* and listen." The difference between these two words is explained by the Holy Qur'an itself:

Some of those who are Jews alter words from their places and say, we have heard and we disobey; and (say) Hear without being made to hear and (say), *Ra-'i-na*, distorting with their tongues and slandering religion. (4:46)

*Ra'i-na* is equivalent to "give ear to, hearken, or listen to us", but with a slight change of accent it becomes *ra'ina*, which means "he is foolish or stupid or unsound in intellect". The Jews of Medina with the intent to ridicule Muslims changed the accent, thus "distorting" the word and changing its meaning. It is quite apparent that they used these derogatory words right in front of the Holy Prophet. Certain *Hadith* report that instead of *Asalaamo alaikum* (peace be upon you) they would say, *Asaamo alaikum* (death be upon you). They would also say, "Allah is poor and we are rich" (3:181). There is also mention of making fun of the Holy Prophet, and use of abusive language. In the verse quoted above, Holy Qur'an categorizes this behavior as, "slandering religion" (4:46). Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon Him) never punished any of those who used such offensive language.<sup>2</sup>

The Holy Qur'an also states, "And you will certainly hear from those who have been given the Book before you and idolaters much abuse." This verse from the chapter *Al-Imran* which clearly points out that Muslims will have to face insult and verbal abuse. Under such circumstances they are enjoined, "And if you are patient and keep your duty, surely this is an affair of great resolution" (3:186). Along with patience stress is laid upon keeping one's duty. What is keeping one's duty under such circumstances? It is not only being tolerant of such maltreatment, but responding to it with goodness. This in the words of the Holy Qur'an is an affair of great resolution.

### **Appropriate Response to Slanderers**

You are all aware of this that amongst the Muslim's it is prevalent idea that whosoever abuses the Holy Prophet should be put to death. I have explored this issue, and found it in contradiction of the Qur'anic teachings. As I have pointed out the Holy Quran gives clear instructions to bear slander with patience tolerance and benevolence. We find incidents in the life of the Holy prophet where face with such circumstances he never responded in the manner commonly perceived by the Muslims, and which they attribute to him. Take for example the case of Abdullah bin Ubayy. In one of the campaigns outside Medina, he threatened the Muslims thus, "Upon return to Medina we shall see how the respected and honored inhabitants will expel the wretched ones." In spite of this insolence he was not reprimanded for it by the Holy Prophet.

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Seemingly this proposition appears very attractive. It stokes our ego that we hold such love and honor for the Holy Prophet in our hearts that we are impulsively ready to get rid of his slanderer! In my opinion we need to re-study the Holy Quran for guidance in regards to a lot of ideas which have become entrenched in our psyche. Sometimes it is even necessary to overlook the commentaries and study the Holy Qur'an independently. It is very essential that we consider how such a mind set and behavior on our part will affect others. One aspect of this is that we have such inviolable sense of honor for the Holy Prophet that we are ready to mete death upon the perpetrator of such insolence. The other side of this is that people instead of being attracted to Islam will despise it and think of it as a violent and intolerant religion. We need to ponder deeply in this matter. For example, if some individual raises an objection against or insults an honorable and powerful man, do we expect him to respond with kindness and thus manifest his magnificence of character, or do we prefer that he should chase the perpetrator with the intent to beat him up. The Holy Qur'an in fact teaches us to endure insult with restraint and mercy and not respond with intolerance and injury.

### **Patience and Tolerance is Essential**

What Muslims are lacking in these times is the spirit of tolerance. The reason for endless squabbles is this lack of tolerance. In fact the real honor of a Muslim lies in this that he accepts difference of opinion and faces difficulties and tribulations with patience and steadfastness. This is a commendable attribute. There is no moral superiority in answering abuse in kind. Strength of character lies in being patient. I enjoin you to tolerate difference of opinion. Face abuse and insult with fortitude. In this lies your magnanimity. If someone utters a few derogatory words against you, you get angry and respond in a similar manner, you have lost the high moral ground.

### **Principle Underlying the Strength and Progress of a Community**

The Holy Qur'an extols the Holy Prophet in the following words, "And hadst thou been rough, heard- hearted, they would certainly have dispersed from around thee" (3:159).

This is the key to strengthening an organization. A person should not be abrasive, but instead be so kind hearted as to tolerate abusive language and be ready to forgive. The Holy Qur'an contains such teaching in abundance. In one verse it says, "And say to my servants that they speak what is best. Surely the devil sows dissension among them." (17:53). Another verse tells us, "Repel (evil) with what is best (41:34). And if you adopt this attitude, you will find that, "he between whom and

thee is enmity would be as if he were a warm friend" (41:34).

Now keep all these teachings in perspective, and ask yourself the question, where does the Holy Qur'an lead us in this matter? The Qur'an teaches us to treat even our most inveterate enemy with kindness and to tolerate his abuse with patience. There is no doubt that insult provokes anger in us and we think that the perpetrator is our enemy and should therefore be disgraced. The Holy Qur'an, however, seeks the moral spiritual elevation of man through its guidance.

### **Advice to Members of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement**

I present these arguments for my own personal reformation and the reformation of the members of my *jamaat* (organization). Some people have this temperament that they get very angry when insulted. What good does it do to us that we narrate the excellent example of the Holy Prophet, but do not follow him? We tell other people of how the Holy Prophet forgave his enemies after gaining victory over them. Do we for a moment consider that we should follow his example? Why do we not follow these excellences of the Holy Prophet whereby we prove his magnanimity? How great were the difficulties and afflictions he had to suffer at the hands of his opponents and with what unparalleled generosity he forgave all of them? Not for a moment did he seek blame or ask for an apology. I know that this word forgiveness is hard on both parties. For the person who is aggrieved it is very hard to forgive his tormentor. He does not feel rested till he has not fully humiliated his adversary. For the one who has caused this injury, it is also very difficult to ask for forgiveness. If both of them however do this, in this lies their graciousness and nobility.

### **Respect for One's Brother**

My understanding is that Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad formed this organization for a specific purpose. Our greatest goal is to sustain and strengthen this movement. We drift further from our goal and become weaker, as we prolong our mutual discords. I therefore remind you of the Qur'anic injunction, "And obey Allah and His Messenger and dispute not one with another, lest you get weak hearted and your power depart; and be steadfast. Surely Allah is with the steadfast" (8:46).

The Holy Prophet said, "Just as you regard this month, this day, this city, as Sacred, so regard the life and property and honor of every Muslim as a sacred trust." Dishonoring your brother is like spilling his blood. Both these actions are similar. Remember first and foremost is to abstain from speaking an evil word against your brother.

### The Inappropriateness of Demanding Apologies

The second step is that if someone aggrieved you, forgive him. This should not be your attitude that you do not let go till the individual is humiliated and asks for an apology. While apologizing is a commendable action, for you to demand an apology is not. Remember well that he who caused the grief did evil. Similarly not forgiving his action is immoral. *Hadith* of the Holy Prophet enjoins us to, "Create Allah's qualities within you." Allah's attribute is that He is, "Forgiver of sin and Acceptor of repentance" (40:3). He forgives without one asking for forgiveness, and also accepts repentance. We should also at times forgive our brother without his seeking an apology and also forgive him when he apologizes. Every individual who is a member of this organization and all the elders amongst you should have it in their heart to forgive those who speak evil of them. Follow the example of the Holy Prophet, and create the same spirit within you.

Before his death, the Holy Prophet said this to his companions, "If one of you has been hurt or offended by me, he should take recompense from me now." A man from amongst the audience spoke thus, "O Prophet of Allah, in one of the battles your elbow grazed my shoulder." The Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) laid bare his shoulder and gave him permission to hit it with his elbow. He came forward, and affectionately kissed his shoulder instead, saying, "You, oh Prophet of Allah and causing me any hurt? Certainly not! My intent was to kiss you!"<sup>3</sup>

### Real Strength of Character

Remember this well that the real measure of your strength does not lie in this that you are able to denigrate someone, but lies in this that you forgive the one who has aggrieved you, and overlook his faults. This has a great significance for the strength of your organization, hence I repeatedly advise you of this. Your community cannot be strong unless you overlook the weaknesses and faults of your brethren. The more you forgive your brothers, the more contentment and pleasure will it bring to your heart. Finding faults with others and speaking ill of them are habits you should let go of. I say to all of you that if somebody has caused you hurt, you should very soon try to put the matter behind you and forget the grievance. In fact the *Hadith* tells us, that a person should not stop speaking to his brother for more than three days. This is the extreme limit; the best course is, to forgive his omission in the very beginning." ■

### NOTES:

1 Note by Khwaja Kamal-ud Din on this Subject (taken from his book, 'The Ideal Prophet'):

There are numberless books on the life of the Holy Prophet, some of them written in the early days of Islam, and among these Books of *Sirat* and *Maghazi* are conspicuous. Nevertheless, they should be put to the test of the Books of *Hadith*- the traditions of the Prophet - before they can be accepted as reliable on the subject. Hafiz Zainuddin, a well known "traditionist" very rightly remarks in his book, *Al-fiya-fissyar*, "The seeker should remember that books on the *Sirat* (biography) of Muhammad gather all kinds of traditions and sayings, both those that are true and those which should be rejected". The *Sirat* and *Maghazi* books were not over-carefully compiled, and many unreliable accounts, in the nature of fiction, crept into them. On the other hand, in the books of *Hadith*, we have the statements of about 13,000 persons - who had spoken with the Prophet and seen him - that have been written down and passed on to us. "In order then, to ascertain whether a certain narrator of a certain tradition is trustworthy, we consult a special branch of Arabic literature known as *Asma-ur-Rijal* that is to say, the names of those who have either spoken to or seen the Prophet. In these books are preserved the accounts of the lives of the persons who are narrators of traditions, and it is from these books that we learn whether such should be accepted or rejected. Thousands of "traditionists" spent their whole lives in preparing this branch of knowledge. They took long journeys to meet and interview the persons who could relate any events of the life of Muhammad. They met them and inquired about them; whether the narrator was a pious man; what were his occupations; whether he had a good memory; whether he was of a superficial or deep character; and if he proved to be in any way deficient, his evidence was rejected." It was under this system of sifting the truth that the books of *Sifah Sittah*- six reliable books of traditions were pre-pared and became the basis of all other books on the life of the Prophet. The books of *Maghazi*, (books dealing with battles Holy Prophet had to undertake) on the other hand, have not appealed to the Muslim Divines and "traditionists," and their writers have not been accepted as reliable. Among these writers, Waqidi and his Katib have been regarded, in the Muslim world, as the least trustworthy and most careless biographers of Muhammad. Of the former Ibn Khalikan speaks thus: "The traditions received from him (Waqidi) are considered of feeble authority, and doubts have been expressed on the subject of his veracity (vol. iii, p. 62). Imam Shafi'I - one of the four great Imams of the Muslim world -says that all the books of Waqidi are a load of lies, and other "traditionists" say the same. But unfortunately Waqidi is the chief authority with some of those European writers, who approach the subject with sinister motives and for obvious reasons. They can get such material in this fiction writer's account of the Campaigns of Muhammad as, with little distortion, will help them to malign the Holy Prophet.

- 2 The Holy Prophet at this stage had been accepted by the inhabitants of Medina as their ruler and could have easily done so if he chose to.
- 3 This shows, not only the sublime sense of awareness the Holy Prophet had for the rights of other individuals but also the great affection and love his followers had for him.

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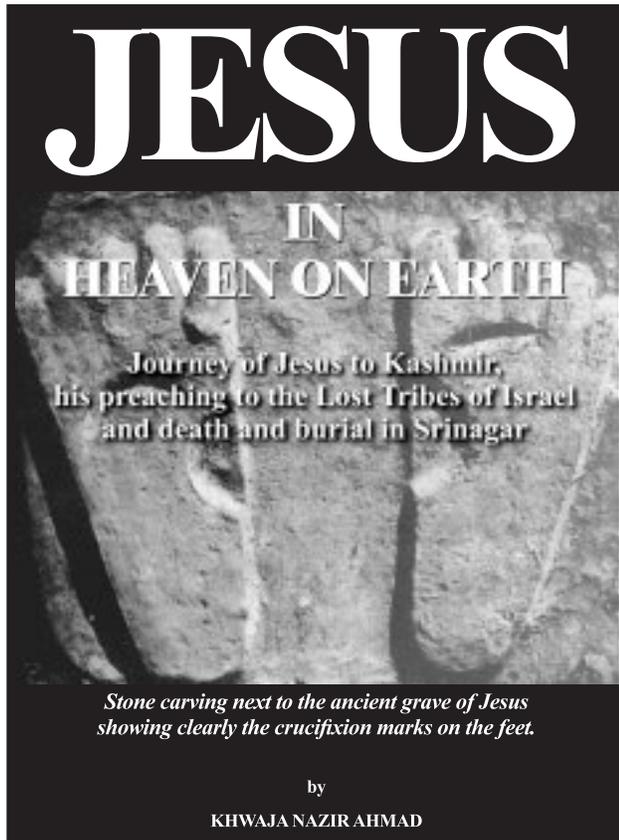
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8. Jesus still felt hunger (Luke 24:39-43) and still bore the wounds of the crucifixion (John 20: 25:28), being in the same physical state as before.
9. Jesus undertook a journey to Galilee, a major port city, with two disciples (Matt 28:10), clearly unnecessary to rise to heaven but convincing evidence of an escape elsewhere.
10. Jesus prayed the whole night before his arrest to be saved from dying on the cross (Matt 26:39) and his prayer was answered: “When he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him who was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared” (Heb. 5:7).

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