

*“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 2008

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. 85

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Published on the World-Wide Web at: www.muslim.org

احمدیہ انجمن اشاعت اسلام لاہور

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

Abraham: The Common Ground

By Fazeel S. Khan, Esq.

[This article is a transcript of the opening speech at the Symposium on “The Faith of Abraham, from an Islamic Perspective” presented by the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society in conjunction with its annual convention in Columbus, Ohio in 2007. The Editor provides a review of Abraham’s connection with and status in the major faiths of the world and then presents an outline for a model by which the “Abrahmic Faith” may be achieved. This article sets the stage for the other presentations in the Symposium, which will be published in future issues of this periodical.]

Introduction: Why Abraham?

This Symposium is dedicated to discussing the “Faith of Abraham”. The obvious question arises: “why Abraham?” What is it about Abraham and his particular faith that creates respect and admiration within the hearts of millions of people from multiple faiths? Abraham is a historical figure who is passionately revered by followers of the major religious faiths of the world. In fact, he is considered the “Patriarch” of the Israelite and Arab dispensations and the one who established the basic theology upon which the Judaic/Christian and Islamic beliefs are founded. There is no doubt, in Abraham do the major faiths of the world find a fundamental connection.

Connection with Judaism

Accordingly to Jewish beliefs, Abraham gave rise to a nation of “Hebrews”, or people who live “on the other side”. He was born in Mesopotamia (today’s Iraq) and then moved with his father to Haran (today’s northern Syria/southern Turkey) and it is there God made him an offer: if Abram (as he was initially called) would leave his home and his family, then God would make him a great nation and bless him.

God said to Abram: “Go from your land ... to the land that I will show you.” (Genesis 12:1)

Abraham accepted this offer and the *b’rit*, or “covenant” between God and Abraham, was established. The idea of the *b’rit* is fundamental to tradi-

tional Judaism. Jews believe they have a covenant (a contract) with God, which involves rights and obligations on both sides. The terms of the *b’rit* became more defined over time, until the revealing of the *Torah*.

Abram, raised as a city-dweller, adopted a nomadic lifestyle, traveling through what is now the land of Palestine/Israel for many years. However, throughout this time, he was childless. In ripe old age, Abraham was given a son, Ishmael, and later another son, Isaac. Before his wife Sarah conceived Isaac, God tells Abraham:

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

So, through Isaac, it is believed, that the “mission” of Abraham is to be carried out. And the Jews, through Isaac, inherited the covenant with God.

Connection with Christianity

As in Jewish tradition, ancestry through Abraham is important to Christian theology. The Gospels trace Jesus’ genealogy to Abraham, stating he descended from him “according to the flesh”. However, Christian theology emphasizes a reinterpreted connection with Abraham – one based not simply on lineage but also on “faith”. As Paul emphasized, Abraham “believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.” Thus, it is *beliefffaith* that is aligned with having a connection with Abraham, not mere physical relations and rather than observance of laws and regulations.

If it is the adherents of the law who are to be heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. (Romans 4)

All who rely on the works of the law are under a curse. (Galatians 3).

Notwithstanding, the promise to Abraham and his heirs is not forgotten in Christianity. Rather, it is redefined in line with the focus on “faith”. God’s promise, Paul notes, is to “Abraham and his *offspring*”, not “*offsprings*”. This offspring, it is claimed, is Jesus Christ. Thus, faith in the “true descendant” of Abraham, Jesus Christ, makes one an heir of Abraham and a member of his family.

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

Connection with Islam

As with Jewish and Christian beliefs, a direct physical relationship with Abraham is present in Islamic traditions. This physical connection is through Abraham's firstborn, Ishmael. Just as the Israelite nation descended from Isaac, the Arab peoples descended from Ishmael. The Bible accepts this connection, for *Kedar*, the son of Ishmael, stands for *Arabia* throughout the Old Testament.

Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar. (Ps. 120:5).

Let the wilderness and the cities thereof lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar doth inhabit: let the inhabitants of the rock sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains. (Is. 42:11).

The Prophet Muhammad himself, Muslims believe, was a direct descendant of Ishmael.

The *covenant* that God made is also accepted in Islam. However, in Islam, it is emphasized that the covenant was between God and Abraham and, therefore, extended to both of Abraham's sons, Ishmael and Isaac.

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

Although conceived from two different mothers, Hagar and Sarah, both Ishmael and Isaac were the "seed" of Abraham, the inheritors of the covenant and beneficiaries of the blessings of God.

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

In addition to these ancestral ties, Abraham's presence is connected with the holiest site in Islam – the "*kabah*". The *kabah* is the sacred cube structure in Mecca to which millions of Muslims make pilgrimage each and every year. So established is Abraham's connection with the *kabah*, it is referred to as

"*Maqam Ibrahim*", or the house of Abraham in the Quran, the Holy scripture of Islam.

And when We made The House a resort for men and a (place of) security. And: Take ye the place of Abraham for a place of prayer. And We enjoined Abraham and Ishmael, saying: Purify My House for those who visit (it) and those who abide (in it) for devotion and those who bow down (and) those who prostrate themselves. (2:125).

According to Islamic tradition, it was Abraham who when settling Hagar and Ishmael near the Sacred House, the ruins of which was already there, laid the foundations of a city, which is today Mecca.

Our Lord, I have settled a part of my offspring in a valley unproductive of fruit near Thy Sacred House, our Lord, that they may keep up prayer. (14:37)

Thus, the casting forth of Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness of Beer-sheba, as is stated in the Bible, is not accepted; rather it is believed that Abraham settled Hagar and Ishmael in the desert area of what is today Mecca. It is further believed to have been done under divine instruction so that the *kabah*, which was rebuilt by Abraham and Ishmael, would become a place where persons from far and wide would come to pray to the One God, the God of Abraham.

When Abraham and Ishmael raised the foundations of the house: our Lord, accept from us. (2:127)

In fact, it is believed to have all been done in accordance with a Divine plan, so that the "stone" which the builders rejected should become the head of the corner.

The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. (Ps. 118:22).

Jesus sayeth unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?

Therefore say I unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. (Matt 21:42-43).

Ishmael, it is believed, was that “stone”. For, whereas from the descendants of Isaac came numerous prophets, from the descendants of Ishmael – who was cast into the wilderness and rejected by the other line of Abraham’s descendants – came the Holy Prophet Muhammad, who became the head of the corner due to being the last of the prophets and being the recipient of the final message for mankind (the Holy Quran).

Connections with Hinduism

Interestingly, some believe there to be a connection between Abraham and the Hindu faith as well. The great *Rishi* Brahma from Hindu traditions is suggested by some to be no other than Abraham. The names of the two characters for one, is strikingly similar – simply putting the letter “A” in front of the word Brahma produces “Abrahma”, almost identical to “Abram” or “Abraham”. Moreover, according to Hindu tradition, Brahma’s wife’s name was “Sarai-Svati”, the first part being identical to the name of Abraham’s wife in the Bible, “Sarai” (before it became “Sarah”). In addition to this, the Saraisvati River in India, named after Brahma’s wife, has a tributary named “Ghaggar”, strikingly similar to “Hagar”, who Jews, Christians and Muslims accept as the mother of Ishmael.

Brahma is considered by Hindus to be the “Creator of the people”, very comparable to Abraham’s status of “Patriarch” in Judaic/Christian and Islamic traditions. Brahma is traditionally depicted in Hindu portraits and sculptures as holding a scepter in the form of a spoon, which is associated with pouring butter or oil into a sacrificial pyre, as is ceremonial among Hindus, indicating that he is the “Lord of Sacrifice”. “Sacrifice” is without doubt the primary attribute for which Abraham is most well known due to his willingness to sacrifice his son, as the story is related in the Bible and the Quran alike.

Thus, Abraham’s influence may be extended even further – there may even be a connection with the millions of followers of Hinduism.

The “uniqueness” of Abraham

Now, we see the vast influence Abraham has had on mankind, people of various faiths revering him as, in essence, their spiritual father. But what was it that made Abraham so special. What distinguished him from the other righteous people in history? What

made him the sole occupier of the grand status of “Patriarch” of organized religion?

Establishing Monotheism

The Jewish, Christian and Islamic views are all in agreement on the answer to this question: Abraham was first to firmly establish belief in the One, True God. It was Abraham’s comprehension that the True, Supreme, All-Powerful God is One, and that it was to this One True God that man was to submit himself completely, that affords him this special rank among the monotheistic faiths of the world.

The Holy Quran reveals this distinctive status of Abraham by the unique term used to describe him. He is referred to as *hanif*, or “upright.” This term is repeatedly used to describe Abraham in the Holy Quran. For example, we read:

Say: Allah speaks the truth; so follow the religion of Abraham, the **upright** one. And he was not one of the polytheists (3:95).

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

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

Of all the descriptive words used to describe prophets in the Quran, only Abraham is referred to as being “upright.” The clear meaning of the attribute is that Prophet Abraham was unwavering in his submission to the One True God, always inclining to the correct state (i.e. a monotheistic as opposed to polytheistic belief).

However, there may be a secondary significance as well. Just as throughout the Quran material illustrations are used to shed light on spiritual matters, the use of the word “upright” may have a deeper meaning. In the “physical evolution” of our species, the *upright posture* is probably the most distinguishing characteristic that differentiates modern/civilized man from its ape-like predecessors. Charts showing the progression of our species over thousands of years shows the curvature of the spine dictating how “evolved” the species is at a particular point in history. So too, it

appears, that Abraham being referred to as an “upright” man is an indication to a turning point in mankind’s “spiritual evolution”. Just as Adam represents a new type of man, the one from whom modern, civilized man progressed, so too it appears that Abraham represents the existence of unique type of man that possessed the spiritual qualities to comprehend and follow higher spiritual matters, the one from whom later generations would inherit spiritual maturity. The Quran seems to be highlighting Abraham’s unique position in the history of man’s spiritual evolution – just as Adam is our father in the physical field, Abraham is our father in the spiritual sphere.

Submission to an “unseen” God

Abraham’s conception of God was contrary to what everyone else at the time believed. In order to believe in a higher power, Abraham’s contemporaries needed something tangible: they worshipped celestial bodies, natural phenomena and carved structures. Thus, Abraham’s concept of God was also different in that it entailed God being “**unseen**”. The God of Abraham was not something one could see or touch with their physical senses. Rather, faith in this God required “knowing” God through the spiritual senses. And through his continued search for God, Abraham achieved this knowledge of God and developed faith in Him.

And the story of the grand sacrifice Abraham was willing to make is an illustration of this faith in an unseen God. As is related in the Bible and Quran alike, God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son. His son was not only a source of love and affection, but, as Abraham was childless well into old age, his son was also a source of economic and daily support. Yet, Abraham was willing to do as commanded by God. The Quran states, “he [Abraham] came to his Lord with a pure heart.” He displayed total commitment to this Unseen God; he did not serve any other master – whether material or emotional – and, thus, was not torn by two loyalties. In essence, the incident of the grand sacrifice stands for the proposition that only if God is One, can anyone make a total commitment to God. And it is this practical display of allegiance to One God, who was unseen to the physical senses, submitting totally to His will, that makes Abraham the archetype of faith in Judaism, Christianity and Islam alike.

“God of Abraham”

This new concept of God, a single higher power that could be known through the spiritual senses only and Who was due total allegiance, became known as the “God of Abraham”. In the Bible we read:

Abraham’s servant speaks of “the God of my father Abraham” (Gen. 24:12);

Jehovah, in an apparition to Isaac, speaks of himself as “the God of Abraham (Gen. 26:24);

Jacob speaks of God as “the God of my father Abraham” (Gen. 31:42);

To Moses, God introduces himself as “I am the God thy fathers, the God of Abraham” (Ex. 3:6).

The same expression is used in Psalms (96:10) and is common throughout the Old Testament.

This new concept of God, viewed as the “God of Abraham”, laid the foundation for the monotheistic religions of the world. The Quran emphasizes this point by asserting that the basis of the true and correct religion is simply that of the faith of Abraham. It states:

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

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

To whom does Abraham belong?

As we all know, belief in the God of Abraham became predominant. Faith in One, Unseen God was viewed as superior to the polytheistic beliefs of the past. Because the “God” of Abraham was viewed as superior, Abraham himself began being viewed in terms of exclusivity. The followers of the various monotheistic faiths began characterizing Abraham as “their” father, only. Whether using Isaac, Ishmael, Jesus or Muhammad, claims were made that “their” connection with Abraham was stronger.

The Holy Quran emphatically condemns these arguments, deeming them all specious. As to whom the faith of Abraham belongs, we are told:

Abraham was not a Jew nor a Christian, but he was (an) upright (man), who totally submitted to God; and he was not one of the polytheists (3:67).

Notice that the verse does not say Abraham was one following the religion of Islam or Muhammad either. Abraham is not classified in terms of a particular belief system nor is he labeled as belonging to any one specific faith. Rather, he is one who believed in God, submitted himself completely to Him and Him alone and his faith was so strong that nothing, not even, the life of his beloved son, could rival it.

And as for the physical ties that are used to make “claim” upon Abraham, the Quran explains:

And when his Lord tried Abraham with certain commands he fulfilled them. He said: Surely I will make thee a leader of men. (Abraham) said: And of my offspring? My covenant does not include the wrongdoers, said He (2:124).

Thus, ancestral relations mean nothing in and of themselves. Neither do conventional rituals for that matter. Rather, observance of duty in its true spirit is the key. So, the Quran explains, it is the following of the faith and practical example of Abraham, not simply being included in his family tree, that qualifies one to be an “heir” of “son” of Abraham. We read in the Gospels that John the Baptist was of the same opinion. He argued:

Do not begin to say: We have Abraham for our father, for I say to you God is able of these stones to raise up children of Abraham” (Luke 3:8).

Jesus also explained:

If ye be the children of Abraham, do the works of Abraham (John 8:33).

A guide by which the Abrahamic Faith may be achieved

And this is what we will be discussing in the various speeches today. We will examine how one can affirm the faith of Abraham or, as Jesus said, “do the works of Abraham”.

As already mentioned, the Holy Quran views the true/correct religion, at its core, as nothing other than the faith of Abraham. From an Islamic perspective, achieving the Abrahamic Faith requires the following:

It requires the establishment of a spiritual connection with the One, True God. What this means and how it can be achieved will be discussed by Dr. Malik in the lecture titled: **Abraham: a “friend of God”**.

It also requires the willingness to submit one’s self totally to the will of God. And what this entails will be discussed by Dr. Ahmad in the lecture titled: **Abraham and the sacrifice of the animal within**.

It also requires a process that facilitates the acquiring of this connection with God and the internal desire to submit to Him completely. And what this process comprises will be discussed by Attorney Sahukhan in the lecture: **Abraham and the true concept of prayer**.

Finally, it requires an example – an available written record – to which people can turn to seek guidance as to how to incorporate this faith into the various challenges of daily life. And our last speech examines how the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad satisfies this requirement, in the lecture: **Muhammad: an affirmation of the Abrahamic Faith**.

I thank you so much for your attention. And I hope you will enjoy the remaining speeches. ■

Journey of the Human Soul

By Dr. Mohammed Ahmad

[In this article, Dr. Ahmad provides a detailed outline of the concept of the human soul in Islam. He first describes the nature of the soul. He then explains that man’s spiritual progression, unlike man’s physical evolution, is everlasting and that one’s deeds dictate the soul’s future course. Practical illustrations are also provided as to the moral qualities required to develop the soul. Finally, Dr. Ahmad sheds light on the life hereafter, when the soul becomes independent of its earthly body.]

“Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” is a famous phrase from the United States Declaration

of Independence. It is listed among the “unalienable rights” of man. Interestingly it also summarizes our discussion today. For purpose of this discussion, “Life” stands for life in this world and the Hereafter. “Liberty” stands for free will and freedom to make choices. “Pursuit of Happiness” is the quest for inner peace that comes with spiritual development. To ensure our physical survival, man possesses basic primal desires, such as the need for food, territory or power and sex or procreation. Man shares these traits in common with the rest of the animal kingdom. Even an ant is perfectly endowed with the instincts to gather food, defend its territory, reproduce and protect its young. However, if physical development was the sole purpose of our creation, it would be a fleeting objective. With the passage of time, we lose our health and at the time of death we lose all our material possessions. The Holy Quran states:

And Whomsoever We cause to live long
We reduce to an abject state in creation.
Do they not understand? (36:68)

How can it be that the qualities we possess and the time we spend are solely for the purpose of attaining physical dominion when that dominion is so transitory? Clearly, occupying our time and energy solely in this task is a waste. These basic human desires, in fact, are not only to further our physical self but also the impetus for spiritual growth when used properly under divine guidance. When used under the exertion of an appropriate amount of control, they further our lives and community in a positive way and draw us closer to the source of all goodness, our Creator.

For example, lust is a very basic desire necessary for human existence. Desire for each other is integral in a marriage and helps to strengthen the bond and increase the love for one another. It aids in creating a peaceful, stable union that is conducive to spiritual growth. Also, it results in the creation of children who, lovingly raised, are our collective security for the future. The same lust, unbridled, results in promiscuity, sex for the sake of sex, and children created as an unwanted by-product and raised the same way, not exactly fodder for a loving and peaceful, productive society. Thus, the desires we possess are integral to our physical existence and when used appropriately result in our spiritual growth. However, if allowed to run out of control they consume and destroy our spiritual life. Through its growth, the

human spirit strengthens its bond with the Creator and finds solace and serenity.

How exactly does this spiritual evolution occur? What is the nature of our spiritual self? The Holy Quran provides guidance by stating:

So when I have made him (man) complete
and breathed into him of My spirit (*ruh*).
Ref

The Quran explains that Allah, Who is Ever-living and Self-subsisting (*Hayy and Qayyum*), has, out of His infinite mercy, provided man with a part of His own spirit. It is interesting to note that in man, the process of breathing involves the supply of oxygen which is vital for our physical existence. Similarly, it is explained, the divine spirit given to us is an essential element and vital element for our spiritual evolution. This spirit (*ruh*), while in the human body, is impacted by the good and evil actions of the individual and forms a personality of its own, which is called in the Quran as “*nafs*”, or “soul”. The Quran explains that the human soul does not come from any place in the heavens and then seeks connection with the body in the womb of the mother. Rather, the soul grows from the body, as if a light or an essence that lies concealed in the seed:

Then We cause it (life-germ) to grow into
another creation. So blessed be Allah, the
Best of the creators! (23:14)

The Three stages of development of the Human Soul

With this background, I would like to now briefly outline the three stages of spiritual development, as prescribed by the Holy Quran. The Creator has so arranged the system of moral evolution that one can advance from a low state to a higher state. The Holy Quran states:

And I call not myself sinless; surely
(man’s) self is prone to command evil,
except those on whom my Lord has
mercy. Surely my Lord is Forgiving,
Merciful. (12:53)

Man’s “self” is here called *ammarah*, that is “*one wont to command evil*” (12:53). This is the first stage in the spiritual growth of man. It is what may be called the *animal self*. At this stage, low desires and animal passions rule the mind of man and man is

capable of doing any evil without remorse. He submits to his carnal desires completely. The next stage is called the *lawwamah*, which is referred to in 75:2 as the “*self-accusing spirit*”. At this point in one’s development, departure from the path of rectitude at once rouses the pangs of conscience. Though one may trip up, one recognizes this mistake and feels remorseful. The third stage is the stage of perfection — which is referred to in 89:27-30 as the *mutma’in-nah*, or “*the soul at rest*”. Here, one finds perfect peace, having attained the goal of perfection. Those who attain the second or third spiritual stages are referred to in the verse quoted above as “those on whom my Lord has mercy”.

Attention must also be called to another very important point. The whole purpose of the Holy Quran, and the pith of its teachings, is to bring about the threefold reformation of man. All other directions therein are simply means to this end. These directions are given for the spiritual well being and growth of a human. As is in medicine, certain treatment regimens must be followed or surgical operations performed in order to achieve a state of physical health. Likewise, the Quran employs moral precepts and advises the avoidance of various actions in order to attain spiritual vitality. All these moral teachings, precepts, and doctrines have an all-pervading purpose beneath them: the transformation of a person from a purely physical state, which is imbued with a tinge of savageness, into the moral state, and from the moral into the spiritual state, which is boundless. Thus, laws are laid down to guide the actions of daily life, and all that is necessary to make the savage being into a social being is included therein.

Awakening the Moral Being

As mentioned earlier, the desires for food sexual activity, acquisition of wealth and power exist naturally in man and provide the motive force for his physical existence. The Holy Quran has laid down the guiding rules which control these forces and channel them in a direction where their energy is used to elevate man spiritually. The following are some examples of moral qualities prescribed in the Holy Quran.

Chastity

The word, “*Ihsan*” or “*chastity*”, signifies the virtue which relates to the act of procreation. Indulging in indecency and sexual abasement has far reaching implications. Particularly, if the peace of a marriage is

destroyed from inability to refrain from sexual desire, one spouse is lost to another and a parent is lost to a child. One may argue that sexual desire is “natural” and since this inclination is present in the make up of a person, there is no sin in acting on it. In truth, the virtue of chastity cannot be attained unless one desires, has the capability to act upon, and yet refrains from indulging in it. It is refraining under such circumstances — against the power of the passions which nature has placed in man—that deserves to be credited as a high moral quality. Nunnery, impotency, emasculation or old age nullify the existence of the *moral* quality we term “chastity”. Though the mere act of abstaining from sex exists in these circumstances, no effort is exerted to overcome animalistic desires for a more pure ideal. The fact is that in such cases it is a natural condition to be chaste, and there is no resistance of passion. It is the choosing of goodness over the desire for immediate physical gratification that results in the achievement of a moral quality.

The directions contained in the Quran for the attainment of this noble quality of chastity, are described in the following words:

(Allah is Knowing) and let those who cannot find a match keep chaste . . . (24:33).

And go not nigh to fornication: surely it is an obscenity. And evil is the way (17: 32).

Say to the believing men that they lower their gaze and restrain their sexual passions. That is purer for them. Surely Allah is aware of what they do. And say to the believing women that they lower their gaze and restrain their sexual passions and do not display their adornment except what appears thereof. And let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms. And they should not display their adornment except to their husbands or their father, or the fathers of their husbands, or their sons, or the sons of their husbands, or their brothers, or their brothers’ sons, or their sisters’ sons, or their women, or those whom their right hands possess, or guileless male servants, or the children who know not women’s nakedness. And let them not strike their feet so that the adornment that they hide may be known. And turn to Allah all, O believers, so that you may be successful (24:30–31).

These verses outline lessons for a practical and noble society that emphasizes moral virtue, yet is not excessively restrictive. Sexual desire is recognized as a natural part of the human make-up but to guard this within the bonds of marriage is a virtue. Flaunting sexuality is warned against and gawking at sexual exhibition is likewise warned against. Modesty in dress and actions is highlighted as purer for believing men and women alike. Furthermore, it is important to note that the society painted in these verses is one in which men and women co-exist. There is no separation to monasteries and convents, no vows of chastity encouraged, no cloistering of women into houses. Instead, men and women are allowed to go about in society with the caveat to dress and behave in a modest way when in front of members of the opposite sex where attraction is possible.

Honesty

The Arabic word “*amanat*” refers to the quality of “honesty”. This consists of not deceiving people or taking unlawful possession of their properties. As in the case of chastity, in order to truly exhibit this moral quality, one must be faced with the opportunity where a choice exists between acting with honesty or deceiving. Obedience to truthfulness where there is nothing to be gained from deception cannot truly be called the moral virtue of honesty. The Holy Quran states the following:

And make not over your property, which Allah has made a (means of) support for you, to the weak of understanding, and maintain them out of it, and clothe them and give them a good education. And test the orphans until they reach the age of marriage. Then if you find in them maturity of intellect, make over to them their property, and consume it not extravagantly and hastily against their growing up. And whoever is rich, let him abstain, and whoever is poor, let him consume reasonably. And when you make over to them their property, call witnesses in their presence. And Allah is enough as a Reckoner (4: 5-6).

The Holy Book uses the case of a person to whom the care of an orphan is entrusted as an exemplary situation. In pre-Islamic Arab society, orphans were sometimes left with property from their deceased parents and when the orphan was placed in someone’s care, the guardian had control over the proper-

ty as well. We are told that although the property can be used to aid in the rearing of the child, but it is better if the foster parent does not consume the property and makes it over to the child when the child comes of age. This situation is one in which no societal authority regulates expenditure and a person is given free reign over money and property. Thus, the opportunity to consume the wealth with impunity exists as does the chance to responsibly and honorably raise the child and keep the wealth in trust. To act honestly in such a situation is an act that can truly be called *amanat*.

The Quran goes on to say:

Surely Allah loves not the treacherous (8: 58).

Surely Allah commands you to make over trusts to those worthy of them (4 : 58).

Successful indeed are the believers ... And those who are keepers of their trusts and their covenant ... (23:1,8).

The Holy Book thus makes general statements that comprehend in their plain meaning all sorts of dishonesty. In short, a person who shows honesty in some of his dealings, but is not scrupulous about it to the minutest degree and does not observe all good rules, does not attain a moral quality but acts out of habit in obedience to the natural inclination, without applying the faculty of reason.

Meekness

The Arabic word “*hudna*” refers to the quality of “meekness”. A natural inclination towards compliance and attachment so early witnessed in the child is, therefore, only the germ out of which grows the high moral quality of meekness. It cannot itself be classed as moral as long as it is not consciously resorted to on the recommendation of reason. The following directions found in the Quran:

And the servants of the Beneficent are they who walk on the earth in humility . . . (25:63).

Repel (evil) with what is best, when lo! he between whom and thee is enmity would be as if he were a warm friend (41:34).

And reconciliation is better . . . (4:128).

And set aright your differences (8:1).

And if they (the enemy) incline to peace,
incline thou also to it (8: 61).

These verses reiterate that the actions of a person should not be self serving or grandiose, but rather colored with modesty and driven towards peace even when one's own pride must be sacrificed.

Politeness

The Arabic word “*rifq*” refers to the quality of “politeness”. Before a child learns to speak, the cheerfulness of its face serves the same purpose as kind words in a grown-up man. However kind it is, this quality may not be classified as a high moral condition because the action is not chosen through free thought. A few of the Quranic verses pertaining to this are as follows:

(O you who believe) let not people laugh at people, perchance they may be better than they; nor let women (laugh) at women, perchance they may be better than they. Neither find fault with your own people, nor call one another by nicknames. Evil is a bad name after faith; and whose turns not, these it is that are the iniquitous. O you who believe, avoid most of suspicion, for surely suspicion in some cases is sin; and spy not nor let some of you backbite others. Does one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You abhor it! And keep your duty to Allah, surely Allah is Oft-returning (to mercy), Merciful (49:11, 12).

And speak good (words) to (all) men. (2: 83).

(O man) and follow not that of which thou hast no knowledge; Surely the hearing and the sight and the heart — of each of these it will (surely) be asked (17: 36).

Thus, graciousness and good manners are integral to being a moral person. Through choosing to act with respect and courtesy to others, we attain the moral quality of *rifq*.

The moral qualities presented thus far all related to the avoidance of wrongdoing. However, there is a second class of morals outlined in the Quran, that is those concerning doing good to others. The following are some examples of this second class of morals.

Forgiveness

The Arabic word “*afw*” refers to the quality of “forgiveness”. The Holy Quran states:

And those who restrain (their) anger and are forgiving towards mankind and pardon men. And Allah loves the doers of good (3: 134).

And the recompense of evil is punishment like it; but whoever forgives and amends, his reward is with Allah . . . (42: 40).

It will be noted that these verses furnish the guiding rule as to the occasions of forgiveness. The Quran does not teach unconditional forgiveness and non-resistance of evil on every occasion, nor does it inculcate that punishment is not to be given to the offender under any circumstances. It requires the injured person to exercise his judgment, and see whether the occasion calls for punishment or forgiveness. However, the measure of forgiveness exercised by a person is to outweigh that of just retribution. Allah, Himself mentions his forgiveness numerous times more than His retribution for our mistakes in the Quran. Thus, the Almighty sets the example that to lean towards forgiveness when one is wronged is the moral course.

Kindness

The Arabic word “*adal*” refers to doing “good for good”. The Arabic word ‘*ihsan*’ refers to “kindness”. And the Arabic word ‘*itai dhi’ l-quarba*’ refers to “kindness to kindred”. The Holy Quran outlines the various forms of kindness one should strive to achieve so that the quality of kindness ascends above all selfish motives. It states:

Surely Allah enjoins justice and the doing of good (to others), and the giving to the kindred, and He forbids indecency and evil and rebellion . . . (16: 90).

The lowest form of goodness is, doing good in return for a good deed. The next stage is when one does good towards another but expects some thanks or reward for the action. The highest stage of kindness is doing good without any expectations in return. This is exemplified by the kindness a mother shows towards her child; where love for another person is the driving force in doing good to them, not an expectation of repayment. The following are Quranic verses that outline this progression in the kindness one displays to their fellow human being.

(O you who believe) make not your charity worthless by reproach and injury ... (2 :264).

Spend in Allah's way and do good (to others). Surely Allah loves the doers of good (2 :195).

And they give food, out of love for Him, to the poor and the orphan and the captive. We feed you, for Allah's pleasure only – We desire from you neither reward nor thanks (76: 89).

And (the righteous is he who) gives away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask and to set slaves free (2:177).

Those who spend (of that which Allah has given them) in ease and in adversity ... (3 :133).

You cannot attain to righteousness unless you spend out of what you love (3 : 91).

In following these lessons, each member of society evolves one's nature to wanting to do more selfless acts of goodness.

Courage

The Arabic word '*shajā'at*' refers to "courage". This is a virtue resembling "bravery". The Holy Quran provides the following directions upon this point:

And those who are steadfast in seeking the countenance of their Lord... (13: 22).

Those to whom men said: Surely the people have gathered against you, so fear them; but this (threat) increased their faith, and they said: Allah is sufficient for us and He is the most excellent Guardian (3:172).

And the patient in distress and affliction and in the time of conflict. These are they who are truthful. (Such are God-fearing) (2:177).

And be not like those who came forth from their homes exultingly and to be seen of men (8:47).

The above verses outline that the truly courageous do not display their bravery in an insolent manner. Their

only consideration is the pleasure of God. Therefore, their courage takes its root in patience and steadfastness. The courageous person resists his passion and does not flee from danger like a coward. Rather faith in the remote consequences of his or her action and acting for the greater good allow the person to take unfaltering steps toward the right course; despite the knowledge that in the immediate future, this decision may result in personal physical harm, financial ruin, or loss of position and status in society. This moral quality is that of true courage.

Veracity

The Arabic word '*sidq*' refers to "veracity". As long as there is no incentive to tell a lie, a person is naturally inclined to speak the truth. So the real test is that on the occasion that one's life or honour or property is in danger, a person speaks the truth. The Qur'an states the following:

And when you speak, be just, even though it be (against) a relative ... (6:153).

And conceal not testimony. And whoever conceals it, his heart is surely sinful (2: 283).

(O you who believe) be maintainers of justice, bearers of witness for Allah, even though it be against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives (4: 135).

(And the truthful men and the truthful women...) Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward (33: 35).

(O you who believe) let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably . . . (5: 8).

Here truth is held up as the greater virtue even when one must speak against a relative, friend or oneself! It is further stipulated that dislike of a person should not lead a person to speak a lie against the person; rather one is obligated to give true testimony even if it means speaking in favor of an enemy and sustaining personal loss.

Patience

The Arabic word "sabr" refers to "patience". Everyone suffers misfortunes; diseases and afflictions are the common lot of humanity. Everyone also has, after much sorrowing and suffering, to make his peace with the misfortunes that befall him. But such

eventual resignation is by no means a noble moral quality. It is only when the loss is received with total resignation to the will of God that the sufferer deserves to be called virtuous, as the Quran states:

And We shall certainly try you with something of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits. And give good news to the patient, who, when a misfortune befalls them, say: 'Surely we are Allah's, and to Him we shall return'. Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord; and those are the followers of the right course. Ch. 2:155-157.

It is, therefore, owing to the quality of patience that a man declares himself satisfied with God's pleasure.

Living the Spiritual Life

A perfect divine Law enables a person to rise from the lowest depths of ignorance to the highest pinnacles of light and knowledge; it turns a savage into a human, a human into a highly moral being and, last of all, transforms morality into spirituality and godliness. The injunctions of the Law have, moreover, the effect of regulating a person's relations with his or her fellow beings and of increasing sympathy for them. By its aid, a person begins gradually to see and know their rights and, in dealing with them, applies attributes of justice, goodness and sympathy on the proper occasion. He or she freely gives to each, a share of knowledge, substance, comforts, and other blessings which the Merciful has granted him or her. Like the sun, the person sheds luster over all and, like the moon, transmits to others the light that he or she

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borrowed from the great and original source of light. He or she shows the ways of truth and virtue and draws a veil over the faults and misdeeds of others. The effect of walking in obedience to the ordinances of a perfect Law, therefore, is that a person is able to perform his or her duty towards God and mankind in a fitting and creditable manner. He or she is totally resigned to the Divine will and completely engaged in the service of humanity. Such is the transformation which obedience to the Law brings about in a person in this life.

Life After Death

The world we currently live in is referred to in the Quran as the “world of earning” and of the “first creation” because it is here that a person earns a reward for the good or bad deeds he or she does. Though onward spiritual progress continues after resurrection, that advancement is granted simply by the grace of the Beneficent and does not depend upon human efforts. Indeed, the human soul continues its journey even after the earthly body in which it resided passes away.

The Intermediate State

Upon death, a person enters *barzakh*. The word *barzakh* originally means any “intermediate state”. It has been thus called because this world falls between the present life and Resurrection. But this world has from time immemorial, been applied to an intermediate state and thus the word itself is a standing witness to the intermediate state between death and after-life (*Barzakh* is a word of Arabic origin and is a compound of *bar* and *zakh*, and literally means that “the period of earning merit or demerit by deeds is over”).

Upon entering *barzakh*, the soul leaves the mortal body, and the perishable remains are decomposed. The body is discarded and the soul loses the power to do good or bad deeds as it is no longer housed in a form that can take action. The soul is nothing unless it has its connection with a body. Had it any value apart from the body, the action of an All-Wise Being in uniting the soul with a short-lived body would have been quite meaningless. Nonetheless, humans are essentially a progressive animal, and the advancement aimed at is by no means a limited one. Therefore, if the soul is unable to make any advancement in the brief life without the assistance of the body, how is it to continue evolving?

As stated, according to the Islamic principles, the perfection of the soul depends upon its permanent connection with a body. In keeping with this principle, it stands to reason that though this body of clay is separated from the soul, in the *barzakh* every soul receives temporarily a new body to be in a position to taste the reward or punishment of its deeds. This new body is not a body of clay but a body prepared from the actions of this life. While this concept may be regarded as a mystery beyond comprehension by ordinary human understanding, those who have a keen and bright spiritual sight will have no difficulty in realizing the truth of being given a body in the hereafter that is carved from our actions in this life and is, in fact, the manifestation of the ugly or beautiful fruits our deeds have reaped.

Barzakh is also a place of reward for good and evil as the Resurrection itself. The Qur’an describes it as a place where punishment and reward shall be given though not so openly as after the Resurrection. It abounds with verses stating that a man meets with his due immediately after his death. Thus speaking of a certain person, it says:

It was said (to the man who believed in the Truth): Enter the Garden (36: 26).

With reference to another person, the Holy Book says the following:

Then he looked down and saw him (his friend) in the midst of hell. (37: 55).

After our earthly course is ended, we are transferred to regions where our deeds and their consequences assume a shape, and what is hidden in us in this world is there unrolled and laid open before us. With reference to this, the Qur’an says:

So no soul knows what refreshment of the eyes is hidden for them ... (32: 17).

It is no doubt true that the blessings of the hereafter are represented as material things in the Quran, but we are also told that their source is spirituality and righteousness. The following verse, which may ordinarily be misunderstood, is far from describing the heavenly blessings as being identical with worldly things:

And give good news to those who believe and do good deeds, that for them are Gardens in which rivers flow. Whenever they are given a portion of the fruit there-

of, they will say: This is what was given to us before; and they are given the like of it ... (2 :25).

Now the context clearly shows that the fruits which the righteous are said to have tasted here do, by no means, signify the fruits of trees or the things of this world. Only the spiritual fruits of this life will be transformed into palpable and more delicious fruits in the next life.

The Mystery of Resurrection

The Holy Quran provides the following in *Surah Yasin*:

Does not man see that We have created him from the small life-germ? Then lo! he is an open disputant. And he strikes out a likeness for Us and forgets his own creation. Says he: Who will give life to the bones, when they are rotten? Say: He will give life to them, Who brought them into existence at first, and He is Knower of all creation, Who produced fire for you out of the green tree, so that with it you kindle. Is not He Who created the heavens and the earth able to create the like of them? Yea! and He is the Creator (of all), the Knower. His command, when He intends anything, is only to say to it, Be, and it is. So glory be to Him in Whose hand is the Kingdom of all things! and to Him you will be returned. (36: 77–83).

These well-known verses are recited to a person who is dying. And rightly so, for it discusses the question of life after death, and holds out promise of the life eternal. This verse reassures a person that he or she will not cease to exist. A person who is in sound mind does not wish to cease to exist. To him the good news that he is merely passing on to a next and better life is the best news that could be. Says the Holy Quran:

Nay, you prefer the life of this world, while the Hereafter is better and more lasting. (87:16–17).

Life after death is therefore the fulfillment of man's strongest desire to live forever. All religions have given this assurance. Yet, a large number of people these days deny that there is life after death. Why? Because of the Divine Judgment which will be made in the Hereafter of how one spent one's life in this

world. The skeptics do not really want to be judged. But they raise spurious objections about the possibility of resuscitation. And the well known objection is the one quoted in the verses noted above, "Who will give life to the bones when they are rotten?" The flesh rots first. The bones last a long time. But even they rot in course of time. So this ultimate disappearance of the human body is made the basis for the objection of resurrection.

The first point made by the Holy Quran about a person who raises such an objection is that "he strikes out a likeness for Us, and forgets his own creation", meaning that such a person judges Allah upon himself, forgetting that he is a mere creature while Allah is the Great Creator and the two cannot be alike. Humans are helpless in the matter of creation, because they themselves are a part of it.

Paradise is meant for further advancement

Despite the material symbolism of the hereafter presented in the Quran, it is clear that paradise is not a place for simple enjoyment or rest; it is essentially a place for advancement to higher and higher stages. The Quran states:

But those who keep their duty to their Lord, for them are high places, above them higher places, built for them." (39:20).

Our Lord, make perfect for us our light (66:8).

This idea of a ceaseless advancement in paradise is one which is peculiar to the Holy Qur'an, and not the least trace of it is to be met with in any other scripture.

Hell is meant for purification

The Holy Quran further states:

(It is) the Fire kindled by Allah, which rises over the hearts (of men) (104:6-7).

The Islamic concept of hell is quite in accordance with the idea of paradise as a place of unending progress to higher stages of life; hell's punishment is not meant for torture but for purification, in order to make a man fit for spiritual advancement. The Holy Quran lays down the principle in clear words that every such punishment is a remedial measure:

And We did not send a prophet to a town but We seized its people with distress and

affliction that they might humble themselves (7:94).

And indeed We sent messengers to nations before thee, then We seized them with distress and affliction that they might humble themselves (6:42).

It is clear from this that God brings down His punishment upon a sinning people in order that they may turn to Him; in other words, that they may be awakened to the higher life. The same must, therefore, be the object of the punishment in hell. That this is really so is made clear, in the first place, by giving the utmost prominence to the quality of mercy in God, as already pointed out, and then by stating clearly that all mankind has been created for mercy:

Except those on whom thy Lord has mercy; and for this did He create them (11:119).

The purpose of God must be ultimately fulfilled and, though man may bring down punishment on himself by his deeds, God has created him for mercy, and mercy is the ultimate end in the Divine scheme. Elsewhere we are told:

And I have not created the jinn and the men except that they should serve Me (51:56).

Punishment of hell not everlasting

It is in consonance with its remedial nature that we find it stated that the sinners shall ultimately be taken out of hell.

He will say: The Fire is your abode — you shall abide therein, except as Allah please. Surely thy Lord is Wise, Knowing. (6:128)

Then as for those who are unhappy, they will be in the Fire; for them therein will be sighing and groaning — abiding therein so long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as thy Lord please. Surely thy Lord is Doer of what He intends. (11:106-107)

Both these verses show clearly that the punishment of hell is not everlasting. To make this conclusion clearer still, the latter of these occasions may be compared with the next verse which describes the abiding in paradise:

And as for those who are made happy, they will be in the Garden, abiding therein

so long as the heavens and the earth endure, except as thy Lord please — a gift never to be cut off (11:108).

Further, Bukhari records a saying to the effect that, when the sinners are taken out from hell, they shall be thrown into “the river of life, and they will grow as grows a seed by the side of a river” (B. 2:15). A saying of ‘Umar is recorded as follows: “Even if the dwellers in hell may be numberless as the sands of the desert, a day will come when they will be taken out of it” (*Fath al-Bayan*).

Conclusion

The Holy Quran provides further insight the spiritual nature of man and man’s spiritual evolution by comparing man to a green tree. There are many important points to be gleaned from this analogy. In fact, this analogy provides a beautiful illustration of the lessons on the spiritual journey of the soul outlined in this article.

For instance, like a green tree, a person is rooted in the earth from which origination occurs and from which water is drawn to support life. Furthermore, a green tree requires for its nourishment and growth both a source of water and of light. Likewise, in order to attain true stature, a person needs the combination of the water of earthly life as well as the heavenly light sent down by Allah in the form of revelation through prophets. Prophets in the Holy Quran have, in fact, been compared to the sun.

Moreover, with the help of the heavenly light, a green tree derives nourishment for its own growth and development, and it also purifies the atmosphere by absorbing and breaking its poisonous carbon dioxide, and regenerating oxygen for the benefit of mankind and even the animals. Similarly, like a green tree, with the help of the heavenly light, the person who accepts that light and acts upon it gains moral and spiritual stature and also serves Allah’s creation.

And when the tree dies, it is cut off from the earth. So is man on his death. But, when a spark is applied to the dead and dried up tree, it is transformed into another form, namely, that of fire. In that process the carbon within the tree combines with the oxygen once generated by the tree for the benefit of mankind and the animal world and the molecules of the tree take a new shape. Similarly, a dead human being’s own goodness and the good he did to others combine

to give him the new life. The activating cause, like the spark applied to the dead wood, is the Divine command, “Be, and it is.” Like the sun’s energy hidden in the tree which comes out in the form of fire when the wood is lit, the spiritual energy received by man from on High which lies hidden in his body, comes out of it in the form of a new creation as different from the first creation, as fire is from the dead wood.

May Almighty Allah grant us the wisdom and the strength to cultivate our souls in the best possible manner.

Acknowledgement: This article has been compiled using the following sources: Teachings of Islam, by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad; Light of the Holy Quran, by Nasir Ahmad Faruqi; various writings of Maulana Muhammad Ali. ■

Review of “Fundamentals of Rumi’s Thought”

By Rev. Dr. Melvin V. Richardson

[The following article is a book review presented at Barnes & Noble bookstore at Easton Mall in Columbus, Ohio on February 22, 2007. Reverend Richardson, a Christian Baptist Minister and the host of the ecumenical television magazine, “The Good News”, reviews the book “Fundamentals of Rumi’s Thought” by Sefik Can. In this review, Reverend Richardson provides valuable insight into not only the book itself, but also the underlying spiritual lessons one can learn from studying the life of the great Muslim Saint Rumi. Moving beyond the man, Reverend Richardson humbly suggests that a true appreciation of Rumi is made when one follows Rumi’s example of establishing a personal relationship with God.]

....It was not initially my task to write on this invaluable subject; there are many others who are more adequately prepared to address it. However, this request came from someone whom I have respected for a very long time and, therefore, I could not refuse. I took on this topic, which is, in reality, beyond my capacity. Hundreds, even thousands, have written about Rumi.

It is their job to write – and if something important is to be said, it is their job to say it. Despite this, there is nothing that prevents simple people like me from muttering a few lines – I think that this is what I have done....

I began this book review with the foregoing quote of M. Fethullah Gülen who wrote the foreword to Sefik Can’s substantive Fundamentals of Rumi’s Thought, (Can, Sefik. Fundamentals of Rumi’s Thought: A Mevlevi Sufi Perspective. Somerset, New Jersey: The Light, Inc., 2004.) because I felt that it so very well expressed my view, my limitations and my perspective in regard to undertaking a task which would anticipate some commentary by me upon the works and ideas of the inimitable and world-renowned Rumi. This first edition of the tome in English has done substantive justice to Rumi in its translation from Turkish by Professor Zeki Saritoprak and Cuneyt Eroglu.

Since Fundamentals is a translation, essentially at least one thorough review of this work of Can, who was ninety-five years old when he wrote the book, has occurred. And Saritoprak, who is both credentialed and credible, makes every effort to be as clear as the subject matter will allow; appropriately beginning by immersing the English reader in the historical, political and philosophical milieu into which Rumi was born, socialized and thrived. Although a child in a family that was for a time migrant due to social and political upheaval in the area of his birth (the city of Balkh, in modern Afghanistan, September 30, 1207), Rumi was obviously a materially and spiritually blessed individual. He was the son of Baha al-Din Valad, who had been given the title of “the king of scholars” and also the title, “the king of virtues.” Likewise, Rumi became a scholar and teacher at university and also a man of spiritual virtue. Later in the volume, it becomes abundantly clear to the reviewer that Rumi was not only highly educated and spiritually gifted by Allah/God, but also developed an exceptional personal relationship with Him.

This reviewer very much appreciated the clearly explained critical role of Shams al-Din of Tabriz in Rumi’s life. This friend of Rumi diverted him from his reliance on the intellectual knowledge of Allah/God and the ways of the same; encouraging Rumi, instead, to rely more and primarily upon that knowledge which is derived from spiritual closeness to God. Rumi discovered that such a relationship that

Shams had depicted was indeed possible with God and that his own spiritual gifts not only could be exercised but maximized through an increase in his exposure to the Spirit of God.

Sham's interdiction in Rumi's life (making "...him into an ardent lover of God.") was the source of great blessing and great loss (a paradox not unknown in other contexts to God's chosen). Professor Saritoprak's rendition of Can's account of Sham's influence on Rumi may be, metaphorically and with all due respect, portrayed as fertilization, hydration, growth, maturity and fruition for the already otherwise accomplished Rumi – who would later become the author of the *Mesnevi*, *Divan-i Kabir* and other renowned works. Parenthetically, the reviewer regrets the limitations of time and purpose in his not addressing the aforementioned works of Rumi in more depth; however, he does strongly encourage the reader's exploration of them and Rumi's other inspirational poetry and writings.

The reader of Fundamentals should be intrigued by Can's sharing that most often in books about Rumi, there is no Rumi due to Rumi's having lived such a private life and "concealed his life in his loved ones and their lives." Therefore, writers, historians and others have culled the writings and poetry of Rumi (which, in fact, were literally mostly penned by others) in order to know the man. The reasoning seems to proceed thusly: a person who would say, could say or did say this thing or these things must be of this kind, nature or persuasion. This information is helpful to the careful and interested reader in his or her understanding of the enigmatic Rumi.

The reviewer noted with interest that in Fundamentals Rumi literally disavows being a poet in the traditional sense and attributes all of his virtues and abilities to his obviously very spiritual and very close personal relationship with God/Allah. The primary focus of Muslim students of Rumi (including Can) seems to be on Rumi's poetry and writings, not on his special and personal relationship with God/Allah, of which Rumi's poetry and writings, in turn, appear to be the ample by-products. The review-

er must inquire, "Why is not the focus on the personal relationship Rumi had with God, which was the source of the 'fire' that 'burnt' and 'melted' him?" Would the understanding of the nature of the relationship Rumi had with God, which stoked and energized his spiritual gifts, prove more profitable spiritually to the student of Rumi than the sifting of Rumi's poetry for its mystical meanings?

The reviewer, a Christian Baptist minister, recently availed himself of the opportunity to inquire of a modern-day shaikh of the Mevlevi Order, Kabir Helminski, of both the propriety and wisdom of presenting the reviewer's conclusions regarding the questions presented immediately above to possibly a mostly Muslim audience. Helminski's most gracious and shared perspective was that the reviewer, chosen or ordained by God/Jehovah/Allah, the One and the same God, is sufficiently credentialed to speak his conclusions, even unto a Muslim audience. Accordingly, the reviewer shares his conclusions, as follows:

- According to Rumi's own accounts, his special personal relationship with Allah became the source of his spiritual life, joy and productivity.
- The type of personal and spiritual relationship Rumi had with Allah was not the usual one for Muslims of Rumi's period or of the modern day.
- The acceptance by Muslims of Rumi's special and personal relationship with Allah, as the model to be imitated, could lead to a shift in the way Muslims generally view, relate to and worship Allah, with the potential for the manifestation of "spiritual fruit" as experienced and shared by Rumi.
- God/Allah is desirous of a more spiritual and personal relationship with Muslims, as Rumi had.

Fundamentals is an excellent book about Rumi and his thoughts on topics of interest to him in his time and to us, in ours: love, salvation, reason and beauty, to name a few. Assign the book an "A," and give the same grades to Can, Saritoprak and Eroglu. ■

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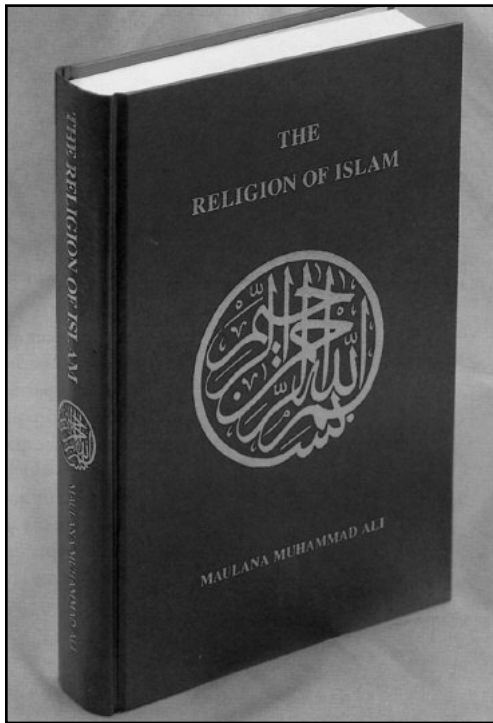
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