

*“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 2010**

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. 87

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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. ◆

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:

U.S.A.	Australia
U.K.	Canada
Holland	Fiji
Indonesia	Germany
Suriname	India
Trinidad	South Africa
Guyana	Philippines

**Achievements:**

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

**History:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Reviving the True Islam

By Fazeel S. Khan, Esq.

*[This article is a transcript of a presentation given in the Philippines at the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society Center in Cagayan de Oro. It is the second of a two-part presentation, the first part being delivered by Dr. Noman Malik. Dr. Malik discussed the spiritual basis of Islam by elaborating on the key points contained in the Surah Fatiha. This article addresses the undeniable decline in the spirituality of the faith in the present age and a principle reform introduced by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad for purposes of reviving it. This reform centered around the doctrine of “jihad”. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad not only clarified the correct meaning of the very misunderstood term but also laid the foundation for its correct application in modern times.]*

As we have been discussing, the objective of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society is to revive the “spiritual” basis of the Islamic faith. You have heard from Dr. Malik earlier, in which he spoke briefly about the principle spiritual aspects of the Islamic faith as contained in the opening chapter of the Holy Quran. These aspects are the foundation of the Islamic faith.

Despite this foundation, Islam today is generally perceived as a violent and intolerant faith, which is incompatible with the civil, democratic ideals accepted by the modern, civilized world. In America, a poll was recently conducted by Washing Post and ABC News, and it was found that a full one-third of Americans — 33% — believe mainstream Islam encourages violence against non-Muslims. There is no doubt, this view is primarily sustained due to the violent acts and widespread propaganda of extremists who profess that it is a strict adherence to the principles of Islam that justifies their beliefs and agendas. Clearly, the real reform needed in this age is to correct the belief that Islam is a faith based on intolerance and violence. And this is exactly what Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad did.

### Revival of Universal Principles of Islam

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad stressed that from the beginning the message of Islam was universal. Its principles were broad and encompassed all of mankind. As Dr. Malik mentioned earlier, the Holy Quran starts by stating in its very first verse:

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord (Rabb) of the worlds. (1:1)

This Rabb (or Lord) is One who fosters, brings up and nourishes things gradually to make them attain perfection. And this Rabb, is the Rabb for all people, as the Quran states:

All mankind is a single nation (2:213)

Thus, to make provision for all people to attain this state of perfection, God sent His messengers in every age for their spiritual and moral upliftment. As the Quran states:

And for every nation there is a messenger. (10:47)

and

And there is not a people but a warner has gone among them. (35:24)

Accordingly, Muslims are:

- required to believe that truth is found in the other religions of the world;
- required to respect the religious savants and sacred scriptures of other nations;
- required to affirm that prophets and messengers were sent to every nation with divine revelations.

It was the result of this spirit of equality and fraternity that wherever Islam went, it attracted the masses under its fold; because, after accepting Islam nobody was asked to renounce the prophet or the sacred scripture in which he formerly believed.

This basic aspect of the Islamic teachings was unfortunately lost sight of by the Muslim ulema. And Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad drew the attention of the Muslim world to it once again. Speaking against the intolerance that many Muslims held toward other religions, he ever so eloquently explained:

Friends, ponder for God’s sake, and say whether such beliefs are acceptable to reason, whether there is anything in human conscience which responds to them. I cannot see how a rational being can believe, on the one hand, that God is the Lord of the whole universe, and yet say, on the other, that He has withdrawn His fostership and care from the greater part of the world, and that His love and mercy are confined to one people and one country. Is there anything corresponding to this in the distribution by God of His physical bounties? If not, why should His spiritual favors be distributed with such partiality? By using sense and reason, we can discover the good or evil of anything from the results it leads to... (*Message of Peace*, p.10)

Hazrat Mirza did not only speak in theory, but applied this principle to the inhabitants of his home country of India. Addressing the Muslims and Hindus of India, he said:

Our God has not withheld His bounty from any people. The powers and faculties which He bestowed on the ancient peoples of India, have also been bestowed on the Arabs, the Persians, the Syrians, the Chinese, the Japanese, the Europeans and the Americans. For all of them,

the earth of God serves as a floor, and for all of them His sun, moon, and stars give light, and also perform other functions. All of them derive benefit from the air, water, fire, earth and other things created by God, and all of them use the produce of the earth, its corn and its herbs, its flowers and its fruits. These liberal ways of God teach us that we also should do good to all mankind, and should not be narrow-minded, nor limit our sympathy. (*Message of Peace*, p.1)

By reviving the principle of the unity of mankind and belief in the goodness of all religions and their prophets, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad laid the basis for universal peace amongst Muslims and their neighbors.

### Religious Freedom

Now, in order to firmly re-establish this foundation of peace and tolerance within the religion of Islam, Hazrat Mirza focused his attention on certain beliefs that were held by Muslims that were contrary to this view. The principle belief which needed to be corrected was that of “*jihad*”. It was believed by many Muslims that Islam required its followers to engage in war with non-Muslims. In fact, it was believed that the whole world was divided into two parts: *dar al Islam* (the abode of peace) and *dar al harb* (the abode of war). Inherent in this belief was that Muslims were to go about the globe forcibly converting non-Muslims to Islam. Basically, the Muslims were to give the non-Muslim world the following option: accept Islam or face war. And underlying this belief was the assumption that Islam, in its early years, was spread by the sword; this assumption justified the belief in a violent jihad.

These beliefs are absolutely against the teachings of Islam. And Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad worked tirelessly to correct them. He wrote:

God ... by sending this humble servant in this age, intends to remove this violent doctrine of jihad from Islam, and show people that Islam does not depend on force for its progress, but rather affects the hearts with its spiritual power ... it is sheer injustice to ascribe this violent concept of jihad and coercion to Islam.” (*Majmu‘a Ishtiharat*, vol. ii, pp. 125 – 127, footnote)

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad explained that the Holy Quran is explicit in terms of the limited circumstances in which fighting and war may be engaged. He wrote:

... It should be known that the Holy Quran does not arbitrarily give the command to fight. It gives the command to fight only against those people who prevent others from believing in God, and stop them from obeying His commandments and worshipping Him. It gives the command to fight against those who attack the

Muslims without cause, expel them from their homes and countries, and prevent people from becoming Muslims. These are they with whom God is wroth, and Muslims must fight them if they do not desist . . . (*Nur al-Haq*, Vol. 1, p.46)

Hazrat Mirza’s view was based on the clear provisions of the Quran. The Quran states:

Permission (to fight) is given to those on whom war is made, because they are oppressed. (22:39)

And how exactly is the term “oppressed” to be defined? The Quran further clarifies:

Those who are driven from their homes without a just cause except that they say: Our Lord is God. And if God did not repel some people by others, cloisters, and churches, and synagogues, and mosques in which God’s name is much remembered, would have been pulled down. (22:40)

Thus, the permission to fight is conditioned upon facing “oppression” in terms of one’s religious rights being denied. It is to safeguard religious freedom for all, to protect churches, synagogues and mosques, that warrants fighting in Islam. There is not the slightest basis for the view that fighting may be engaged in to compel anyone to accept to Islam or to expand the territory of the Islamic nation. The Holy Quran is explicit about the *defensive nature* of war, as it states:

And fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but be not aggressive. Surely God does not love the aggressors. (2:190)

Moreover, if aggression ceases and the enemy offers peace, it is obligatory upon Muslims to accept it and halt all warfare:

And if they incline to peace, you must also incline to it, and trust in God ... (8:61)

The concept of a *just war*, a concept unanimously understood, accepted and applied in the modern, civilized world, has never so clearly been defined in any religious scripture. The unconditional, aggressive view of war for the purpose of advancement of the Muslim territory, clearly, has no basis whatsoever in Islamic sources.

### Jihad of this Age

So why did the early Muslims engage in wars? This issue also needs clarification. Every student of Islamic history knows that Prophet Muhammad and his companions were subjected to the severest forms of persecution in Mecca. But they bore it all with patience. Over a hundred of them had to flee for their lives to Abyssinia, but persecution persisted. Ultimately, the entire Muslim population left their homes in Mecca and took refuge in Medina. Even this did not stop the hostilities against them; the Meccans were

intent on exterminating this new religion that sought to empower the weaker members of society – the poor, the orphans, women and the elderly – which was an obvious threat to their hegemony. It was at this juncture, and this juncture only, in defense of the existence of their faith, the Quran permitted the Muslims to fight back. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad explained:

In the early days of Islam, defensive wars and physical battles were also necessary because those who preached Islam were answered in those days, not by reasons and arguments, but by the sword. So in reply the sword had *per force* to be used. But in these times the sword is not used in answer, but the pen. This is the reason why, in this age, God has pleased that the work of the sword be done by the pen, and the opponents be routed by fighting them with writing. Hence it is not appropriate now for anyone to answer the pen with the sword. (*Malfuzat*, Part I, p. 59)

He also worked tirelessly to reform the misunderstood concept of *jihad* from the mindset of the Muslims:

I wrote books in Arabic and Persian in order to spread this teaching of the prohibition of *jihad* to other countries, thousands of rupees being spent on their printing and publication. All those books were published in *Arabia, the lands of Syria, Turkey, Egypt, Baghdad and Afghanistan*. I believe some day these will show their effect.” (*Kitab al-Bariyya*, p. 7–8)

However, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad not only clarified the issue of what *jihad* (literally, struggle to improve a condition) entails, but also laid the framework for how this struggle is to be performed in this day and age. He stated:

The *jihad* of this age is exactly to propagate Islam and refute the allegations of the critics [of Islam], to spread the beauties of the true religion, Islam, in the world, and to manifest the truth of the Holy Prophet to the world. This is *jihad*, until God produces different circumstances in the world.” (Letter by Hazrat Mirza quoted in *Ruhani Khaza'in*, vol. 17, p. 17)

And it is on this basis that he created a Movement within the larger Muslim body to exclusively devote its time, energy and efforts in this regard:

Those who join my army, I order them to give up these ideas [of a *jihad* of war], and to purify their hearts, develop and nurture their feelings of mercy towards all humankind and be helpers of those in distress and suffering. They should spread peace on the earth, as this is how their religion will spread.” (British Government and Jihad, p. 15). ■

## The Qur-anic Perspective of Tolerance: Eminent Muslims' Encounter with Christianity

By Prof. Henry Francis B. Espiritu

[This article is submitted for publication by Prof. Henry Francis B. Espiritu of the Philippines. Prof. Espiritu is an Assistant Professor VII in Philosophy at the University of the Philippines-Cebu College. He obtained his Master of Arts (M.A.) in Philosophy from the University of the Philippines (UP)-Diliman Campus, obtained his Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in Political Science (Cum Laude) from the University of the Philippines (UP)-Cebu, and is currently a Ph.D Candidate in Philosophy at the Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU). Prof. Espiritu is an active member of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society of the Philippines and furthers the tolerant and peaceful work of the Society by, among other things, writing valuable articles such as the present one. In this article, Prof. Espiritu presents a compelling case for the argument that Islam is a “tolerant” religion, thereby negating the common misconception that Islam advocates hostility towards other faiths.]

And thou wilt find the nearest in friendship to the believers to be those who say, “We are Christians”. That is because there are priests and monks among them and because they are not proud. (*Al-Qur-an, Surah Maidah: 82*)<sup>1</sup>

Say: I believe in what Allah has revealed of the book, and I am commanded to do justice between you. Allah is our Lord and your Lord. For us are our deeds; and for you, your deeds. There is no contention between us and you. Allah will gather us together, and to Him is our eventual coming. (*Surah Shuraa: 15*)<sup>2</sup>

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### Introduction: Context and Commitment

The current expansion in mass media and communications reveal more evidently that our world contains variety of cultures, races, religions, and ideologies. Despite globalization and its attendant efforts towards homogeneity, ours is still a pluralist world. As such, tolerance is a foundational notion and a very relevant conceptual and practical prerequisite in establishing a pluralistic society. In pluralism's point of view, people living in a society with varied religious, cultural, and ideological commitments should enjoy equal rights and should not sacrifice their beliefs at the mercy of the hegemonic ideology of a particular State or of the dominant religion of the majority community. In our highly globalized world, tolerance and amity are all the more needed for the survival, cohesion, and progress of its citizens.

The contemporary mass media portray Islamic societies to be intolerant of other's religious and ideological persuasions. The purpose of this paper is not to examine whether the contemporary media is right or wrong in perceiving Islamic societies as intolerant. My aim in this essay is to show that authentic Islam—as contained in the pristine revelation of the *Qur-an*—promotes tolerance, harmony, and goodwill of all peoples despite their differences. In this paper, I want to reflect straight from the original source of Islamic tenets (i.e., the *Qur-an*) the tolerant attitude of Islam vis-à-vis religious, cultural, and ideological diversities found in human societies. Likewise, I will endeavor to show various thematic perspectives found in selected passages of the *Qur-an* that encourage tolerance and societal concord. Side by side with my exposition of authentic Islam's framework of tolerance, I will likewise provide several historical instantiations of this "spirituality of tolerance" in the lives of selected Muslim savants and revered Islamic personalities of various epochs in their encounter with Christians.

I sincerely hope that by showing the tolerant and pluralistic pronouncements of the *Qur-an*, and the historical instantiations of tolerance manifested in the exemplary lives of these prominent Muslims as they relate with Christians, I will be able to encourage Muslims to fully practice and live-out the Islamic mandates of amity and inter-religious understanding in their daily lives. Moreover, I further hope that in this essay, I will be able to inform non-Muslims that genuine Islam—as contained in the *Qur-anic* revelation, in the model conduct of the Prophet, and in the exemplary lives of pious Muslim personages—is a very tolerant religion that acknowledges and respects the divergent beliefs and ideological views of others.

### **The Dynamics of Tolerance: Philosophical, Metaphysical, and Mystical Presuppositions**

Firstly, let me briefly explicate my own conceptual framework and philosophical presuppositions in understanding tolerance. Tolerance presupposes plurality and diversity of identities. Pluralism further presupposes alterity or otherness, since diversity entails variety of identities and plurality of existing values. The opposite of pluralism is hegemony where one particular value is imposed and where there is an enforced totalization of expressions of life to make human values comply to a uniformed worldview and a set praxis. Now, tolerance can only exist in a pluralistic framework since pluralism celebrates in the difference of the "other". Tolerance is a very important ethical value in the face of the alterity of the "other". Tolerance therefore presupposes an "other" since without an "other", there is nothing to tolerate at all. In a hegemony, however, the "other" is swallowed and annihilated by the sheer imposition of uniformity and forcible totalization. Thus with the absence of the "other" in a hegemony, tolerance will also be non-existent—this is why all totalitarian and hegemonic societies are most intolerant of differences and dissenting views.

Secondly, I consider tolerance as spirituality. A person who can tolerate the "other" is able to see the unitive Source Who permits and wills these various differences and diversities as found in the world. This unitive Bond that permeates all diverse phenomena of creation and transcends multiplicities—the mystics termed, "the One God". In the words of the *Holy Qur-an*:

And your God and our God is One God. There is no god but He, the Beneficent, the Merciful... There is no contention between us and you. Allah will gather us together, and to Him is our eventual coming.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore—for the *Qur-an*—God is both the Ultimate Source of these diversities and the Essential End of all varied cosmic entities. Spirituality or mysticism acknowledges God as the unifying Connectivity that deeply binds the whole of creation to Himself despite their apparent differences and multiplicities. Muslim and Christian mystics are well able to tolerate religious differences because in their inner beings, these mystics see the vision of the One, and this unitive vision enabled them to go beyond credal and dogmatic differences. It is by this divine grace of an all-inclusive vision of the One that enables saints and mystics to tolerate the "otherness" of the other.<sup>4</sup>

Tolerance in dealing with others, particularly the religious "other" is spirituality because by tolerating differences, one acknowledges the divine Wisdom of God who wills that these differences be made manifest. By reflecting on this ineffable theological tension regarding the plurality or diversity of God's creation and the essential oneness of creation in the Being of God, mystics of all religious traditions appreciate the mystery and spirituality of tolerance; an unfathomable and sympathetic understanding that is holistically related to a consciousness of divine unity manifesting in and through diversity. Tolerance permits us to experience the sympathetic feeling of divine inter-connectedness among diverse creatures in the divine immanence of the Creator who permits these differences.

My own prayerful reflections evidently reveal to me that authentic Islam, i.e., the Islam as expressed in the pristine pages of the *Qur-an* and in the exemplary conduct set forth by Prophet Muhammad—in contrast with the rigid and hegemonic "Islam" as interpreted by "extremist" exegeses or "fundamentalist" hermeneutics—clearly advocates pluralism and encourages tolerance in its relationship with the religious "other". In the next subsections, we will examine how the *Qur-anic* understanding of pluralism is intimately connected to the spirituality of tolerance. We will also see how the *Qur-anic* discourse of tolerance is practically exemplified in the lives of selected Muslim saints in their encounter and dialogue with Christians.

### The Qur-anic View of Pluralism and Its Relevance to an Islamic Understanding of Tolerance

The *Qur-an* is fully conscious of the pluralistic nature of human societies. Many Qur-anic passages describe the diverse expressions of life as found in human communities. Pluralism is therefore a fact, which the *Qur-an* accepts as the basic reality of our human existence. The *Qur-an* says:

For every one of you We appointed a law and a way. And if Allah had pleased, He would have made you a single people, but that He might try you in what He gave you. So vie with one another in virtuous deeds. To Allah will all return, so He will inform you of that wherein you differed.<sup>5</sup>

The above passage is a very decisive proclamation supporting tolerance. The verse fully points out the pluralistic condition of humankind. The passage admits to the existence of societal and religious diversity characterizing human communities when it declares; “for everyone of you, We appointed a law and a way”. Notice that this verse says that our pluralistic situation is willed and permitted by God to test human communities so that each community will vie with each other in doing good deeds. It further says; “And if Allah had pleased, He would have made you a single people, but that He might try you in what He gave you. So vie with one another in virtuous deeds”. *Surah Maida:48* is likewise a very relevant verse in understanding the nature of Islamic tolerance. If God willed that this world contains socio-cultural and religious diversities (when He could have made the world a “single people”), and if God himself has a divine reason for allowing these diversities (so that each society will “vie with one another in virtuous deeds”); then humankind should strive to accept, tolerate, and appreciate the fact of our pluralistic world.

### Good Will, Courtesy, and Mutual Respect: The Basic Ethical Pillars of Qur-anic Tolerance

Maulana Muhammad Ali (circa 1879-1951), was an eminent scholar of *Qur-anic* and *Hadith* exegesis from the Indian sub-continent. He authored exhaustive and authoritative books of Qur-anic exegesis, collectively known in Urdu as *Bayan-e Qur-an* (Qur-anic Lectures) and a comprehensive commentary of the Prophetic Traditions, entitled *The Manual of Hadith*. Maulana Muhammad Ali strove to present Islam as a rational, tolerant, and forward-looking religion at a time when attacks on Islam and the Holy Prophet of Islam by zealous Christian missionaries were quite common. His scholarly book, *The Religion of Islam*, written in response to arguments made against Islam by Christian missionaries, shows a very rational explication of Islam. Fully cognizant of the Christian missionaries’ objections against Islam, Maulana Muhammad Ali responds to these objections using the *Qur-an* and *Sunnah* as bases of clarification. In all his writings, one can admire the profound respect that Maulana Muhammad Ali accorded to his interlocutors, both Christians and Muslims. I will quote

from his Urdu commentary of the *Holy Qur-an* on the necessity of courtesy (*adab*), good will (*ahsan*), and respect (*izzat*) in dialoguing with others. Commenting on the *Qur-anic ayah* (verse): “Call to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the best manner” (*Surah Nahl:125*), Maulana Muhammad Ali had this to say:

... If we desire to establish communication with other religions and their followers, the first pre-requisite is good will (*ahsan*). We need good will because we have to be reminded that followers of other religions desire for our own good when they want to convert us. And we too, desire for their own good when we invite them to Islam. Everyone sincerely believes that his or her respective tenet is the truth. Thus, keeping in mind that every religion desires salvation, the Holy Book requires us to conduct our concourse with others in the best manner of etiquette (*adab*). In his inner heart, the other person who communicates to us his religion thinks that he is doing an act of piety. Similarly, in *Surah Ankabut:46*, the Word of Allah reiterates its exhortation to concourse with the People of the Book, in the attitude of respect and courtesy, when it says: “And argue not with the People of the Book except by what is best... And say: We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you and our God and your God is One, and to Him we submit”. It is therefore with this innate intention of good will that our Holy Book requires us to establish friendly concourse with the followers of other faiths, in the spirit of courtesy and profound respect.<sup>6</sup>

Maulana Muhammad Ali, in his encounters with Christian missionaries, was able to articulate and apply the ethical principles of dialogue and tolerance, which were already laid down by the *Holy Qur-an* (namely in *Surah Nahl:125* and in *Surah Ankabut:46*). Maulana Muhammad Ali understood tolerance as something inherent in our being persons of good will; and that this divine awareness of good intention leads us to respect the viewpoint of the other person even if we do not subscribe to his creedal tenets. The verse in *Surah Nahl:125* encourages Muslims to dialogue with the religious “other” in the spirit of sincere courtesy, profound sensitivity, and deep respect for each other’s differences, by granting a concordant presumption that the other’s intention in striving to convert another person is due to good will (i.e., for the “other’s” spiritual salvation).

### Surah Maida:48 as Potent Islamic Manifesto Supporting Tolerance

Maulana Muhammad Ali asserts that *Surah Maida:48* is an explicit endorsement of pluralism and its attendant duty of tolerating the various diversities of humankind. I quote

from Maulana Muhammad Ali's exhaustive *Qur-anic* commentary to this particular passage:

The appointment of a law and a way for everyone refers to the giving of different laws to different nations... Thus, the Holy *Qur'an* here recognizes the principle to which it refers frequently, that prophets were raised among every people (see Holy *Qur'an* 10:47; 13:7; and 35:24)... Man [*sic*] is placed above the whole of creation in that he has been granted discretionary powers so that he can choose to follow one path or another, as against the rest of creation, which must necessarily follow the laws to which it is subject. Hence led by that [God-given] discretion, men follow different ways, adopting different sects, whereas if man's very nature had been so made as to make him unable to use his discretionary powers, all men [*sic*] would have been a single people, but then man's better qualities, would not have been manifested.<sup>7</sup>

As commented by Maulana Muhammad Ali, *Surah Maida*:48 explicitly declares that Almighty God sent his messengers to diverse groups of peoples and gave these communities their respective commandments in keeping with the different circumstances of each community. The laws prescribed by God to the different communities ensure the holistic development of their respective people. The verse continues, "And if Allah had pleased, He would have made you a single people, but that He might try you in what He gave you. So vie with one another in virtuous deeds". This verse clearly pointed out that if God so willed it, He can create a single community out of varied groups of people. Nevertheless, God planned that humankind be varied in its communitarian expressions. God's endowment of a pluralistic world is His grace to humanity. Our differences provide venues for existential celebration of life and of living: variety and diversity being the potent antidote to our humdrum existence. Each community has its own unique way of life, its own customs and traditions, its own laws. Nevertheless, no matter how diverse these ways of life are, it should be understood in the light of the Almighty's life-affirming purpose in allowing such diversities—human flourishing. It is therefore clear from *Surah Maida*:48 that although God can produce a uniformed world of totalities by imposing a single law for all communities, yet He prefers to create pluralistic communities so that humankind will learn the values of tolerance, harmony, and fraternity.

Another aim of God in creating varied communities is to test human beings in the conduct of virtuous deeds. He tests the various societies if they can live amicably and cordially with each other despite their differences. The divergence in each society's ways of life should not be a cause of disharmony and differences; instead, societal divergences should prod each community to vie with one another in the performance of virtuous conduct.<sup>8</sup> The *Qur-an* insists that the

best way of putting an end to religious, cultural, and ideological conflicts is to tolerate differences with openness and good faith. Each religious community should do righteous deeds according to their tenets; leaving to God the judgment as to which community is the best. The final section of the passage states; "To Allah will all return, so He will inform you of that wherein you differed". The verse is very precise in stating that it should be left to God (and to God alone) in deciding the truth of the matters that peoples dispute. It is not for humans to pontificate which view is true and which is wrong. Vain and fruitless arguments as to which religious, ethical, and ideological point of view is right or wrong will only lead to communal fracas and infringement of societal concord. Likewise, the verse firmly admonishes human beings to contend with one another in good deeds by utilizing their own respective laws as bases of their righteous conduct.

### **God as the Ultimate Source of Divine Revelation: A Central Tenet in the Qur-anic Understanding of Tolerance**

The prologue of *Surah Maida*:48 states, "And We have revealed to thee the Book [i.e., the *Qur-an*] with the truth verifying that which is before it [i.e., the previous scriptures]...and a guardian over it". This verse is a strong proclamation in favor of tolerance and pluralism. The *Qur-an* is referred to as "guardian" of the truths revealed by earlier scriptures. Likewise, one of the roles of the *Qur-an* is "a verifier" of previous scriptures. According to Ustaz Abu Ya'qub Sijistani, a Fatimid theologian and philosopher of the tenth century AD, this verse implies that the scriptures of various religions may be different, but the Ultimate Source of all revealed scriptures is the One and Only God. Thus, scriptures of different faiths are based on Divine revelation. The tolerant nature of Islam as a religion can be seen in this verse in that, the *Qur-an* takes it upon itself to be the confirmer, verifier, and guardian of truths revealed in earlier scriptures.<sup>9</sup>

Before elaborating further on Ustaz Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani's view of the *Qur-an* as the guardian and verifier of previous divinely revealed books and the implications of this *Qur-anic* guardianship to an Islamic framework of tolerance, a brief historical background of Ustaz Sijistani's life is in order. Ustaz Abu Ya'qub Sijistani—although himself an Isma'ili Shi'a—maintained amicable relations with the orthodox Sunni majority during the period of the Fatimid Caliphate (i.e., 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century A.D.). To the dismay of the rabid Shi'as, Ustaz Sijistani forbade his disciples to curse the first three Caliphs of Islam (*Khulafa Rashidin*); warning them, that Prophet Muhammad lavished praise on these three Caliphs, and therefore, it is never right and against Islamic prudence to curse whom the Prophet had abundantly praised. His endeavor to establish Sunni-Shi'a rapprochement was also matched by his spiritual and intellectual relationship with the Coptic Christians of Egypt, the Arab Orthodox Christians of Iraq, the Byzantine Christians of Anatolia, and the Jews. He studied

the Torah in Hebrew and the New Testament in the Syro-Aramaic text. He often consulted Jewish rabbis and Orthodox Christian hermits and enquired from them regarding their interpretation of some obscure passages of the Bible. His encounters with Christianity and Judaism were indeed intellectually stimulating since Ustaz Sijistani wrote six (6) religio-philosophical treatises reflecting on his relations with Christianity, Judaism, not to mention orthodox Sunni Islam. Sijistani's main books, *The Wellspring of Wisdom (Yanbu-al-Hikmat)* and *Proofs of Prophecy (Ithbat-un-Nubuwwat)* were written to show that God is the ultimate Source of Revelation and that this divine Revelation is progressive, i.e., it is sent according to the measure of the spiritual preparedness of humankind to receive divine guidance. Ustaz Sijistani was therefore a perfect example of an "ecumenical Muslim"—if I may be permitted to coin such a term.

Let us now explicate on Sijistani's understanding of progressive revelation and its implication to an Islamic perspective of tolerance. As per Ustaz Sijistani, the inclusive nature of the Islamic faith can be clearly observed in the *Qur-an's* numerous narrations regarding the ministries of Jewish, Christians, and other pre-Islamic prophets. The *Qur-an's* inclusion of the prophets of other religions preceding Islam is meant to illustrate the pluralistic and tolerant dimension of the *Qur-anic* Revelation. The list of prophets as found in the *Qur-an* was never meant to be exhaustive; it was meant to illustrate the extent of the universal chain of prophethood. Thus, we can safely assume that other religious communities that were not mentioned in the *Qur-an* are likewise included in the all-inclusive *Qur-anic* guardianship.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, Sijistani opined that the *Qur-an* fully acknowledges the different expressions of worship undertaken by different religions, while at the same time firmly holding to the Islamic expressions of worship (i.e., the five-times-a-day liturgical prayers, prescribed pilgrimage, Ramadhan fasting, etc.). In *Surah Baqara:148* it is stated: "And everyone has a goal to which he turns (himself), so vie with one another in good works". Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani, interpreted the phrase, "everyone has a goal to which he turns" to signify the diverse spiritual communities and their different approaches of worship.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Qur-an on the Oneness of Humankind and Diverse Expressions of Human Cultures**

The *Qur-an*, in many numerous passages explicitly proclaims the oneness of humankind. Humanity was "created from a single being" (*Surah Nisah:1*). All humans came from a single ancestry and living in the same homeland—earth (*Surah Hujurat:13*). Furthermore, *Surah Baqara:213* says that the whole of humankind is essentially one in origin—God, humankind's Creator. God sent various messengers with their respective scriptures to guide the peoples of the world to righteous living. These prophets were sent to different places of the world and their revelations were suited to the varying milieus, mentalities, contextualities, and

circumstances of the peoples and societies in which they were being sent. However, instead of respecting other societies' contextualities, people begin to be divided and incessantly fight against each other. *Surah Baqara:213* further states that God in giving His revelation to different communities did not intend that they fight each other; but that each communities respect each other's differences.

The *Qur-an* balances its affirmation of the ontological oneness of humankind by equally highlighting on the divergent racial, linguistic, ideological, religious, and national identities of each society. God wills these identities; as the *Qur-an* plainly states, "And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colors. Surely, there are signs in these for the learned" (*Surah Rum:2*). This passage acknowledges cultural differences as "signs" of God and must be duly appreciated as these "signs" serve as venues for each society's expression of identity. Cultural differences are essential for establishing a community's identity and these divergences should prompt peoples to celebrate each other's cultural and national identities.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the *Qur-an* undoubtedly recognizes cultural, religious, and societal diversities as being willed by Divine Providence; even as it equally affirms the essential unity and oneness of humankind.

### **Tolerance and the Diverse Liturgical Expressions of Worship Found in Other Faiths**

As of this juncture, it is noteworthy to quote some *Qur-anic* passages that illustrate the practical dimensions of Islamic tolerance with respect to the different worship expressions of other faith-traditions. The *Qur-an* says:

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East or West; but righteous is the one who believes in Allah and the Last Day, and the angels, and the Book, and the prophets, and 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 the slaves free; and keeps up prayer, and pays the poor-rate [i.e., charity]: and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in the time of conflict [adversities]. These are they who are truthful; and these are they who keep their duty.<sup>13</sup>

The great master of Islamic mysticism, Hazrat Muhaiyuddin Ibn Arabi (*circa* 1164-1240 AD), in his Sufi treatise, *Bezels of Wisdom (Fusus al-Hikam)* provided a very universal and inclusive interpretation of the above passage, showing the tolerant nature of Islamic Sufism that Ibn Arabi espoused. Before discussing Ibn Arabi's explanation of the above-mentioned passage, I feel that it is beneficial for our understanding to describe briefly his historical contextuality. Ibn Arabi's tolerant and pluralistic approach to Islamic spirituality can best be gleaned in his oft-quoted pronouncement:

My heart is open to every form: it is a pasture for ecstasies, and a cloister for Christian monks, a temple for idols, the Mecca for the monotheists, the tablet for the Torah and the bookstand of the *Qur-an*. I embrace the religion called 'Love'; I go where my Beloved's caravan asks me to go. My religion is the creed of Love.<sup>14</sup>

Ibn Arabi's frequent discussions and meetings with Jewish and Christian philosophers and mystics may have influenced his all-inclusive and pantheistic approach to understanding Ultimate Reality (*wahdat-ul-wujud*). Ibn Arabi's homeland, Andalusia, a cosmopolitan region in Spain was ruled during Ibn Arabi's time by the extremely tolerant Umayyad sultans. The emirs of Andalusia encouraged learning and supported all educational institutions, whether Muslim, Christian or Jewish. It was during this period that Christians all over Europe flocked to Muslim Spain to study Greek philosophy as mediated by the Arabic textual sources; likewise, it was in Muslim Spain where Jews from all parts of Europe and the Mediterranean took refuge from pogroms that greatly diminished their ranks. Ibn Arabi's Islamic Andalusia ruled by the enlightened Umayyads offered an atmosphere of intellectual freedom—an atmosphere that was so different from the rest of Europe where inquisitions and religious persecutions were the order of the day.<sup>15</sup> This historical context contributed to Ibn Arabi's universal and all embracing approach to Islamic mysticism.

Now let us come to Ibn Arabi's inclusivist exegesis of *Surah Baqara:177* and how this exegesis conduces to an Islamic spirituality of tolerance. Commenting on the above-mentioned verse, Ibn Arabi says:

Beware of being bound up by a particular creed and rejecting others as unbelief. Try to make yourself a prime matter for all forms of religious beliefs. God is greater and wider than to be confined to one particular creed to the exclusion of others. For He Himself says: "To whichever direction you turn, there is the Face of God".<sup>16</sup>

Ibn Arabi admits that although in Islam, there exists a specific direction and prescribed liturgical postures by which a Muslim faces when praying, yet for him, the *Qur-an* equally acknowledges with respect the various directions and gestures of prayer adopted by other religions in their worship. More importantly, for Ibn Arabi, *Surah Baqara:177* encourages religious pluralism and tolerance by going beyond (i.e., transcending) the ritual demands of different ceremonial expressions of worship and focusing instead on the importance of humane character, viz, compassion towards others and persevering faith in the midst of trials and difficulties.<sup>17</sup> Ibn Arabi explained that the divine purpose of the various prescribed acts of worship is for the spiritual education of humankind, aside from the avowed

aim of glorifying God. For him, more than outward manifestations of piety, the crucial intention of the *Qur-an* is for the Islamic *Ummah* (community) to produce proper human beings who are sensitive to the needs of others. The *Qur-an* endeavors to create compassionate and "humane" persons who act with benevolence and equanimity to everybody with no regard whatsoever to racial, cultural, religious, or ideological differences.<sup>18</sup>

### Instantiations of Tolerance from the Life of the Prophet of Islam and His Companions

The *Qur-an* clearly reveals that, "all the children of Adam are equally honored" by God (See, *Surah Bani-israil:70*). The *Qur-an* also takes an all-inclusive humanistic view in its understanding of justice and equality among all peoples. When it comes to judging actions that either benefit or harm humanity, the *Qur-an* does not distinguish between Muslims and non-Muslims. As pointed out in *Surah Nisah:123-124*,

It will not be in accordance with your vain desires [i.e., Muslims], nor the vain desires of the People of the Book [i.e., Jews and Christians] that can prevail. Whoever does evil will be requited for it... And whoever does good deeds, whether male or female—these will enter the Garden and they will not be dealt with a whit unjustly.<sup>19</sup>

The *Qur-an* further affirms; "so he who does an atom's weight of good will see it. And he who does an atom's weight of evil will see it."<sup>20</sup> According to the *Qur-an*, God does not consider a person's dogmatic or creedal commitment when rendering judgment of an action. Everyone will be given their just recompense based on one's deeds and not because of one's religious adherence.

Furthermore, the *Qur-an* exhorts Muslims to respect places of worship of other faith-traditions and to ensure that these will be protected and safe from acts of vandalism and destruction. *Surah al-Hajj:40* says; "And if Allah did not repel some people by others, cloisters, and churches, and synagogues, and mosques in which the name of Allah is much remembered would have been pulled down".<sup>21</sup> The above-mentioned verse is very explicit in enjoining Muslims to sacrifice even their very own lives to defend the sanctity of churches and synagogues, and not just mosques. Interestingly, this particular passage avers that whether in church, synagogue or mosque, God's name is "commemorated in abundant measure" in all these places of worship.<sup>22</sup> Here, we can find that the *Qur-an* did not make any distinction between shrines of worship—it acknowledges the sacredness of places of worship where God's name is celebrated with reverence; no matter what faith-tradition these shrines belong.

The *Qur-an* solemnly affirms, "there is no compulsion in religion" (*Surah Baqara:256*). The *Qur-an* is very keen in preserving freedom of conscience and freedom of belief—two crucial elements which are at the heart of tol-

erance. In this connection, a narration of two episodes in the life of the Prophet Muhammad is very pertinent in order to show that Islam fully respects the freedom of peoples to practice their own faith. When the people of Medina accepted the Prophet as their lawmaker and chief governmental executive, the Prophet himself immediately asked his scribes to write a declaration assuring the freedom of Jews and Christian residents of Medina and Najran to practice their faith. Likewise, when Christian monks and priests from Abyssinia came to Medina to see the Prophet, they inquired where they can hold their Eucharistic service (since they were still in Medina on a Sunday), the Prophet Muhammad gladly offered half of the space of his masjid (i.e., the first masjid built by the Prophet's own hands) to the Christian priests for their liturgy. The priests tearfully thanked the Prophet for his hospitality, munificence, and cordial act of tolerance by offering and allowing them to hold their Divine Liturgy in his masjid.<sup>23</sup>

In keeping with the example of the Prophet Muhammad, the second Caliph of Islam, Hazrat Umar al-Farooq, assured the delegation of Coptic and Orthodox Christians that their churches, convents, and monasteries were to be protected and to be held inviolable by the Islamic State. The same Caliph Umar climbed by foot to Mount Sinai, Egypt to sign a treaty guaranteeing the safety of the monks and nuns of St. Catherine's monastery. During this visit, the Caliph gave five thousand dirhams for the repair of the monks' convent and chapel. The trustworthy Arab historian, At-Tabari narrated that the call for the noon prayer once overtook Caliph Umar while he was having consultations with the Orthodox Christian patriarch of Jerusalem at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The kind patriarch offered Caliph Umar to pray inside the church premises. The Caliph gently declined the patriarch's offer saying that he was afraid that future Muslims might claim the church for themselves on account of the fact that the second Caliph of Islam prayed his noon prayer inside it. Caliph Umar then went out of the church and prayed at a vacant yard nearby.<sup>24</sup> These historical instances and many others show the extent of amity, tolerance, and concordance that the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad afford to Christians. The continued existence of Arab, Coptic, Armenian, Greek, and Kurdish Christian communities in the Middle East and the marked presence of churches and convents in these Islamic places give witness to the tolerant attitude of authentic Islam to the religious "other".

### **Epilogue: Acceptance of "the Other" as Foundational Basis of an Islamic Spirituality of Tolerance**

The *Qur-an* is very explicit in its pronouncement that non-Muslims should be given the right to worship based on the prescriptions of their own scriptures. As already mentioned in this paper, non-Muslims were given their civil, political, and religious rights during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. After the Prophet's demise, the companions and the immediate Caliphs of the Prophet made numerous

provisions so that the rights of Jews and Christians will be acknowledged and respected. Tolerance towards non-Muslims were also implemented by various Islamic monarchs like the pious Umayyad Caliph, Umar ibn Abdul Aziz; the Abbasid Caliph, Harun-al-Rashid; the just Sultan of Palestine, Saladdin Ayyubi; the Mughal Sultan Akbar; the Ottoman emperors, Fatih Mehmet and Kanooni Suleyman; and the emirs of the Moorish courts of Cordova and Grenada. These Islamic monarchs not only tolerated non-Muslims, much more, they employed Jews, Christians, and even Hindus in their administration, supported their respective places of worship, clergies, and educational institutions. These non-Muslims were accepted with dignity and treated with respect and at par with the Muslim citizens.

Authentic Islam based on the *Qur-an* and as practiced by the Prophet and his companions are not against the promotion of a pluralist egalitarian society that guarantees tolerance and respect to all religious communities within the society. The *Qur-an* recognizes religious diversity not only as a basic reality of human existence but also as a venue for humanity's spiritual development.<sup>25</sup> It is indeed regrettable that in our contemporary times, most of the so-called Muslim nations are perceived as lagging behind in fulfilling the spirit of tolerance as plainly expressed in the *Qur-an* and the Tradition (*Sunnah*) of the Prophet. It is equally lamentable that political and religious extremism failed to see the pluralistic, concordant, and tolerant dimension of Islam as found in the *Qur-anic* texts and in the conduct of the Prophet.

As amply shown in history, it cannot be denied that there were many instances of bloody conflicts between Christians and Muslims and that atrocities and violence can be equally attributed to both sides. The era of the Crusades during the Middle Ages and the more recent phenomenon of Western colonization of Muslim lands painted a different picture of Christianity in the perceptions of Muslims—a grim and greedy "Christianity" which is far from the peace-loving Christianity of Christ and of the Gospels. Similarly, basing their perceptions on the Western media's skewed descriptions of Muslims and the intolerance of some Islamic movements, Christians perceived a rigid and inflexible Islam—an "Islam" very different from the tolerant and inclusive Islam of the *Holy Qur-an*. It is high-time now for both Muslims and Christians to move past these historical contingencies—contingencies that were political, economic, and pragmatic in nature; which had little or even nothing to do with the essential contents of both faiths as expressed in their respective Scriptures.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, it is high time now for both Muslims and Christians to go back to their respective Scriptures and be nourished by the precepts of tolerance, understanding, and amity enjoined by both the Bible and the *Qur-an*. In so doing, both the largest and the second largest religions of the world will be able to contribute actively towards achieving world peace.

It is likewise imperative for academicians engaged in Muslim-Christian dialogue and researchers of Islamic political philosophy to work out theoretic and praxis in pursuance to the *Qur-anic* vision of tolerance and amity, by taking into consideration present realities of our pluralistic world. There is no contradiction in accepting the truth of ones' own religious and ideological perspective and in tolerating or respecting the beliefs of others. Similarly, the *Qur-anic* belief in the ontological oneness of humanity does not contradict the pragmatic reality that humankind's expressions of culture, spirituality, and political ideology are varied and diverse. Authentic Islam as found in the *Qur-an* respects the freedom of conscience of every individual; which includes the right to practice one's own religious, cultural, ethnic, and ideological commitments. By paying careful and prayerful reflection to what the *Qur-an* says regarding tolerance, coupled with the faithful adherence to the *Qur-anic* values of amity and harmony amidst differences, Muslims and non-Muslims will be able to live a tranquil, serene, and secure life—a life of dignity and justice by accepting with openness and good faith each other's differences. May this hope become a Reality for all Muslims and non-Muslims alike. *Insha-Allah* (God willing)! ■

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2. *Loc. cit.*
3. *Surah Baqara*:163 and *Surah Shuraa*:15.
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5. *Surah Maida*:48; *The Holy Qur-an: Maulana Muhammad Ali Translation*.
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7. *Maulana Muhammad Ali Commentary of the Holy Qur-an*. Columbus, Ohio: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam Lahore, 1998; pp.256.
8. Cf., Reza Shah Kazemi, *The Metaphysics of Interreligious Dialogue*. London: Institute of Isma'ili Studies, 2001; pp.5-7.
9. Paul Walker, *Abu Ya'qub al-Sijistani: Intellectual Missionary*. London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1996; pp. 26-32, 58.
10. Walker, *Ibid*, pp. 45-58, 110-112. Incidentally, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the spiritual founder of the Ahmadiyya movement similarly taught that even Indian sages and religious savants prior to the advent of Islam (e.g., Buddha, Krishna, Rama, etc.) may also be considered prophets on the strength of the *Qur-anic* doctrine that no nations were devoid of messengers or warners from God.
11. *Ibid*, pp. 49-51. Ustaz Sijistani, also pointed out that *Surah Baqara*:148 is very much related to the phrase in *Surah Maida*:48, viz; "For everyone of you We appointed a law and a way".
12. See, Maulana Muhammad Ali's commentary of *Surah Baqara*:213, *Hujurat*:13 and *Maida*:48; *op.cit.*
13. *Surah Baqara*:177; *Maulana Muhammad Ali Translation, op.cit.*
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20. *Surah Zilzal*:7-8.
21. *Maulana Muhammad Ali Translation, op.cit.*
22. Cf., Muhammad Hamidullah, *Islam: An Introduction*. Lahore: Kitab Islami Wakf, 1979; pp.34-35. See also Kazemi, *op.cit.*, p.12.
23. See, Maulana Muhammad Ali, *The Religion of Islam*. Columbus, Ohio: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore, 1990; pp.281-291. For numerous instances showing the Prophet Muhammad's tolerance and concordant treatment to non-Muslims particularly Christians and Jews, see also, Mumtaz Ahmad Faruqi, *Anecdotes from the Life of Prophet Muhammad*. Columbus Ohio: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam Lahore, 1997; pp.18-19, 35-37, 40-43.
24. Cf., Hafsa Dawud Zikri, *The Exemplary Precedents of our Righteous Sunni Ancestors*. Pakpattan, Pakistan: Daawat-e Irshad, 1963; pp.68-85.
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## Muhammad: A Model Public Servant

By Mrs. Maliha Ahmad

[This paper was presented by Maliha Ahmad at the Symposium titled "Muhammad: The Last Prophet", held in conjunction with the 2009 international convention of the U.S. based Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society. Pursuant to the theme of the symposium, Mrs. Ahmad outlines a key feature of the Holy Prophet's life; that is, leaving a legacy of how to be a model public servant. From being the head of state, to a judge, to commander in chief, to advocate on behalf of all citizens, Mrs. Ahmad presents the Prophet Muhammad's life as an illustration of how to serve in the public sector.]

I will be sharing with you some thoughts on the Holy Prophet Mohammad as a model public servant.

The prophet's wife Hazrat Ayesha (ra) was once asked about the Prophet's character and she replied that his character was the Quran. That is to say that the teachings and

morals of the Quran were internalized and demonstrated by him in all walks of his life.

In contrast to the phase of his life in which he was an average citizen, the Holy Prophet also held leadership positions of head of state, judge and commander in chief. In these roles he provided examples of how public officials were to conduct themselves.

### As Head of State

According to the Holy Quran, the Muslim State is a Democracy and 'counsel' is the foundation stone of government.

And those who respond to their Lord and keep up prayer and their government is by counsel among themselves and who spend out of what We have given them. (42:38)

The Holy Prophet in his role as a Statesman founded a democratic state based upon consciousness of responsibility towards God as well as towards our fellow human beings. He repeatedly reminded people in the office of authority of their responsibility and accountability to God. The warning to Prophet David in the Holy Quran was taken as a warning to every believer:

O David! We have made thee a ruler in the land, so judge between men with justice and do not follow (thy) desire, lest it should lead thee astray from the path of Allah; for those who go astray from the path of Allah; shall have a severe chastisement because they forget the day of reckoning. (38:26)

The Holy Prophet also reminded his follower that those placed in authority over others had a greater responsibility to God

There is not a man whom Allah grants to rule people, then he does not manage their affairs for their good but he will not smell the sweet odour of paradise. (Bukhari, 94:8)

While bidding farewell to two of his governors, who were leaving for Medina to take charge of two provinces, the Holy Prophets last words were:

Be gentle to the people and be not hard on them, and make them rejoice and do not incite them to aversion. (Bukhari., 64:62)

Everyone, the ruler and the subjects, all had the same rights and obligations. The Prophet never claimed superiority on account of being a ruler. In fact, despite being a founder of a religion and a head of State, he did not demand anything to distinguish him from the others. He did not demand a throne to sit on, a crown to wear, a palace to live in. In fact he lived a life so simple that outsiders had to ask which one of them was Muhammad. Thus were the foundations of a true democratic Islamic State instituted, one that was free of all the differences of heredity, rank and privi-

lege. The Prophet never claimed to be above the law. The Holy Prophet once said:

"I follow naught but what is revealed to me; indeed I fear the chastisement of a mighty day if I disobey my Lord" (10:15).

He also stressed upon the supremacy of the rule of law as laid out by the Holy Quran:

To hear and obey (the authorities) is binding, so long as one is not commanded to disobey God; when one is commanded to disobey God, he should not hear or obey. (Bukhari, 56:108)

Yet, at the same time, he encouraged making the law according to the needs of the people:

On being appointed governor of Yemen, Mu'adh [one of the companions of the prophet] was asked by the Prophet as to the rule by which he would abide. "By the law of the Quran," was the reply. "But if you do not find any direction therein," asked the Prophet. "Then I will act according to the Sunna of the Prophet," was the reply.

But if you do not find any direction in the Sunna of the Prophet," he was again asked. "Then I will exercise my judgement and act on that," came the reply. The Prophet raised his hands and said:

Praise be to Allah Who guides the messenger of His Messenger as He pleases. (Abu Dawood, 23:11)

He encouraged his followers to take counsel, especially in important matters. He said:

Never do a people take counsel but they are guided to the right course in their affair.

The Holy Prophet was accessible at all times and had no locks or guards to stop people to approach him. Governors were required by law to be available to the people at all times.

### As Judge and Arbiter

As a Judge, the Holy Prophet based his decisions on fairness, honesty and justice. There were the guiding principles of all his actions.

The Holy Prophet instituted *fairness* and *justice* as the guiding principle in his dealings of the affairs of State. He embodied the principles of justice as laid out in the Holy Quran:

O you who believe! Be upright for Allah, bearers of witness with justice; and let not the hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably: act equitably, that is nearer to piety; and

be careful of your duty to Allah, for Allah is Aware of what you do. (5:8)

And again:

O you who believe! Be maintainers of justice, bearers of witness for Allah's sake, though it be against your own selves or your parents or near relatives; if he be rich or poor, Allah is competent to deal with both; therefore do not follow your low desires lest you deviate; and if you swerve or turn aside, Allah is surely Aware of what you do. (4:135)

The Holy Prophet was scrupulously even-handed. Muslims and non-Muslims, friend and foe, were all alike in his eyes. Rights of non-Muslim subjects were just as protected as those of their Muslim counterparts. (Bukhari, 62:8). Even before the Call, his impartiality, honesty and integrity were of household fame, and people would bring their disputes to him to settle. At Madina, the Jews and the idolaters both accepted him as the arbitrator in all their disputes. Notwithstanding the deep-rooted malice of Jews of Madina against Islam, when a case between a Jew and a Muslim came up before him, he decreed in favour of the Jew, regardless of the fact that the Muslim, even perhaps the whole of his tribe, might thereby be alienated. In his dealings with his worst enemies he was always true to the Quranic injunction which says:

“Let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably; act equitably, that is nearer to piety.” [5:8]

On his deathbed, immediately before he breathed his last, he had it publicly announced:

“If I owe anything to anybody, it may be claimed; if I have offended anybody, he may have his revenge.”

People were required to have the moral courage to point out the injustice of the rulers. The Prophet said:

The most excellent jihad is the uttering of truth in the presence of an unjust ruler. (Mishkat, 17)

### As Commander in Chief

Soon after his flight to Medina, the Muslims were compelled to defend their community with the Holy Prophet as their commander in chief.

Medina was attacked thrice by the Quraish, in the years 2, 3 and 5 of the Flight, and this war came practically to a close by the Prophet's conquest of Mecca in the year 8. This sequence of events shows that the Prophet was not aggressive. In fact, permission to fight was given to the Prophet after war was made on him, as clearly stated in the Holy Quran:

Permission to fight is given to those upon whom war is made because they are oppressed. (22:39)

Even after permission was given, he was expressly told that his war was to be defensive:

And fight in the way of Allah with those who fight with you, and do not exceed this limit. (2:190)

War was forced upon on the Prophet; temperamentally he was averse to it. He therefore tried his best to reduce its horrors to the lowest possible limit. Strict orders were given that non-combatants should not be killed in war. A woman was found among the killed in one of the battles, and when this fact was brought to his notice, “He forbade the killing of women and children” in war (Ibid., 56:147). “She was not fighting,” he said, and added that even hirelings should not be killed in war (Mishkat, 18:4). All non-combatants, including labour units employed in war, were thus exempted; and the battle was a trial of strength only between the fighting forces. War became necessary in order to save the Muslim community from extermination, but bloodshed was limited to the minimum.

It was due to the Prophet's abhorrence of unnecessary bloodshed that he was so generous in making peace. The cessation of hostilities was made necessary if the enemy desired peace:

If they incline to peace, do thou also incline to it and trust in Allah. (8:61)

The enemy's proposal of peace might be insincere, it might be made to gain time and prepare for another war; but, even then, the offer was not to be rejected.

The Prophet actually set free all prisoners of war as a favour, except in the battle of Badr, when seventy prisoners of war were set free on paying ransom while war with the Quraish was still in progress. On one occasion, in the battle of Hunain, as many as six thousand prisoners were set free as a favour.

The war which the Prophet was compelled to fight was thus a mercy at its start because it had to be fought in self-defence; a people were to be saved from aggressors who were out to annihilate them. It was a mercy in the end because it had to be stopped when the aggressor sued for peace — safety of the oppressed being the object, not the annihilation of the aggressor. It was a mercy for the non-combatants as well who in modern warfare are greater victims of the tyranny of war than even the fighting forces: the so called collateral-damage.

### As Protector of All Citizens

As a leader, Prophet Mohammad engaged in a concerted effort to institute reforms to advance the rights of various member of the society who were historically unprotected.

Living in an age and a country where most women were considered property of men, to be traded and inherited like other goods, he reformed their status of to that of a “free” person by instituting their right to property ownership, to inherit property, to transfer property and to give property.

He instituted independence of women by mandating dowry as part of the marriage. He instituted independence of women by mandating free will in terms of marriage and right to dissolution of the marriage.

Living in a time when polygamy was the rule he instituted that only one wife should be taken, but at times of war up to four were permissible for the sole purpose of protecting the women. Thus, polygamy was made an exception and only permissible under certain circumstances. Moreover, it was for the purpose of sacrificing for the betterment of society and not for the enjoyment of the man.

Prophet Mohammad was himself an orphan from an early age and was acutely aware of their plight as well as the struggle of the poor and the needy, of all the downtrodden sections of the society who usually get left by the way side and do not benefit from the wealth and progress in the society.

In the earliest teachings as much stress was laid on prayer to God as on service to humanity, perhaps more on the latter. In fact, prayer to God was meaningless if it was not accompanied with service to humanity. It would be a mere show, severely condemnable. One of the short, earliest, chapters of the Quran is devoted entirely to this:

Hast thou considered him who gives the lie to religion? That is the one who treats the orphan with harshness, And does not urge the feeding of the needy. So woe to those who pray, Who are heedless of their prayers, Who make a show of their prayers, And refuse small acts of kindness (to their fellow-beings). (107:1-7)

Prayer, therefore, had no value if it did not lead to the service of humanity. Of the two, prayer to God and service of humanity, the latter was the more difficult task. It was an uphill road:

And (have We not) pointed out to man the two conspicuous ways? But he would not attempt the uphill road. And what will make thee comprehend what the uphill road is? It is the setting free of a slave, Or the giving of food in a day of hunger, To an orphan near of kin, Or to the needy one lying in the dust. (90:10-16)

The orphan and the needy were not only to be helped; they were to be honoured:

Nay! But you do not honour the orphan; Nor do you urge one another to feed the needy; And you eat up the heritage, devouring it indiscriminately; And you love wealth with exceeding love. (89:17-20)

Wealth was not given to people for amassing; the needy had a right in the wealth of rich:

And in their properties is a portion due to him who begs and to him who is denied (the fortunes of life). (51:19)

In a very early revelation, the possessors of wealth who do not help the poor are threatened with destruction:

We will try them as We tried the owners of the garden when they swore that they would cut the produce in the morning; And were not willing to set aside a portion for the needy. Then there encompassed it a visitation from thy Lord while they were sleeping; So it became as black, barren land. And they called out to each other in the morning: Go early to your tilth if you would cut the produce. So they went, saying in low tones one to another, No needy one shall enter it today upon you. And in the morning they went, having the power to prevent (the needy). But when they saw it, they said: Surely we have gone astray; Nay! we are deprived of everything. (68:17-27)

I may add a few out of a large number of the Prophet's sayings which show that the service of humanity was a great goal of life:

Whoever does the needful for his brother, Allah does the needful for him; and whoever removes the distress of a Muslim, Allah removes for him a distress out of the distresses of the day of Resurrection. (Bukhari, 46:3)

Thou wilt see the faithful in their having mercy for one another and in their love for one another and in their kindness towards one another; like the body — when one member of it ails, the entire body ails. (Ibid., 78:27)

Your slaves are your brethren; Allah has placed them under your control; so whoever has his brother under his control, he should feed him from what he eats and should give him clothes to wear from what he wears; and do not impose on them a task which should overpower them; and if you do impose on them such a task, then help them in the doing of it. (Ibid., 2:22)

One who manages the affairs of the widow and the needy is like one who exerts himself hard in the way of Allah, or one who stands up for prayer in the night and fasts in the day. (Ibid.,69:1)

I and the man who brings up an orphan will be in paradise like this. And he pointed with his two fingers, the forefinger and the middle finger. (Ibid.,78:24)

Allah has no mercy on him who is not merciful to men. He is not of us who does not show

mercy to our little ones and respect to our great ones. (Miskhat, 24:15)

He had a tender heart even for animals. It is related that he passed by a camel that had grown extremely lean; so he said:

Be careful of your duty to Allah regarding these dumb animals; ride them while they are in a fit condition, and eat them while they are in a fit condition. (Abu Dawood, 15:43)

His Companions once asked: Is there a reward for us in doing good to beasts? He replied: “In every animal having a liver fresh with life, there is a reward. (Mishkat, 6:6)

A prostitute was even forgiven: she passed by a dog panting with its tongue out, on the top of a well containing water, almost dying with thirst; so she took off her boot and tied it to her head-covering and drew forth water for it; she was forgiven on account of this.

### Conclusion

In closing, I would just like for you to imagine what the state of our communities, societies and countries would be, if our heads of state, our commanders in chief, our law makers, our judges and community leaders base their actions on the principles and example of the Holy Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him). ■

## The Holy Prophet’s Marriages

By N. A. Faruqui

*[This article has been compiled using an article by Mr. Faruqui first published in 1980 in the Volume 6, Issue 12 edition of The Light. In this article, Mr. Faruqui responds to the common allegation made against the Holy Prophet Muhammad concerning his marriages. It is alleged that the Holy Prophet was, God forbid, a sensual man who could not control his sexual desires, therefore being compelled to marry more than one wife. Mr. Faruqui analyzes this allegation in a simple point form and argues that the facts do not support such a supposition. Rather, when the historical facts are considered, and some context is applied, the motive behind the Holy Prophet’s marriages is clearly revealed to be one of selflessness, integrity and honor.]*

To misconstrue the Holy Prophet’s marriages, as some Western critics have done, as sexual indulgence (God forbid) is the height of injustice in view of the following historical facts:

1. He led a life of the utmost moral purity throughout. Although he was a handsome and healthy man, and in the pre-Islamic Arabian society it was customary for young men to indulge in sex freely, he lived a life of puritanical chastity. Even a critic like Sir William Muir has remarked

that Muhammad’s moral conduct was exemplary and unique in terms of chastity.

2. Later in life, after being called to prophethood, the Holy Quran made the following challenge to his enemies: “(Say) I have lived among you a lifetime before this. Do you not then use your reason?” (10:16) His opponents were thus challenged to find a single fault in the lifetime he spent with them. Not one of them could say anything against his character or morals.

3. After leading an absolutely clean and spotless life up to the age of 25, he married a widow of 40, who was twice married before. And he was an absolutely faithful husband to her for 25 years until her death. She thought so highly of his sterling and outstanding qualities that when he was called to prophethood, she was the first person to believe in him and accept him as a prophet of God. The well-known adage is that “No man is a hero to his valet”. To that I would add, “much less to his wife”. For wives know the most intimate of details about their husbands. Here was a wife, older than the husband by 15 years, who could find no fault in him. Rather, she was the first to believe in him as a prophet of God. Could there be a greater testimony to his character and qualities?

4. Polygamy was common in Arabia before Islam. Had the Prophet also married a young and beautiful virgin, even after marrying a widow, as a man given to sex would, his first wife would have understood. But not the holy Prophet, despite having a societal license to do so

5. It is not that the Holy Prophet was not offered the temptation. When his opponents, who were not only overwhelming in numbers but were also in authority in Mecca, could not budge him from his mission by persecution and harassment, they tried all possible temptations. “If you want to be our king, we will accept you as such”, they offered. “If you want wealth, we will heap piles of gold and silver before you. If you want a beautiful woman or women, name them and we will provide them for you”, they said. The Holy Prophet’s reply is well known: “Even if you bring down the sun to place it in my right hand, and the moon in my left hand, I will not give up the mission entrusted to me”. Could this be the reply of any person given to the call of flesh or concerned with worldly delights?

6. If the Holy Prophet did not for any reason take a second wife while his first one was alive, though polygamy was the fashion in the society of his time, what was there to prevent him from marrying a more attractive wife after his first wife had died? Yet he never gave a thought to marriage although he had two young daughters to look after, in addition to the onerous calls of prophethood. After 3 more years of self-denial, when he was advised to marry again, he chose another widow who was 70 years of age and far from what is normally considered attractive! It should be clear to any fair-minded person that sex was not his motive. Rather, it was compassion and sympathy for those in distress, overwhelming in his nature, which made him select old and

helpless widows as his sole wives one at a time, until he was 55 years old.

7. He took more than one wife from 2 A.H. to 7A.H. The reasons for that were again entirely unselfish. Firstly, these were the years of the wars imposed upon him and his followers by the enemies of Islam who were out to destroy the Holy Prophet by his followers. Hundreds of his followers fell as martyrs. Because they died for him, he felt a moral obligation to ensure their widows were taken care of. Therefore, he and his surviving followers married them so that they could be supported and given rights as wives.

8. Four of his marriages during this period were due to the reasons of state (of which he was now becoming the head – much against his wishes) and high policy. The wives he married were Safiyya (daughter of the Jew Chief of Khaibar after it fell to Muslims – to placate the Jews even after their defeat), Juwairiya (daughter of the chieftain of the huge tribe of Banu Must'aliq – after the tribe's revolt and defeat, again to placate the fallen foe) and Mary, the Copt, who was gifted to the Holy Prophet by Maququs, the king of Egypt, as a gesture of goodwill and friendship.

9. Another marriage forced upon him by circumstances was with his cousin, Zainab. The Holy Prophet who was the biggest champion and emancipator of the slaves, had freed his slave named Zaid. He later proposed marriage between Zaid and Zainab. This was distasteful to Zainab and her family, but out of respect for the wishes of the Holy prophet – who pressed for the match to show that he regarded slaves (emancipated or otherwise) as equal to free men – Zainab and her family reluctantly gave in. But the marriage failed and Zaid divorced Zainab, in spite of the Holy Prophet's persistent advice to him not to do so. Zainab's plight was now hopeless and tragic. There was a shortage of men to marry even otherwise. But Zainab was now further handicapped by the double stigma of divorce and of having been married to a slave (albeit one who was freed). The then Arabs would possibly take widows as their additional wives but not a divorcee, as it was assumed (however wrongly) that there must have been something seriously wrong with her to be divorced. And as marriage to a slave (even a free one) was considered a serious blot on the woman concerned, nobody would think of marrying her if she was divorced – hence, the double stigma. So, there was no hope for Zainab. And as the Holy Prophet felt he was responsible for the tragedy that befell her, he felt a moral responsibility to marry her, which he did. That explains four of his ten marriages. The rest were also to widows and divorcees, barring Hazrat Ayesha who was the only virgin to become his wife.

10. None of the Prophet's wives, except Hazrat Ayesha, was good-looking or attractive, as indicated in the books of Hadith, and even admitted by the famous British historian Bosworth Smith. So, sex or self-indulgences did not come into these alliances at all. Then why did the Holy Prophet who had spend 55 out of his 63 years with only one wife at

a time and that to a widow, take so many wives at the end of his life? Wars and the resulting widows is one reason. Divine dispensation is another, for the Holy Prophet came under Divine orders after being called to prophethood, as is clear from the Holy Quran (33:50). But why did Divine dispensation put such a heavy burden on the Holy Prophet in his old age? The reasons are extremely important, as will be shown below.

11. The years when the Holy Prophet had to marry many wives, 2 A.H. to 7A.H., were not only the years of wars and multiplying widows, they were also the years when the Shariat (Islamic Law) was given to the Holy Prophet, and through him to the Muslim community. A special and startling feature of these laws was the emancipation of women – who were not only declared to be equal to men as human beings, but were given rights which they never possessed before even in a small measure. These included grants of the right to inherit and hold property to women, who were previously themselves considered to be the property of men. Now women could inherit and hold, independently of the men, their properties which they were to inherit in their various capacities in life – as daughters, as sisters, as wives, as mothers and so on. There were other unheard of rights now granted to women. The Muslims (men) bowed to the will of God and His Prophet but to say that there was no struggle for rights would be to misunderstand the position. The new rights included the right of the women to divorce their husbands or to re-marry after divorce or after the death of their husbands. A reference to the Holy Quran will show that the only bar which the women had to overcome was *Iddat* (compulsory waiting) in case the widow or the divorced or divorcing woman was later found to be pregnant by her husband. In such cases, certain obligations fell on the husband or a dead husband's family. You can take it that the unhappy men and their families who had never heard of such rights to women before fought every inch of the ground to maintain the position of lords and masters of their womenfolk. So the Muslim women had to approach their champion, the Holy Prophet, who was luckily among them and whose word when given was law to the Muslim men. As the compulsory period of waiting (*Iddat*) is based on the woman's menstruation, to decide whether she has conceived or not, this and the linked matters were not such that women could discuss them freely with, or even mention before, the Holy Prophet. It was more discreet and respectable for these women to discuss such affairs with the Prophet's wives as a link between them and him.

12. The number of women who come to the Holy Prophet's household to claim their rights or seek elucidation about their new rights was quite large. Besides, even generally, the Divine commandments were terse and fundamental, and required a lot of elucidation and explanation of details by the Holy Prophet. So resort, and recourse, to him by men and women was often and time-consuming. And the Holy Prophet was over-burdened with other duties. So the intervention of his wives, who acted as the link between him and the women clamoring for, or claiming, their rights,

was absolutely essential. That the wives were groomed for this purpose will be clear from the next point.

13. The Holy Prophet was declared by God to be the last Prophet, to be an exemplar to the whole mankind for all time to come (i.e. to be the spiritual father of mankind as a whole, Holy Quran 33:21 and 33:40). It was therefore necessary to preserve for all times to come for the benefit of all nations of the world a task which no one could perform. It required hundreds, in fact thousands of his followers to do. And they did it so well that everything he said in explanation of the Holy Quran or to give details of its commandments (which by itself was a monumental task) and all he did to illustrate and exemplify the teachings of the Holy Quran, or the thousands of prophecies (or the immense knowledge of the future or the unseen) that he uttered, is all preserved. This is why he is truly the only historical prophet, whose life is as much before us today as it was before his followers 1400 years ago.

14. In performing this Herculean task, his wives played an important role. If his life and sayings outside the home required hundreds, nay thousands, of men followers to preserve, his life and sayings inside the home could not possibly have been preserved by one woman. So that if between the years 2 to 10 A.H., when the Shariat (Muslim law) was being given, he had eventually 10 wives in total, that was not too large a number to preserve the details of his sayings and explanations of the fundamental commandments given in the Holy Quran, his examples set on different occasion at home, and his amplifications of the law or commandments given in reply to questioners (including those by women). Because it was necessary for at least 10 wives to preserve all the details of his life (nearly half of it inside the home—taking into account the nights, the greater part of which he spent in praying), he was required to keep on all his 10 wives (Holy Quran 33:50) even when the ceiling of four for polygamy was imposed by the Holy Quran. It was for this noble mission of preserving his life-story in full that one or two wives had to accompany him even on the arduous journeys by camel when he was compelled to go on his campaigns. In the battles which followed, they served as nurses for the wounded or water carriers for the thirsty.

15. That the size of the Holy Prophet's household was created by Divine dispensation, for the important role his wives were to play, is clear from the Holy Quran. For instance: "O wives of the Prophet you are not like any other women.....And remember that which is recited in your houses of the messages of Allah and the wisdom (of the prophet). Surely Allah is ever knower of subtleties, aware" (33:32-34). The wives of the Holy Prophet, were thus made the spiritual mothers of the believers as much as the Holy

Prophet was made their spiritual father. They were required to:

- a) Remember that which was recited in their houses of the messages of Allah;
- b) Remember the wisdom and knowledge of religion imparted to them by the Holy Prophet; and
- c) Be an exemplar to women as much as the Holy Prophet was an exemplar to men, in the field particularly of simplicity and frugality in matters of dress, ornaments and the good things of life. When these were earlier demanded by the wives, since they were lawful and were being enjoyed by other women, the Holy Prophet demurred and he was later confirmed by Divine revelation which stated: "O Prophet, tell thy wives, if you desire the world's life and its adornment, come I will give you a provision and allow you to depart a goodly departing. And if you desire Allah and His Messenger, then surely Allah has prepared for the doers of good among you a mighty reward" (33: 38-29). The Holy Prophet's wives, one and all, chose Allah and His Messenger and gave up the good things of life.

16. The wives of the Holy Prophet discharged their responsibilities to perfection. Not only did they preserve for the whole of mankind for all times to come the sayings and example of the Holy Prophet in all walks of life, but they really became the spiritual mothers of the believers who flocked to them after the Holy Prophet's death in thousands to learn religion. It is estimated that nearly one-third of the religion has come down to us through Hazrat Ayesha, who being young (17 years old) when married to the Holy Prophet, survived him for nearly 50 long years to teach religion to men and women alike. Even the closest companions of the Holy Prophet would later come to her to seek understanding of some of the verses of the Holy Quran or to seek knowledge about the Holy Prophet's example in a particular matter.

The same role was played by the other widows of the Holy Prophet. After 40 A.H. when the seat of the Muslim empire was shifted from Madina to Damascus by Hazrat Muawiyah, two of the Holy Prophet's widows gave up their life-long home in Madina, and the spiritual consolation they derived from being near to the Holy Prophet's grave, to travel to distant Damascus. They took residence there to teach religion to the Muslims (men and women) who flocked to the new capital in thousands from the far corners of the Muslim empire, which then spread from China to the Atlantic. These two estimable widows of the Holy Prophet died, and are now buried at Damascus. ■

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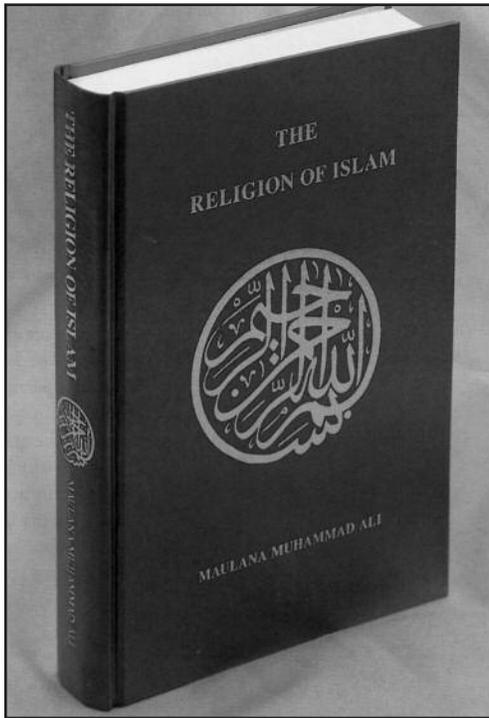
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