

*“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**

**April – June 2011**

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

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**احمدیہ انجمن اشاعت اسلام لاہور**

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

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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.

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

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

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

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#### History:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# The Cosmopolitan Nature of the Religion of Islam

By Ebrahim Mohamed

*[This article is a transcript of a speech delivered at a conference titled “Towards a Quranic Society” held in Johannesburg, South Africa in May of 2011. The conference was organized by Al-Burhaan, an Islamic publication group. Mr. Ebrahim Mohamed, President of the Lahore Ahmadiyya branch in South Africa, was invited to speak and also meet with conference organizers who are great admirers of Maulana Muhammad Ali’s literary works. The article, which was very well received by the conference participants, provides an excellent outline of the unique aspects of Islam that promote the enhancement of pluralistic worldviews, the lack of which in the world today is causing much chaos and havoc.]*

I recently delivered a speech entitled, “The Cosmopolitan Nature of Islam” at a conference organized by an Islamic publication group, Al –Burhaan<sup>1</sup>, situated in Johannesburg, South Africa. The conference took place on the 14th and 15th May 2011. The theme of the conference was, “Towards a Quranic Society”. I was invited by the head of the group, Mr. Aziz Shaikh who has been in contact with me in the past with regard to obtaining copies of the English translation and the Religion of Islam by Maulana Muhammad Ali. Mr Shaikh had high praise for Maulana Muhammad Ali, describing his English translation as one of the best and recommended it, together with his Religion of Islam to the audience at the introduction to my speech.

## Introduction

The subject of Muslim Cosmopolitanism<sup>1</sup> was recently discussed by Professor Bruce Lawrence of Duke University, USA on a visit to the University of Cape Town. He spoke about the emergence of Muslim cosmopolitanism, more from a cultural cum political perspective and did not dwell much on the cosmopolitan teachings as contained in the Holy Quran. My focus, therefore, is to highlight the cosmopolitan teachings of Islam as contained in the Holy Quran as I believe it is the only reliable testimony of the cosmopolitan nature of Islam, as opposed to inaccurate and biased conclusions drawn from the behavior of Muslims which are often flawed and do not give a true picture of Islam.

## Background

Post 9/11, Muslims have been criticized for their lack of tolerance and for their prejudices towards those who do not share their faith, and, within their own ranks, towards those who do not share their opinions.

References are often made to acts of violence and particularly desecration of churches in Egypt, Malaysia Indonesia and Nigeria and mosques in the Indian sub-continent and elsewhere. In the same vein, acts of desecration of mosques in Gaza by extremist Jews and the irreverence shown towards the Holy Quran by Christian fanatics are highlighted and denounced.

There, therefore, appears to be a general decay of true leadership, spirituality and guidance across all communities in the world. With the current uprisings in the Arab world, this situation has become more visible.

With regard to the Muslim community, blind patriotism, driven by age-old, national customs and influenced by dogmatic, politically motivated clerics coupled with many years of subjection to despotic rulers, are perhaps the main causes for anti- cosmopolitan behavior by certain sectors. Muslims often tend to see themselves as Arab, Indian, African, European, etc. first before seeing themselves as one ‘borderless’ Muslim whole.

After the golden era of Islam, which lasted for about three centuries after the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), illiteracy, superstitions, saint worship, once again reared its ugly head. Adherence to archaic, outdated and often erroneous interpretations of the law by theologians and law makers have stifled progress within a community struggling to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world. This situation has spawned wide spread prejudices, bias and bigotry that has kept communities apart for centuries. It is time Muslims stop thinking along the lines of Sunni, Shia, Wahabi, Bareilvi etc., and unite around the Holy Kalima, “**There is no God besides Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah**” - if they are to do justice to the cosmopolitan message of Islam as expounded in the Holy Quran..

It is argued that the same prejudices and lack of tolerance are equally rife within European and American societies, but my approach, in this discourse, has been – let’s sweep before our own door first. The expectation is that the Muslims, custodians of these sublime teachings, would set an example to the world by executing and implementing it with true humility and sincerity, as best they can.

The Age of Cosmopolitanism that we find ourselves in, places the responsibility on all of us to dispose of our nationalistic, racial and religious boundaries and prejudices. There is a great need for all to look beyond, cultural and religious borders and to embrace the world with all its diversity, with an open mind and respect for all. It is time that Muslims substitute, the antagonism and hostilities, so rife in our societies, for the love, compassion, empathy, forgiveness and tolerance that Almighty God in the Holy Quran and His Messenger,

the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) expect from us.

The message is simple - ***BACK TO THE HOLY QURAN- for therein lie light and guidance much needed in today's societies!***

If we now examine the Holy Quran, we find a wide range of principles and practical lessons of a cosmopolitan nature. If implemented properly, Muslims should feel at home in a diverse global society.

### **The cosmopolitan nature of Islam**

#### *1. One God for all mankind*

Worship is common to most of mankind. The concept of God might differ across religious lines but the existence and acceptance of some higher power is prevalent amongst all societies. In Islam, God is depicted as "***Rabbul Alameen***" The Creator, Nurturer and Fosterer of all the worlds – that is, the entire creation including all of mankind.

"Praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds," (1:1)

Maulana Muhammad Ali, in his English Translation of the Holy Quran, Chapter 1, page 4, explains, and I quote:

"The all-comprehensiveness of the Lordship of Allah in the very first words of the Quran is quite in consonance with the ***cosmopolitan nature of the religion of Islam,...***" – unquote.

The cosmopolitan nature or concept of God in Islam is unique. The tribal or national concept of God prevalent in other faiths, which result in people viewing themselves as "chosen" ones, is foreign to Islam. The Holy Quran states:

"Nay, whoever submits himself whole-heartedly to Allah and he is the doer of good to others, he is the one who has his reward from his Lord" (2:112)

#### *2. Mankind is 'one single nation'*

In one sweeping statement, the Holy Quran erases age-old prejudices that have plagued mankind for centuries, by declaring that mankind is a 'single nation'

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

Ethnicity, tribalism, race, nationality, religion, language are of no consequence to Almighty God. Nobility and excellence lie in the degree of righteousness and subservience to God.

"O Mankind, We have created you from a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other. Surely the noblest of you with Allah

Is the most dutiful of you. Surely Allah is

Knowing, Aware" (49:13)

"And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colours. Surely there are signs in this for the learned. (30:22)

How often has it not been proven that prejudices exist simply because of ignorance of each other's cultures and beliefs etc? Differences within a diverse society are meant to serve as a means of enriching ourselves with the knowledge of others. It was never meant to generate hostility, bigotry and unfair bias against each other.

#### *3. Islam, a universal, not tribal message*

Unlike Moses who came to the Israelites and Jesus to the 'lost tribes of Israel', Muhammad (PBUH) brings a message of universal benefit. Referring to the Holy Prophet, the Holy Quran states:

"And We have not sent thee but as a mercy to the nations." (21:107)

"The Prophet's advent will prove a mercy not only to the Arabs by making them a foremost nation in the world, but to the whole of humanity. The Prophet's being a mercy to the '*alamin*', or *all nations* of the world, is to show that ultimately all nations will be received into the Divine mercy which was manifested through him. Already the teachings of the Quran have not only benefitted its followers, but even those who will reject its message, for, notwithstanding their rejection of it, they have accepted many of its principles." –MM Ali footnote to 21:107

#### *4. Belief in all Prophets means respect for all people of different Faiths.*

Muslims are told to accept all the prophets of God from Adam to the last prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and we are told not to make any distinction between any of them.

"...They all believe in Allah and His angels and His Books and His messengers. We make no difference between any of His messengers. ..." (2:285)

Religious bias is most probably the leading factor that creates division in the human race and therefore those of other faiths may benefit by submitting to the superior cosmopolitan teachings of the Holy Quran as seen here and elsewhere.

#### *5. All places of worship are sacred to Muslims.*

Paying lip-service to religious tolerance is not enough. Muslims are expected to be actively engaged in

the preservation of all places of worship.

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

6. Allah’s reward transcends religious boundaries.

As already stated, the concept of a “chosen Race” is foreign to Islam. The Holy Quran declares:

“Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does good, they have their reward with their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve.” (2:62)

7. The Holy Quran teaches “freedom of religion” and peaceful propagation of the truth.

The Holy Quran prescribes complete freedom of religion. Whilst it is against any form of force or compulsion, it teaches how to bring people to the truth in a peaceful manner. This is fundamental to peaceful co-existence in a diverse cosmopolitan society. The Holy Quran clearly states:

“There is no compulsion in religion – the right way is indeed clearly distinct from error” (2:256).

“And if your Lord had pleased, all those who are in the earth would have

believed, all of them. Will you then force people till they are believers?” (10:99)

“Call to your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the best manner...” (16:125)

8. Marriage with women of the People of the Book (People of other Faiths such as Christians and Jews etc.) and partaking of their food (except that which is expressly prohibited for Muslims) are permitted.

“This day (all) good things are made lawful for you. And the food of those who have been given the Book is lawful for you and your food is lawful for them. And so are the chaste among the believing women and the chaste from among those who have been given the Book before you...” (5:5)

9. The Holy Quran prohibits Muslims from abusing other ‘Gods’, worshipped by other people.

“And abuse not those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest, exceeding the limits, they abuse Allah through ignorance. Thus to every peo-

ple have We made their deeds fair-seeming; then to their Lord is their return so He will inform them of what they did.” (6:108)

The wisdom of this verse manifested itself a few years ago when Muslims in Afghanistan under the influence of the Taliban, destroyed Buddha statues. At the time this cowardly act, which has no basis in the Holy Quran, caused irreparable harm to an already tainted image of Islam, as the news media capitalized on it and broadcast it internationally.

In fact this injunction of the Holy Quran underpins the far reaching tolerance expected from Muslims and teaches Muslims how to co-exist in a broad cosmopolitan society even with those who worship “gods” besides Allah.

10. The leveling influence of the Pilgrimage

Another unique characteristic of Islam is the fact that it contains practical ordinances that give actuality to the theoretical side of Islam. It is not enough that we ‘say’ we believe in the oneness of God and the oneness of mankind, with claims of religious, racial, language and color tolerance. Muslims are expected to translate these lofty principles into practice. The pilgrimage is a way of implementing those principles; provide lessons to Muslims on how to live in peace and harmony, on an equal footing with fellow Muslims from other nationalities from across the world.

“And pilgrimage to the House is a duty which men owe to Allah — whoever can find a way to it” (3:97).

Maulana Muhammad Ali in his “Religion of Islam” sums it up very aptly and I quote:

“No other institution in the world has the wonderful influence of the hajj in leveling all distinctions of race, colour and rank. Not only do people of all races and all countries meet together before the Holy House of God as His servants, as members of one Divine family, but they are clad in one dress — in two white sheets — and there remains nothing to distinguish the high from the low. There is a vast concourse of human beings, all clad in one dress, all moving in one way, all having but one word to speak, *labbaika Allah-umma labbaika*, meaning *here are we, O Allah! Here are we in Thy Presence*. It is hajj alone that brings into the domain of practicality what would otherwise seem impossible, namely, that all people, to whatever class or country they belong, should speak one language and wear one dress. Thus is every Muslim made to pass once in his life through that narrow gate of equality which leads to broad brotherhood. All men are equal in birth and death; they come into life and pass out of it in the same way, but hajj is the only

occasion on which they are taught how to live alike, how to act alike and how to feel alike.” - *The Religion of Islam, Hajj or Pilgrimage page 387* – unquote

### Conclusion

The teachings of Islam are without a doubt sublime - of a *truly cosmopolitan nature*. A cosmopolitan behavior and attitude by all societies, can pave the way to a peaceful and harmonious co-existence with all of Allah’s creation. With the Holy Quran as its guide, Muslims should be able to lead the way in the execution of such behavior thereby spreading the love and compassion sorely needed in the world today. ■

### Footnote:

1. The dictionary meaning of ‘cosmopolitanism’ within the context of this paper/discussion means “...not bound by local or national habits or prejudices; at home in all countries or places.”

## The Societal Significance of Prophet Muhammad’s Doctrine On Charitable Giving

By Prof. Henry Francis B. Espiritu<sup>1</sup>

[This article is an expanded version of a conference paper delivered at an academic symposium hosted by the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society – Philippines titled “Muhammad: The Final Prophet of Islam” on February 20, 2010. The author, Prof. Henry Francis B. Espiritu, (Assistant Professor VII in Philosophy at the University of Philippines – Cebu College) provides an impressively intuitive exposition on the institutions of charitable giving in Islam. Prof. Espiritu illustrates the underlying significance of charitable giving by explaining the concepts of “sadaqah” and “zakah” and providing examples from the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad and his early companions. The objective to better society through charitable giving, as Prof. Espiritu demonstrates, is a mere means to spiritual development of the individual.]

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 slaves free and keeps up prayer and pays the poor-rate.<sup>2</sup>

And they give food, out of love for Him, to the poor and the orphan and the captive. We feed you

for Allah’s pleasure only—We desire from you neither reward nor thanks.<sup>3</sup>

### The Cosmos as Almighty Allah’s Perpetual Act of Charity

According to Islam, Almighty Allah, the One and Only God, created the whole of creation out of the overflowing of His generosity and merciful love for His creatures.<sup>4</sup> One of the Blessed Names of Allah Almighty is *Al-Wadud*, which means, “the Loving Well-wisher of one-and-all”. Almighty Allah’s Name, *Al-Wadud* (The Loving) demonstrates that it is Allah’s nature to perpetually manifest compassion and love to the whole ongoing universe; and this divine love flows towards His creation as the means for the preservation of the *cosmos*. This divine well-wishing is Almighty Allah’s perpetual act of charity and mercy to all his creatures.<sup>5</sup> As human beings, whose source of origin and dependence of existence come from Almighty Allah’s munificence, we should spiritually manifest God’s attribute of *Al-Wadud* by being charitable to everyone and by being a genuine well-wisher to fellow humans, especially to those who are in dire need of our assistance. For this reason, Islam, being a religion of genuine mercy and compassion, greatly stresses the duty of all Muslims to support the poor and the needy in society. All Muslims, with no exceptions, are enjoined to manifest kindness and charity to the deprived and the distressed fellow humans. In the words of Hazrat Baba Bulleh Shah, a great Sufi saint of Punjab: “No one is so poor that he cannot give something to his fellow humans. No one is so deprived of Allah’s provisions that he can turn a blind eye to the cries of the needy”.<sup>6</sup>

In the perspective of Islamic sociology as practiced by the exemplar, the Holy Prophet Muhammad, the act of charity as prescribed by the Divine Law (*Sharia’h*) is a way of bringing societal equity and is an effective means of manifesting justice to one’s community. Islam, as a religion that seeks to manifest Divine justice to the world, has elevated charity to the level of sacred obligation to all those who name themselves Muslims. The Muslim *Ummah* can take great strides in spiritual development towards genuine Islamic Renaissance when believers, purged out of their greed, vanity, and caprice begin to generously and cheerfully spend a portion of their wealth in charity to the destitute for the sole purpose of winning Almighty Allah’s pleasure (*raza*). A genuine believer curbs his animalistic instincts, extravagant passions, and capricious wants by constant acts of charity and by performing meritorious deeds of benevolence to the needy, the unloved, and the impoverished.

### Zakah and Sadaqah as Concrete Manifestations of the Islamic Understanding of Charity

Islam establishes two kinds of charities: *zakah* and *sadaqah*. *Zakah*, in Arabic literally means, “to bloom,” “to be wholesome,” “to be pure”, and “to refine something”.<sup>7</sup> *Zakah* implies spiritual purification from the entanglements of our material possessions.<sup>8</sup> Giving up a fragment of our resources which we own in excess of what is needed for our survival, is to “purify” and to make our resources “wholesome” so that it may be cleansed from monetary greed and worldly attachments. Deducting *zakah* from one’s income is a spiritual discipline and a fitting acknowledgment of the fact that the actual giver of bounties is God, from whose benevolence all blessings emanate. Since the Provider of every provision is God, we the recipient of His kindness is duty bound to spend some portion of His provisions for His cause and for His good pleasure.

The distribution of our *zakah* also signifies that true Muslims can let go of their wealth by utilizing it for the service of humanity. True Muslims are they who prioritize Allah’s Laws and service to humanity as topmost precedence in their lives. True Muslims are those who can sacrifice a portion of their wealth on behalf of suffering humanity. The Islamic law governing *Zakah* is to take from those who have wealth and give it away to those who do not. This circulation of wealth is a way to balance social inequality and to spiritually promote distributive justice. The Holy Prophet of Islam established the institution of *zakah* to make concern for the poor a permanent and compulsory duty to those who called themselves Muslims. The commandment of paying charity, in its form as *zakah* is mentioned in the *Qur-an* twenty-seven (27) times along with the establishment of the daily formal liturgical prayers (*salaah*).<sup>9</sup> This shows the significance that Almighty Allah attached to this pillar of Islamic faith. In Islam, religious injunctions of the *Shariah* (Divine Law) are divided into two aspects; *huquq-ul-llah* (Divine rights) and *huquq-ul-ibad* (rights of other persons). *Zakah* is a form of worship since it belongs to the rights of Allah that believers dispense charity. Allah Himself in no uncertain terms commanded the giving of charity. Charity-giving belongs also to the rights of other persons because for Islam the needy in the society have also rights over a portion of our wealth. Therefore, the bestowing of charity to the needy is one of the Islamic pillars that intersect both the rights of Allah and the rights of society. Charity-giving is both a divine worship and a societal duty. This is why the *Qur’an* juxtaposes the command to give *zakah* together with the command to keep one’s daily prayers. If the believers do not pay his charity, his prayers will not be answered. In the words of the Holy Prophet;

If a person prays but does not give his alms-due, his prayers are worthless and valueless in the sight of Allah; and Allah will not listen to his supplications.<sup>10</sup>

To emphasize further, *zakah* in its spiritual dimension is an act of worship while in its external form it is the carrying out of social service (*khidmat*). It is therefore not just the external payment of a tax as it is apparently understood but is rather an act of deep sacred significance befitting divine worship. Its importance is underlined by the fact that the *Qur-an* treats it as being equal to *salaah* (five daily prayers). The *Qur’an* frequently enjoins the believers “to perform prayers and to pay the *zakah*.” It goes to the extent of saying that one cannot attain righteousness unless one spends out of one’s wealth for the love of God:

You cannot attain to righteousness, unless you spend out of what you love. And what you spend, Allah surely knows it.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, from the aforementioned *Qur-anic* passage, it is clearly articulated that the test of charity lies not in giving away something we have discarded but the things that we value greatly, something that we cherish. It is unselfishness and sincerity in giving-up what we love and hold dear that please God Almighty.

### The Socio-Ethical Significance of the Prophetic Injunction to Dispense Charity to the Needy

The requirement of Islam that all its adherents should spend their wealth freely for the common good of society is not only limited to the payment of the obligatory collection of *zakah*. According to a *hadith*, the Prophet observed:

In one’s wealth there is a charity due to God and His people, and this is *zakah*; but over this, one can dispense his wealth generously by way of voluntary alms giving (*sadaqah*) based on his sincere intention (*ikhlas*).<sup>12</sup>

Soon after the death of the Prophet, the first Caliph of Islam, Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq, strongly emphasized the need to be mindful of the giving of charity as explicitly expressed in the abovementioned *hadith* to the wayward Arabs who apostatized from Islam by their denying of *zakah* as one of the pillars of faith. Hazrat Abu Bakr admonished the Arab dissidents in this manner:

God has ordained that the rich are to pay out of their wealth to that extent which is sufficient for the needs of the poor; so that if they do not find food and clothing, or any other need remains to be fulfilled, it would be because the rich are not doing their duty; and for this God will take them

to task on the Day of Judgment. Consequently, those who give the rights of the poor by paying *zakah*, Allah's mercy and forgiveness will descend on them with abundance—and the poor will pray for their forgiveness and will bless them.<sup>13</sup>

Aside from *zakah*, the expenditure of the people in need in an Islamic society is covered by the faithful's freewill and voluntary charity called *sadaqah* (from Arabic, meaning, "righteousness" from the root *sadqa*, "to speak the truth", "to be true", "to be truthful", and "to be faithful")—a very wide term used in the *Qur'an*.<sup>14</sup> According to the great Sufi saint and mystic, Hazrat Muhiyuddin Ibn Arabi, almsgiving is called *sadaqah* to indicate the truthfulness (*sidq*) and sincerity (*ikhlas*) of the giver's inward faith. Hazrat Ibn Arabi goes on to say that *sadaqah* is a voluntary act of worship, a choice made out of one's own freewill. If the act of giving *sadaqah* is something forced-upon or done out of compulsion, it has no religious merit.<sup>15</sup> Hazrat Ibn Arabi says:

For if man makes the giving of *sadaqah* incumbent for himself out of love for Allah; then Allah Almighty likewise makes it incumbent upon Himself to have mercy upon such a person and forgive his transgressions.<sup>16</sup>

The only difference between *sadaqah* and *zakah* is that *sadaqah* is the product of humane sensitivity on the part of the donor to give alms voluntarily as befitting his sense of mercifulness towards the needy; whereas *zakah* is given on the basis of a fixed and obligatory percentage of the giver's property (*nisab*) as specified in Islamic jurisprudence (*Shari'ah*). In the case of *zakah*, there is a system of collection set up under Islamic law and there are persons appointed as collectors and custodians of these dues. The money thus collected is meant for the general welfare of the community. In the case of *sadaqah*, the bequest is made directly and spontaneously from one individual to another and the amount given is based on the discretion of the giver depending on the discerned need of the receiver.<sup>17</sup> Thus the spirit of kindness and well wishing is the essence of the Islamic dynamics of charity. The giver is not to expect any reward from the beneficiary, as his only motive is to gain closeness to Allah. Although a true and sincere believer does not yearn to be reciprocated by Allah, yet Almighty Allah Himself promises that there awaits for him an abundant reward coming from His grace—material, moral, and spiritual—what God deems it best to confer on His servant, His servants accept these blessings with gratitude.<sup>18</sup>

The *hadith* clearly states that the reward for giving charity in secrecy is seventy times greater than that of giving it manifestly.<sup>19</sup> The *Qur'an* warns us against

spending "to be seen of men".<sup>20</sup> This attitude of showing-off one's giving is purely conceit and vain-glory and is not real charity. Almighty Allah gives a very beautiful metaphor to illustrate the true heart of a sincere giver of charity. It is like a field with good soil on a hillside. It catches good showers of rain and the moisture penetrates the soil. The favorable conditions inherent in the field increase the harvest enormously.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the bountiful heart of a person of genuine generosity is well pleasing to God Almighty. He invites God's graces and mercies to come to his life through his charitable giving. Since charity is purely for the sake of God, it has value only if something good and valuable is given. It should be lawfully earned or acquired by the giver. It should include such things as are of use and value to others. Furthermore, the sole intention (*niyyah*) of the giver is solely to please Almighty Allah and to win His proximity—and not monetary rewards or worldly benefits that may accrue from one's charitable giving.

The *Qur'an* states that "charity is for the poor and needy".<sup>22</sup> This general principle enjoins us to help people in need, be they good or bad, on the right path or not, Muslims or non-Muslims. We are not to judge the recipient of our charity by the abovementioned considerations. All who are needy needs our help no matter how different their culture and belief system to our own. The chief ends in charity, as reiterated here, should be God's pleasure and our own spiritual cultivation of a sensitive heart. It is by now very clear that the charity of the Muslim as *sadaqah* is not limited to fellow Muslims; it is to be given to the needy irrespective of his creedal and cultural divergences.<sup>23</sup> The sole purpose, therefore, of our charitable giving is to gain our Almighty Allah's pleasure (*raza*) and to achieve nearness to Him. In the words of the Holy *Qur'an*:

Their guidance is not thy duty, but Allah guides whom he pleases. And whatever good thing you spend, it is to your good. And you spend not but to seek Allah's pleasure.<sup>24</sup>

To further elucidate the abovementioned *Qur'anic* passage, the *hadith* likewise emphasized that "charity is like placing a thing of value in the palm of God".<sup>25</sup> Hence, it is incumbent to dispense charity with this *hadith* in mind. God is the ultimate Recipient and Goal of our charity—it is for His good pleasure alone that we give alms to the needy in the community. We should therefore give our best alms by calling to mind this spiritual perspective.

### Shining Paradigms of Charity as Illustrated in the Life of the Holy Prophet of Islam

The Holy Prophet Muhammad is the perfect exemplar of generous dispensing of charity, as he is the best

model of sacrificial giving. If the Holy Prophet had some money at home, he could not sleep until he gave this money to the poor, the orphan, the wayfarer, and the destitute. The Holy Prophet never refused to give charity to someone who asked from him. If there was nothing that he can offer to the person asking for something, he gave a heartwarming smile and a tight hug to bring joy to the needy.<sup>26</sup> The Prophet described himself as a custodian of charity while stressing that everything comes only from the generous hand of Almighty Allah. The Holy Prophet oftentimes had a guest during meal times. He often asked his dearly beloved wife Hazrat Aishah, to open the door of their house during dining time so that he can invite the poor and the traveler to dine with him. He always paid out of his own money the outstanding debts of his deceased Companions.<sup>27</sup> He described a generous believer in this manner:

A true believer in the provisions of Allah is never stingy. A generous Muslim is one who manifests his proximity to Allah Almighty and is also dear to the heart of the people. A miser is far from Allah's favor and from the heart of the people.<sup>28</sup>

Hazrat Abu Dharr Ghaffari, a companion of the Holy Prophet, reported that the Prophet while sitting in the shade by the wall of the *Kaabah*, said: "They are the losers and Almighty Allah dislikes them." Abu Dharr enquired, "Who are they, O Messenger of God?" The Prophet replied: "Those who pile up heaps of wealth and do not like to spend them in the way of Allah but continue to hoard them for their own benefit."<sup>29</sup>

The Prophet revolutionized the Islamic perspective in as far as possession of wealth is concerned. A Muslim could possess wealth but even in his own wealth, there is also the right of society included in it. The Holy Prophet himself explicitly articulated the abovementioned perspective when he said that besides the performance of one's prayer, it is also made obligatory for Muslims to give charity to the needy. The Holy Prophet taught that the wealth which a man earned was not entirely his own. The needy has a right to charity from a Muslim's wealth. The Holy Prophet declared that charity is binding on every believer. Once after hearing the Prophet's sermon on charitable giving, a Bedouin companion of the Prophet was worried since he cannot give anything due to his extreme poverty. The Prophet then gave him an advice that he work or do business and lay-in-store some amount for charity. The Bedouin replied that if he cannot do this what should he do as alternative? The Prophet advised him to do active charity by doing actions that are beneficial to society like removing sharp stones along the walkways, drawing water for the thirsty, or by meeting people with a warm and cheerful smile.<sup>30</sup>

The abovementioned *hadith*-narrative clearly corroborates what the Punjabi Sufi saint Hazrat Baba Bulleh Shah said: "There is no person so poor that he cannot give something to the needy in the society". The Islamic concept of charity is very broad at best—so that even poor Muslims can likewise dispense charity. The Holy Prophet declared that enjoining the good and forbidding evil are themselves expressions of charity.<sup>31</sup>

To close this section, it is beneficial to quote the words of the Holy Prophet showing how his understanding of charity is very down-to-earth and practical and can be undertaken by rich and poor Muslims alike:

On every bone of the fingers, charity is incumbent everyday. One assists a man in riding his beast by lifting his provisions to the back of the animal, this is charity; and a good word is charity... Removal from the way of that which is harmful is charity... Every good deed is charity, and it is good deed that you meet your brother with a cheerful countenance; and it is charity when you pour water from the bucket into the vessel of your brother.<sup>32</sup>

### Practical Examples of Islamic Charity in the Lives of the Companions of the Holy Prophet

The Prophet was the most generous of men. He used to give the needy with his own property. When asked for anything, he never refused any beggar. If he had nothing to give, he would borrow from one of his Companions and pay him later. His Companions followed the charitable deeds of their Prophet whom they take as their perfect guide and exemplar.

The Prophet's wives were also known for their alms giving. Hazrat Aishah Siddiqah, the youngest wife of the Prophet too was known as the mother of the poor (*umm al-masakin*) for her regular and profuse alms-giving.<sup>33</sup> Whenever anyone uttered words of blessings and prayers for her, she used to return the same with more beautiful and copious words of blessings. We likewise have shining examples of generosity set by the *Khulafah Rashidin* or the Rightly Guided Caliphs. Once when the Holy Prophet urged them to give *sadaqah*, Hazrat Umar al Farooq brought half of what he owned, but only to find that once again, Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq had outdone him by giving away all that he had for the sake of Allah. Hazrat Abu Bakr beautifully answered when the Prophet asked him what provisions the latter left for his family: "I left for them Allah and the Prophet as their provisions—and Allah alone suffices for them."<sup>34</sup>

In the early days of his successorship as the first Caliph of the Prophet, Hazrat Abu Bakr, earned his sus-

tenance by milking the sheep of a Bedouin woman. It was only sometime in the latter part of his Caliphate that he was given a small salary by the State. While on his deathbed, Hazrat Abu Bakr gave a small clay flask to those around him and requested them to give it to the next Caliph after the former's death. Hazrat Umar succeeded him, and when he broke the flask, coins came out together with the letter written by Hazrat Abu Bakr's hand: "I lived my life in the manner of the poorest Bedouin of Medina, and I stored in this flask, my latest salary. After my death, these coins should be given back to the *Bayt-ul-Mal* (public treasury). I want to bequeath it back to the people". After reading the letter, Hazrat Umar Farooq wept and said: "Oh Abu Bakr, we can never out-do you in charitable giving! Even in death, we cannot out-give your charitable giving"<sup>35</sup>

There is also a very interesting narrative on the generosity of Hazrat Uthman al-Ghani, the third Caliph of Islam. There was a time when the people in Medina were in great distress due to a long spell of drought. The people supplicated that Almighty Allah will relieve them from this difficulty. Days passed, Hazrat Uthman's caravan arrived in Medina with various food commodities. There were one thousand camels in that caravan, loaded with various edibles from Syria and Lebanon. When the news got around Medina, all the great traders gathered in Hazrat Uthman's house. Upon meeting him, the traders expressed their pressing desire to purchase the foodstuffs so that they could distribute these to the residents of Medina who were in dire need of food. Without hesitating for even a moment, Hazrat Uthman al-Ghani donated all his caravan's foodstuffs to the poor of Medina instead of selling it to the traders. He reasoned that he can get ten times profit for every worth of the goods that he gave freely to the people. Thinking that a philanthropist will reimburse Hazrat Uthman for his expenses, the traders asked him how he can get a tenfold profit for each worth of his goods. Hazrat Uthman recited the verse of the *Qur-an* (*Surah An'am*: 160) which says; "whoever brings a good deed will have tenfold like it". He explained to them that before the traders expressed their interest in buying his goods, he already planned to give away in charity all his foodstuffs to the needy people of Medina.<sup>36</sup>

### Practical Examples of the Islamic Understanding of Charity as Manifested in Islamic Societies

Inspired by the verses of the Quran and the exemplary practices of the Holy Prophet and his Blessed Companions, the giving of *zakah* and *sadaqah* to individuals or institutions remains prevalent in Muslim societies. In Islamic societies, the spirit of helping others for the sake of gaining the pleasure of Almighty Allah can mostly be observed in matters of education,

which is the dissemination of knowledge to the society. The Prophet is reported to have said that learning something beneficial and teaching it to others is a perpetual form of charity (*sadaqah jariah*) on the part of the giver.<sup>37</sup> This *hadith* elucidates how the Holy Prophet valued universal education. He also acknowledges the importance of the dissemination and transmission of knowledge from one generation to another. This *hadith* paved the way for the rise and establishment of educational charitable foundations (*waqf*) providing free or affordable education to Muslims. One can read from the annals of Islamic history that various Muslim rulers emphasized the establishment of *madrasah*<sup>38</sup> throughout their domains. During the medieval period and even up till now, these *madaris* (plural of *madrasah*) abound throughout the world of Islam. Wealthy Muslims helped in running the *madrasah*, not only through their *zakah*, but also by making endowments of their properties to these *madaris*. The destitute students were given financial allowances or stipends aside from the free board and lodging provided by the *madrasah* to them.<sup>39</sup>

The reign of the pious Umayyad Caliph, Hazrat Umar ibn Abdul Aziz, was considered by Islamic historians as the brightest period of Islam second only to the enlightened and righteous reigns of the *Shaykhayn* (the first two Caliphs of Islam—namely, Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq and Hazrat Umar).<sup>40</sup> During his enlightened reign, the rich were faithfully paying their *zakah* tax and they likewise give their voluntary *sadaqah* in abundant measure to the effect that provincial governors found themselves with surplus funds in their respective *Baytul Mal* (State Treasury). Hence they inquired from the Caliph what to do with the surplus funds. The sagacious Caliph advised them to establish institutions of knowledge such as *madaris*, educational libraries, astronomical observatories, house of scientific research as well as charitable self-sustaining foundations (*waqf*) to assure the perpetuity of these educational activities.<sup>41</sup>

*Sadaqah* in the form of charitable endowments (*waqf*) is known as *sadaqah jariah*, i.e. alms in perpetuity. Giving someone proper education, publishing beneficial books, establishing libraries, helping someone recover from disease by monetary aid, looking after orphans and destitute; giving scholarships to poor but deserving students—all such charitable works, come under the category of *sadaqah jariah* or perpetual charity. This is the reason why many centers of social welfare have continued to function in the Muslim community up to the present times. From the many directives found in both *Qur-an* and *Hadith*, and from the practical examples illustrated by the *Sunnah* of our Holy Prophet and His Righteous Companions, our predecessors in faith established hundreds and thousands of charitable foundations throughout the Islamic world.

From soup kitchens, dispensaries, orphanages, educational institutions, publishing houses, libraries, institutions providing interest-free financial assistance to the needy, hospitals, infirmaries, and mutual assistance societies—these charitable societies abound in the Muslim world even up till now. The presence of these institutions displays the beautiful, merciful, and benevolent face of authentic and *Qur-anic* Islam as practiced by the Holy Prophet. These charitable institutions practically exhibit the social responsibility that Islam feels towards society. These are perfect manifestations of the merciful nature of the Islamic faith. Likewise, these charitable organizations show the Muslims' unflinching belief that all graces (*ni'mat*) come from Allah Almighty, and we are only given these blessings as *amanat* (trust) for a limited duration in our earthly sojourn; and these provisions should be utilized for the sake of Allah's pleasure and to be used in the way of Allah. Thus, our charitable giving makes us gain Divine proximity and Allah's affection.

Alms given with a willing and generous heart helps create strong bonds of love and sincerity between the rich and the poor. Ever since time immemorial, there has been a continuous conflict between the rich and the poor due to socio-economic inequities. Generally the rich looked upon the poor as a constant burden to the society. On the other hand, the poor maintained a strong stance of resentment and envy toward the rich. This divisive attitude can be seen not just in the poverty-stricken countries but in developed nations as well. Through the institution of charitable giving, Islam enjoined the rich to be merciful to the needy and encouraged the strong to take care of the weak.<sup>42</sup> If only the rich people pay their obligatory alms in the form of *zakah* and give alms over and above *zakah*, which is called *sadaqah*, the underprivileged masses will be immensely helped.<sup>43</sup> Muslims should bear in mind that *zakah* is only a minimum requirement that he should pay, but there is no upper limit to the giving of voluntary charity in the form of *sadaqah* for a Muslim whose heart is teeming with Allah's love and sympathy to the needy world.

### **The Islamic Practice of Zakah/Sadaqah as Venue for Benevolent Concern and Social Responsibility**

There is a great sociological wisdom in the Prophet's doctrine regarding charitable giving. The dispensing of charity, specifically in its forms of *zakah* and *sadaqah* prevent the monopolization of vast riches into the hands of the vested few. If the vast amounts of riches are concentrated in the hands of greedy individuals, it usually results in the oppression of the poor and the marginalized. The Holy Prophet's spiritual "socialism" paved the way for an ethics and praxis of social responsibility for

the rich to take care of the poor and for the poor not to have bitter resentment against the rich. Everyone in the society, be they rich or poor, need each other to nurture each other's capacity for humane sensitivity and cooperation leading to societal concord and harmony.<sup>44</sup>

In its practical dimension, the Islamic instantiations of charity may take on many forms—one's personal efforts, talents, skills, learning, properties, or possessions; all these can be shared to the society as charity. Dispensing charity is for everyone. One does not have to be wealthy to be able to give charity. Charity begins by giving out of what one has. Giving a glassful of water to the thirsty wayfarer is an act of charity—if sincerely given; this act gives immense pleasure to Almighty Allah. The Holy Prophet considers all Muslims as rich in the sense that all Muslims can give something to the needy—in one way or another. The Holy *Qur-an* and the *Hadith* of the Holy Prophet show that commanding what is good, advising, helping those who suffer from systemic injustice, the smiling of one's countenance to give joy to another, removing something from the road that might injure passers-by; these are all considered charity in the broadest sense.

The real richness, according to Islam lies in the sincere heart of the giver. People are as rich only as their sincerity. Poverty of the heart is the real wretchedness that eats-up the sensitive feeling to be vulnerable to the needs of suffering humanity. Real riches lie in our spirit; true spiritual riches can be found in our heart. There is no other medicine that can remedy a stingy and miserly person whose life is characterized by selfishness, avarice, and egotism—only the patient, constant, and sincere practice of charitable giving can cure the egotistical and insatiable heart from illiberality and selfishness.

A real Muslim is one whose spirit has been softened to the cries of the helpless "other". A bonafide Muslim is one who weeps with compassion when he sees the woundedness of the world—and he effectively responds to this woundedness by acting accordingly through his sacrificial, heartfelt, and sincere giving. Charity is the perfect demonstration of a believer's merciful and compassionate vulnerability to be available for others. The teachings of the Holy Prophet concerning charity show that Islam did not leave the poor and the needy to the mercy of the oppressors. Islam is interested in the spiritual development of humankind—building a just society and training the hearts and spirit of humanity to manifest in their heart of hearts the all-embracing attributes of Allah as the All-Loving One (*Al-Wadud*) and the All-Merciful One (*Al-Rahman*).

May Almighty Allah grant grace and mercy on us so that each one of us will be, *Insha'Allah*, harbingers and

servants of mercy and compassion to a world which is so in need of these divine virtues. May all Muslims exhibit the glorious manifestations of Almighty Allah's names, *Al-Wadud* (The Most Loving), *Ar-Rahman* (The Most Compassionate), and *Ar-Rahim* (Most Merciful), in their lives by dispensing charitable deeds to the needy in their respective societies. Ameen! ■

### Footnotes:

- 1 Prof. Henry Francis B. Espiritu is Assistant Professor VII at the University of the Philippines-Cebu College. He obtained his Master of Arts (MA Philosophy) from the University of the Philippines-Diliman and his Bachelor of Arts BA Political Science (*Cum Laude*) from the University of the Philippines-Cebu. He is a PhD Candidate (Philosophy) at the Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City. He is a board member of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society in the Philippines, and is actively engaged in the promotion of the authentic, peaceful, rational, and egalitarian teachings of Islam as espoused in the works and writings of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and Maulana Muhammad Ali of Lahore.
- 2 Al-Qur'an, *Surah Baqara*: 177; Maulana Muhammad Ali Translation (Columbus, Ohio: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam Lahore).
- 3 Ibid., *Surah Insan*: 8, 9.
- 4 See, Hazrat Ibn Arabi, *Ahkam al-Quran* (Lucknow, India: Ishaat Islami Kutabkhana, 1979); pp. 175-176.
- 5 Ibid., pp.177-180.
- 6 Hazrat Baba Bulleh Shah Qadri, *Abyaat-e-Baba Bulleh Shah* (Multan: Majliss-e-Baba Bulleh Shah, 1986); p. 54.
- 7 Shaykh Nasser al-Hurayni. *Qamus-e-Alam* 6th abridged edition (Cairo, Egypt: Sayyidah Maimoonah Press, 1963), in the *Zakah* entry.
- 8 *Zakah*, from the definition of the Islamic *Shari'ah*, is an annual contribution of two and a half percent (2.5%) of one's income to public welfare and for the alleviation of the needy and of the less fortunate. (See, al-Hurayni, Ibid.)
- 9 Osman Nuri Topbas Effendi, *Islam: Spirit and Form* (Istanbul: Erkam Publishers, 2003); pp.189-190.
- 10 Ibid., p.190.
- 11 *Al-Qur-an Ahl-Imran*: 92.
- 12 An-Nasaai, *As-Siyam 2; Al-Infraq*, 6.
- 13 Hazrat Maseehullah Khan Deobandi, *The Peerless Abu Bakr Siddique Akbar: The Confidant of the Prophet* (Azaadville, South Africa: Darool-Uloom Azaadville, 1968), p. 52.
- 14 Shaykh Nasser al-Hurayni. *Qamus-e-Alam* 6th abridged edition, *op. cit.*, in the *Sadaqah* entry.
- 15 Hazrat Muhaiyuddin Ibn Arabi, *Ahkam al-Quran, op. cit.*; p. 180.
- 16 Ibid., p. 181.
- 17 Maulana Muhammad Ali, *The Living Thoughts of Prophet Muhammad, op. cit.*, pp.120-121.
- 18 See *Al-Qur'an, Surah An'am*: 160.
- 19 Al-Baydawi, *Anwar al-Tanzil*, Volume 2; p. 211.
- 20 *Al-Qur-an, Surah Baqarah*: 264, 271.
- 21 Ibid., *Surah Baqarah*: 265.
- 22 *Surah Baqarah*: 272, 273.
- 23 Maulana Muhammad Ali, *The Living Thoughts of the Prophet Muhammad, op. cit.*, pp. 96-97.
- 24 *Surah Baqarah*: 271-274.
- 25 Quoted in Osman Nuri Topbas Effendi, *Islam: Spirit and Form, op. cit.*, p. 189.
- 26 Al Bukhari, *Sahih Bukhari; Bad-al Wahy*, 5-6; An-Nasai, *Siyam 2*; Ahmad Hanbali, *Musnad*, 1, 288, 363.
- 27 Osman Nuri Topbas Effendi, *Muhammad, the Prophet of Mercy: Scenes from His Life* (Istanbul: Erkam Publishers, 2005); pp. 148-150.
- 28 Al Qudai, *Musnad al Shihab*, I: 211, At-Tirmidhi, *Birr* 40, 41. See also M. Fethullah Gulen, *op. cit.*, pp. 297.
- 29 Sharh Bukhari Sharif wal Muslim (Cairo, Egypt: Maktab Darul Tasneef, 1973); p. 259.
- 30 Maulana Muhammad Ali, *The Living Thoughts of the Prophet Muhammad, op. cit.*, pp. 96-97.
- 31 Bukhari, *Sahih-al-Bukhari*, 24: 31.
- 32 Mishkat 6:6; Bukhari 46: 24; quoted from Maulana Muhammad Ali, *Living Thoughts of the Prophet Muhammad, op.cit.*, p. 97.
- 33 Hazrat Imam Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulum Ud-Din*, 298
- 34 Maseehullah Khan Deobandi, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
- 35 M. Fethullah Gulen, *The Messenger of God, Muhammad: An Analysis of the Prophet's Life* (New Jersey: Light Inc. and Isik Yayainlari, 2006); p. 296. For a fuller version of the narratives on the generosity of Hazrat Abu Bakr, see Tabari, *Tarikh-al-Khulafa Rashidun (with Arabic and English Texts) Volume 1* (Beirut: Darr al Birr, 1965); p. 252.
- 36 Tabari Volume 3, Ibid.; pp. 38-40.
- 37 Ahmad, *Kitabul Zakah*.
- 38 *Madrassah* is a free boarding school for religious and scientific instructions. These free educational institutions that are endowed by a Muslim State from the collected *zakah* or from pious endowments (*waqf*) provided free education to the masses.
- 39 Osman Nuri Topbas Effendi, *Islam: Spirit and Form, op.cit.*, p. 221. See also, Ramkrishen Bhatt, *Madrassah and Wakf Endowment during the Mughal Era* (Hyderabad, Deccan India: Vande Mataram Pte. Ltd., 1960); pp.204-208.
- 40 Osman Nuri Topbas Effendi, *Islam: Spirit and Form, op.cit.*,pp. 190-191.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 There are *hadiths* emphasizing the importance of giving *sadaqah* during the holy month of Ramadhan. Therefore, during this blessed month of fasting, all those who can afford it, should strive to help the poor and the needy in one way or another through their generous giving.
- 44 Maulana Muhammad Ali, *The Living Thoughts of the Prophet Muhammad, op.cit.*, pp. 119-124.

## Trials and Tribulations

**A discussion on why distress is necessary for spiritual growth and how this is explained through the example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad**

**By Maulana Muhammad Ali**

(translated into English by Dr. Mohammed Ahmad)

*[This article, originally in Urdu and translated into English by Dr. Mohammed Ahmad, is a transcript of a Jumma Khutba (sermon) delivered by Maulana Muhammad Ali on January 7, 1921. In this khutba, Maulana Muhammad Ali discusses, ever so eloquently, the topic of why people have to suffer trials and tribulations and, in particular, how this is reconciled with God's foremost attributes of Love and Mercy. With wars, famine, natural disasters and political unrest plaguing the world today, the explanations offered in this khutba provide solace to one's heart. Maulana Muhammad Ali sheds light on the often over-looked reality that trials and tribulations generate the development of spiritual qualities within one's self and the complete realization of this concept is made available through the lessons and examples provided by the Holy Prophet Muhammad.]*

I bear witness that none deserves to be served besides Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is the servant and messenger of Allah. After this I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil. In the name of Allah the Beneficent the Merciful.

O you who believe, seek assistance through patience and prayer; surely Allah is with the patient.

And speak not of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead. Nay, (they are) alive, but you perceive not.

And We shall certainly try you with something of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits. And give good news to the patient.

Who, when a misfortune befalls them, say: Surely we are Allah's, and to Him we shall return.

Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord; and those are the followers of the right course.

The *safa* and the *marwah* are truly among the signs of Allah; so whoever makes a pilgrimage to the House or pays a visit (to it), there is no blame on him if he goes round them. And whoever does good spontaneously — surely Allah is Bountiful in rewarding, Knowing. (2:153-158)

## Quranic Philosophy of Trials and Tribulations

In these verses the believers who are addressed in the words "O you who believe," are told in clear words: "And We certainly try you with something of fear;" meaning they will be tested through trials. Their hidden strengths will be manifested by facing fear, hunger, loss of property, and lives and fruit. And the words "And give good news to the patient" then offer solace to those who face these difficulties with patience. Such are those that when they encounter adversity, they say: "Surely we are Allah's and to Him we shall return." As a result, "Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord; and those are the followers of the right course." The concluding words of this verse, "those are the followers of the right course" always indicate that this goal cannot be achieved without meeting these preconditions; that is, without having to face the trials and tribulations. The Quranic phrase "these it is that are successful," has a similar significance; in this verse the believers are given the good news that only by encountering these adversities, can they successfully follow the right course.

Many people, though, consider suffering and distress only as a form of punishment. They find it hard to understand why the Merciful and Bountiful God would send suffering and distress on His helpless and weak creation? Although, it is also said that the love of a mother for her child is like a candle in comparison with God's love for humanity; his love and compassion for His creation is unlimited. In the Holy Quran, the attributes of Allah – the Beneficent, the Merciful – have altogether been repeated one hundred and fourteen times. The Quran also tells us, "and My mercy encompasses all things" (97:156). We, however, also observe the immense suffering of humanity, seeing what a materialistic person thinks (i.e. why God the most Merciful, the all Powerful subjects His creation to such suffering). These two characteristics (tribulation and mercy) seem mutually incompatible.

## The Idea of Reincarnation

The Hindu religion has also considered human suffering only as a form of punishment. As a result of this error, suffering and distress are understood to be the basis of reincarnation. The question is then put forth, since God is free of faults, why would He subject His creation to suffering? Their answer to this is that man is liable to commit sin, as a consequence of which he is reincarnated and therefore suffers a result of his own evil deeds. They question, how can the All Merciful God punish us with distress and suffering without any sin committed by us? One can entertain some doubt about a youthful person (having committed sin), but how can a Merciful and Bountiful God cause a child to suffer without any reason? Therefore, it is argued, that the child must have

committed some sin in a previous life for which it now faces distress and affliction.

It is quite true, that punishment without commission of a crime is injustice, but punishing someone without informing him about the nature of his crime is also unfair. How wrong can it be that a punishment is meted out and the subject is not informed of his wrongdoing? After all this cannot also be the doing of the Merciful and Bountiful God, that He would chastise anyone without letting him know the nature of his offence.

### **Suffering a Means of Spiritual Development**

In this verse Allah the Most High has addressed this very issue. He states that suffering and distress will undoubtedly come, but do not consider them to be a form of punishment. For these are the very same believers who have sacrificed everything in the way of Allah, they have not even hesitated to lay down their lives for this purpose. Allah praises their deeds in the following words:

And they who pass the night prostrating themselves before their Lord and standing. (25:64).

And they who, when they spend are neither extravagant nor parsimonious, and the just means is ever between these. (25:67).

And they who call not upon another god with Allah and slay not the soul which Allah has forbidden, except in the cause of justice, nor commit fornication ; and he who does this shall meet a requital of sin. (25:68).

The Holy Quran is full of their praise, and does not mention any evil deeds on their part. Those with such a high standard of purity are addressed by Allah the Most High in the words: “And We shall certainly try you with something of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits” (2:155). Indeed, if you follow the commandments of Allah, your lives are free of sin; but, it is also true that one cannot achieve the stage of perfection until and unless he/she is subjected to suffering and distress. And without facing such afflictions one cannot be the “followers of the right course”.

Some view the principle that a believer cannot reach the goal of perfection without having to face suffering and distress as unreasonable. The truth of the matter is that afflictions are of two types. One kind is that which man brings upon himself, and the other type is that brought upon him by others. The suffering that a person brings upon himself is not very difficult for him to bear. Those that are levied by others upon him, though, are hard to bear patiently, and frequently results in loss of determination. These are, however, the kind of sufferings whereby one can reach true perfection. There is no doubt that fire is harmful and consumes everything, but

it carries with it a lot of benefit. It is able to turn a mould of raw clay into a strong brick. Thus a person cannot become strong without having to face adversity, nor does his/her faith bloom to full fruition. When one of my close relative suffers, it is a time of great trial for me, as I am being challenged to show kindness and compassion towards him. Without suffering and distress, the development of qualities like love and loyalty cannot reach the stage of perfection. One can show love and loyalty to a person who is in good health, but the real test is to manifest these qualities when that person is sick and in distress.

### **Love of God**

The sum and substance of religion is that one should love God, and love His creation for the sake of His love. The proof that one loves God can only be manifested through the love of His creation. The true worth of this love can only be determined when one remains steadfast in times of affliction. One who has not been subjected to this test cannot provide proof of his love and compassion. True love can only be known during times of suffering and distress. A poet has expressed this thought well: “A true friend indeed is the one who holds the hand of his friend during times of distress and need.”

The person, who tries to test love and loyalty in good times, makes a mistake. Without encountering suffering and distress, strength and firmness in the development of loyalty is not established. As the Quran states, “Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord.” For these people, distress and suffering become a source of blessing and mercy.

### **A Personal Experience**

Someone has expressed it very well by stating, “personal experience provides the best lesson for a person.” It is useful to present a personal experience that may be of benefit to others. For two years I tended to my ten year-old sick daughter, and had to face many difficulties for her sake. My friends consoled me in this matter and also expressed their feelings in their letters empathizing with the difficulties I was facing. But somebody who knows my inner feelings knows that this protracted period of care-giving was a source of comfort for me. Getting up at night to tend to her needs and crying before the Lord for her; striving during the day to get her medicines and taking her to her doctors, all this brought tranquility to my soul. There is no doubt that her suffering was a source of distress for me, and no one can call this as comforting, but the thought that my loved one is in distress and I was serving and attending to her illness, and Allah the Most High provided me with this opportunity was also a source of serenity for me. Having lost this loved one, that feeling of tranquil-

ity has gone. To show compassion towards one's near relative is due to the natural bond that one has with them. Hidden within this compassion is the lesson whereby one learns to be compassionate towards God's creation. Just as one feels love and empathy for the near kindred, one should have the same feelings for the rest of God's creation.

### Compassion for God's Creation

Without compassion for God's creation one cannot form a bond with the Creator. As Hazrat Abu Huraira reports:

The Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him said: Allah the Most High will ask on the Day of Judgment, "O son of Adam, I was sick and you did not tend to me. He will answer, "my Lord you are my Provider, Master of all, how could I have tended to you?" The Lord will state: "Did you not know that one of my servants was ill, and you did not visit him. If you would have done so, you would have found Me near to him." "O son of Adam, I asked you for food, and you did not feed me." He will reply, "O my Lord, How could I have fed you? You are the Master of all creation." "Don't you know that one of my servants asked you for food, and if you had fed him, you would have found its reward with Me." God will say, "Son of Adam, I asked you for water and you refused." He will say, "why would I have given you water, you are The Master of the universe"? The Lord will say, "my servant asked you for water, and you did not give it to him. If you would have given him a drink, you would have found its return with me." (*Sahih Muslim*).

### Example of The Holy Prophet Muhammad

In the verse under discussion, Allah the Most High has called suffering and distress as a blessing and mercy. This is because they engender feelings of sympathy towards God's creation in the hearts of those who undergo trials and tribulations. The real objective of religion is to generate the fervent desire in ones heart for the service of humanity. Without encountering suffering and distress, man cannot feel empathy towards the rest of God's creation. The prayer mentioned in the Hadith for the funeral of a child (i.e. "O Allah! Make him for us a cause of recompense in the world to come and as one going before and a reward"), also shows the excellence of the Holy Prophet. In fact all of the Holy Prophet's prayers manifest this excellence. They reflect the condition of the heart of the one chosen by Allah, when he is offering these supplications. Those who do not believe in inner revelation (*wahy khafiy*) to the heart of the Prophet should look at these prayers. They bring a special feeling to one's heart, which could not have been

possible without a Divine connection. Let us look at this funeral prayer; even on such an occasion of sorrow and pain over the passing away of a child, we are taught to say, "All praise is for the Lord of the worlds."

On its surface this seems strange that a dear one has left us forever, his bier is in front of us, and we are saying, "All praise is for Allah, the Lord of the worlds." What one may ask is the meaning of this? In fact, if we contemplate, even this great loss is a manifestation of God's nurturing and providence for our souls. The death of a dear child has implicit within it this element of God's nurturing. If this nurturing is not meant for the child, it carries within it the means of our spiritual growth. The death of my friend has a similar effect. It generates feelings of caring and compassion within my soul. This is also an indication that our real Nurturer to perfection (*Rabb*) is Allah.

It happens quite often that a child is left without a parent. It is God who provides the means for his sustenance. In this we learn the lesson that it is not your father or anyone else who is the source of your sustenance. In reality, the Sustainer and Nurturer of this child is the Lord of the Worlds, who is the Nurturer unto perfection of all creation. In the history of the world we find that many great men were raised as orphans. This is to let us know that our Lord also provides us the means of our spiritual sustenance. The greatest example of this is the person of our Holy Prophet Muhammad. He never saw his father, and his mother also died while he was yet in infancy. From being a helpless orphan he progressed to become the sovereign of a state and the leader of the spiritual world. His life provides the greatest example for a Muslim that he should not despair under any circumstances. Nor should he worry that he has lost the visible means for his progress. He should always find solace in the fact that his God is the One Who bestowed upon an orphan like Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) both a spiritual and worldly kingdom. Thus for a Muslim, there is never a period of despondency. The Holy Prophet taught us this prayer on the death of a child: "O Allah! Make him for us a cause of recompense in the world to come and as one going before and a reward." (B.23:65).

One aspect of this recompense is that the death of a child provides a means of admonition and learning for a person. It in fact generates higher moral values within him. The love of God's creation is evolved. That is why the Holy Prophet has stated in a Hadith reported by Muadh-bin-Jabal:

There are no two Muslims, who have had three of their children die, that Allah will make both of them enter paradise. The companions asked and two? To which the Holy Prophet replied or two.

The companions again asked and one? And he answered, or one. He then said I swear by Him in whose hand is my life, that the placenta of a mother who has miscarried will pull her towards paradise, if she manifests patience (*Hadith Mishkat*).

Some people with uncleanness in their heart say that the Holy Prophet only said this to solace his wife Khadija when she lost her child. They do not realize that that particular incidence occurred before the Holy Prophet was given the office of prophethood by Allah. There is no doubt in this that a child who dies certainly becomes an intercessor for his parents. I do not believe there is any kind of intercession which does not manifest itself in some form in this world. The development of high morals in a person is in fact a form of paradise, as is the sympathy towards God's creation. The child's illness and death creates feelings of mercy and compassion for the rest of humanity in a person. Even the most hard hearted become overwhelmed with compassion. One feels for the pain and suffering of others. In this way that child becomes an intercessor for his parents.

I have in recent days suffered great personal loss because of the death of several of my friends. Sheikh Noor Ahmed was a personal friend, but I was also bonded with him because of his genuine compassion for our common cause and his service for Islam. Every individual has near of kin and family, and he is naturally affected by the death of one of them. The loss of a servant of Islam is, however, a source of great sorrow for us. We are not complaining about this. It is certainly our faith that: "All praise is for Allah the Lord of the worlds." There is, however a lesson for us in this. It should generate and enhance within us feelings of sympathy and compassion for the rest of humanity.

The greatest attribute of God is His quality of nurturing unto perfection (*Rabubiyat*). Having faith in God means that we should nurture His attributes within us. This is the meaning of the Holy prophet's saying, "create the moral characteristics of Allah within you." Thus, the spirit to nurture others should predominate in you. The whole world is God's family and He nurtures it; therefore, you should have sympathy for all of His creation. Those who learn this lesson by suffering the loss of someone have reached this high stage of excellence.

The Quran states, "The Safa and the Marwah are truly among the signs of Allah." The Safa and Marwa are both symbolic of such suffering and difficulties. When the names of sites where individuals had to face suffering and hardship remains, certainly the names of individuals who had face these trials cannot be forgotten.

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad has also described three means of spiritual development. These are: acqui-

sition of knowledge, revelation and Divine inspiration, and, the most perfect means, facing suffering and tribulations with patience and steadfastness. He had such profound and excellent perception; this indeed is the case. When suffering and distress comes upon a person it should be received as a source of tranquility for him. That which generates such feelings of serenity and enhances one in goodness and virtue, cannot be a chastisement. In fact it is the means by which we evolve spiritually and reach real perfection.

When we observe the example of the Holy Prophet under such circumstances, we are genuinely moved to supplicate for his exaltation. We learn from the Hadith that when the Holy Prophet would be with his companions, he would participate in their joy and sorrow. On the death of his infant son he wept and said, "Surely the eye sheds tears and the heart grieves and we do not say but what the Lord is pleased with; and we, O Ibrahim! are full of grief on account of thy separation" (Bukhari 23:43). His crying and laughing, like we do, also hold a lesson for us. Of what benefit is an exemplar who does not have to face suffering and distress like us? If his heart cannot perceive these very human emotions and he is not able to be a role model in times of suffering and distress? He may otherwise be magnificent, possessor of pomp and grandeur, but of what good is he for us? We need a practical exemplar, whose footsteps we can follow. ■

## The Ideal Dome Show

By Jonathan Glancey

*[This article, first published in "The Guardian" on June 17, 2002, offers a perceptive view on the history of architectural designs of mosques throughout the Muslim world and, in particular, the absence of a continuation of this legacy in Britain. Mr. Glancey provides a glowing tribute to Britain's first mosque, the Shah Jehan mosque at Woking (the headquarters of the Woking Mission founded by Khawaja Kamal-ud-Din, the prominent stalwart of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement), but laments the fact that it "seems little more than an architectural bywater today". Very insightfully, Mr. Glancey offers the explanation of "poverty" among the Muslim immigrant population as the primary reason for the decay in this realm of exquisite mosque construction in Britain. Interestingly, it seems the factors considered by Mr. Glancey also explain the decay in Islamic scholarship in the region at the time as well. The same rigid views of the poorer classes that eschewed the beauty of mosques were also the basis for the abandonment of the splendor of moderation and rationality inherent in the religion Islam and so*

*wonderfully displayed by the Woking Mission.]*

Medina, Sammara, Mecca, Delhi, Cordoba, Woking. Woking? Yes, the Surrey commuter town deserves to be ranked with some of the greatest names associated with the Muslim faith. Woking is home to Britain's first mosque: a delightful Moghul, or Indo-Saracenic, pavilion designed by the Victorian architect WL Chambers and dating from 1889. The Shah Jehan mosque, named after the sultan who gave us the Taj Mahal, is very different from the glum, run-of-the-mill mosques we have come to expect in Britain in recent years. A colourful and exotic outpost of Moghul India, and by extension Persia, it can be glimpsed through trees and railings from the trains that wobble in and out of one of Britain's busiest stations.

The mosque was commissioned by Dr GW Leitner - a Budapest-born German linguist and the founder of the University of Punjab, Lahore - as a sporadic place of worship for Muslim students studying at the nearby Oriental Institute in Maybury. The Shah Jehan came into its own as a regular place of worship and study in 1912 when it was adopted as the headquarters of the Woking Muslim Mission, founded by Khawaja Kamal-ud-Din, a Lahore lawyer. Until the arrival of immigrants from Pakistan in the 1960s, the Woking Mission was the centre of Islam in Britain.

It was from here that Kamal-ud-Din published the influential *Islamic Review*, together with the first English translation of the Koran in 1917. It was here, too, that the name Pakistan (from *pakeesgi*, or purity) was coined - and the idea of this Muslim country, detached from India, was raised and passionately debated between the first and second world wars. In the Muslim section of the nearby Brookwood cemetery are the graves of soldiers of the faith who died as much, perhaps, for the dream of an embryonic Pakistan as for emperor and country.

A number of British aristocrats, many of them soldiers who had served in India and Egypt, converted to Islam under the guidance of Kamal-ud-Din. The first was Lord Headley (1855-1935), who became El-Farooq. Prominent Muslims throughout the world descended on Woking; before the 1958 revolution that witnessed the rise of the Ba'athist party in Iraq, King Faisal might be seen here, an exotic figure among the broolly and bowler brigade lined up at Woking station.

So why did Woking not become the model for mosques throughout Britain, as Muslim immigrants arrived in large numbers, mostly from Pakistan, and settled in London, Yorkshire and the West Midlands? Internecine strife and complex rivalries between various Muslim factions are one part of the answer. The other is

the great change that appears to have come over the Islamic community in Britain since the 1960s, and the ways in which it chose to express its faith in bricks and mortar.

The Woking Mission had been a meeting of high minds, with great learning and a degree of wealth and culture. From the 1960s, when Britain sought cheap labour to do its dirty work at home, poor Pakistanis, among others, settled here bringing with them a zealous religion that all but eschewed luxury, sensuality and ornamentation. If there was a religious reason for this puritanical zeal, it was underpinned by poverty.

At the beginning of the 21st century, most of Britain's mosques - poor things in terms of architectural design and quality - raise their domes, minarets and crescents over some of the poorest quarters of our oldest cities. No one would doubt the strength of faith of their congregations, but it is sad that, for whatever reason, our mosques fail to shine like our famous parish churches, our handsome non-conformist chapels or even the latest generation of richly decorated Hindu temples. The mosque at Woking, for all its history, seems little more than an architectural bywater today.

Although there is a puritanical strain in Islam that discourages ambitious architecture (just as there is in Christianity and Judaism), there is equally a tradition of sensuality and delight that could yet make British Islamic architecture a source of joy for all - no matter what our faith, or lack of it. The Moghul architecture of India that married exquisite Persian design with Hindu engineering is one of the world's glories: the fusion of immense strength and solidity with filigree decoration and the subtle play of light and water is at once comforting and mesmerising. This is the architecture of the Taj Mahal, but also of Moghul summer palaces, forts and the noblest mosques.

Perhaps, though, the sensual side of Islamic architecture was most beautifully and convincingly expressed in the design of the exquisite Alhambra palace in Granada. The all-conquering Arab armies had raced across North Africa in the seventh century. Having invaded Spain, they were only finally stopped south of Paris by Charles Martel at the Battle of Poitiers in 732. Pushed back across the Pyrénées, the Arab conquerors took up residence in Spain for the next 700 years. They developed a remarkably high level of civilisation, particularly in Andalus.

The Alhambra was built between 1338 and 1390. A glorious gathering of courtyards, pavilions, pools, fountains and gardens set against a backdrop of snowcapped mountains, its beauty is legendary. It was, perhaps, the most sophisticated representation of a

desert oasis ever devised. At its heart lay the folk memory of a warlike yet deeply religious people who had fought their way thousands of miles from their desert homes to found this earthly paradise.

Banned from creating images of god, Mohammed, the prophets, angels or indeed any human likeness, Moslem architects and craftsman turned to geometry, of which they became masters, and beautiful, abstract decorative forms. Their profound meditations on geometry and patterns led to the stunning forms and decoration of buildings as diverse as the sumptuous seventh-century Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, the labyrinthine eighth-century mosque at Cordoba and the great ninth-century spiral minaret of Sammara in northern Iraq. These various strands found their way into the shaded courtyards of the Alhambra.

“The Alhambra is not just a high point of Islamic architecture,” says Mohsen Mostafavi, the Iranian-born chairman of the Architectural Association school in London and author of the forthcoming *London: Post-Colonial City*. “It is a pointer to one of the ways forward for architecture in cities worldwide. It reconciles architecture and landscape in a profound and very beautiful way. There is a powerful tradition in Islamic architecture of designing buildings in which outdoor and indoor space are blurred, in which water and light and shade play essential and life-enhancing parts. We are beginning to see this kind of architecture emerging again.” One good example is the Said Business School in Oxford, designed by Dixon Jones. Here, lecture theatres open on to cloistered passages giving on to courtyards and terraces.

So why are most British mosques so unlike this, often no more than brick boxes with minarets and domes applied like afterthoughts? Why are the new mosques - of, say, Birmingham, of Northolt, Middlesex, and Ilford, Essex - so determinedly glum?

“Aside from the question of poverty,” says Mostafavi, “there is the question of cultural transference. It has taken 30 or 40 years for the classic British Indian restaurant to turn its back on kitsch Victorian decor; the latest generation of Indian restaurants include some fine, modern designs. It will take a while, perhaps another 10 or 15 years, for the architecture of British mosques to develop a clear and sophisticated vocabulary of their own. The Alhambra didn’t happen overnight.

“It’s also a question of confidence. To an extent, mosques in the poorer parts of Britain are exclusive, as if they are keeping the corrupt world around them at bay. Many non-Moslems feel they shouldn’t or can’t walk into a mosque - they wouldn’t feel welcome -

whereas anyone can walk into a church.”

The implication is that the buildings themselves are self-regarding; what does it matter if non-believers find them ugly or kitsch? But then it might be argued that Islam can be practiced without buildings of any sort. A prayer mat is all that is needed for each day’s five prayer sessions.

“Not quite,” says Mostafavi. “Friday prayers are communal events; so too are the ritual ablutions that precede them. The faithful also gather to listen to the orations of imams, while mosques can also be tombs, places of collective memory as well as gathering.”

These, then, are early days. It would be good to see the design of British mosques maturing and to see architects - whether Moslem or not - knitting them into the fabric of British cities. Mosques might stand as fine buildings in urban parks, the centrepieces of a new generation of water gardens and places of refuge and meditation. They might, like the central mosque in Paris, welcome believers and non-believers alike with tea rooms and hammams, with bookshops, with festivals of music and other events that would draw them into the wider community.

The serene Paris mosque, behind Jean Nouvel’s magnificent Institut du Monde Arab, dates from 1926; its design draws its inspiration quite deliberately from the Alhambra. It has always seemed a welcoming place. Its first imam hid and saved the lives of 200 Jews who sought sanctuary here during the second world war. Today, sitting sipping sweet mint tea under the fig trees of courtyards scented with cedar and myrtle, the attractions of Islamic architecture are as strong as they might be this side of the Alhambra, Sammara or Agra. Or even, on a sunny summer’s evening, Woking. ■

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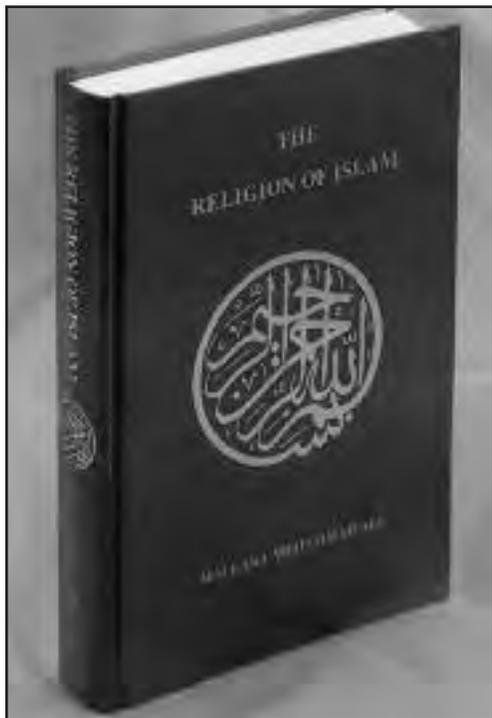
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