

“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 ninety years

October – December 2012

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

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Editor: Fazeel S. Khan, Esq.

Circulation: Mrs. Samina Malik.

*Contact information:*

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

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

E-mails: aaiil@aol.com

Website: www.muslim.org

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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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.

# The Relational Dynamics of Genuine Worship and Inner Transformation from the Perspective of Islamic Spirituality

By Prof. Henry Francis B. Espiritu

[The author of this article, Prof. Henry Francis B. Espiritu, is Assistant Professor VII in Philosophy at the University of Philippines – Cebu College. In this article, he addresses the concept of “Tawhid” (or “Oneness of God”) and the true significance of worship in Islam. Rather than a mere ritual, as Prof. Espiritu explains, true worship in Islam requires sincere devotion that leads to an inner transformation. Moreover, developing the divine attributes within each one of us through this process of spiritual renovation, he further expounds, is the ultimate purpose of life.]

## “Tawhid”: Faith in the Divine Oneness of Allah as the Fountainhead of All Acts of Worship

The Holy *Qur’an* proclaims to all mankind: “Say: He is Allah, the One and Only (*Surah Ikhlas:1*)”. The very foundation of Islam rests on *Kalimah-e-Tawhid* (the Declaration of Divine Unity) where the doctrine of the absolute Oneness of Allah in its purest form is strongly emphasized. The Islamic creed states; “*La-ilaha-illa-Llah*” (There is no God worthy of worship except Almighty Allah). This testimony to Allah’s Oneness has the power to transform our earthly life of worldliness and materialism to the most sublime spiritual state. By inwardly reflecting and contemplating (*tafakkur*) on the profound significance and the spiritual role that the *Kalimah-e-Tawhid* plays in our life, one may achieve nearness to the Divine Throne and eventual vision of Almighty Allah’s Beautiful Face. The inner reality of all forms of divine worship in Islam stems from the fountainhead of our faith in the Divine Oneness of Allah (*Tawhid*); and the ultimate goal of *Tawhid* (Islamic monotheism) is nearness (*qurbah*) to our Beloved Allah’s everlasting Presence.

## The Ultimate Purpose of Existence: To Give Worship and Render Loving Service to our Beloved Allah

Our All-Majestic Allah declares in the Holy *Qur’an*: “I have not created *jinn*s and humankind except that they worship Me” (*Surah Zariyat:56*). Islamic worship (*ibadah*) needs to be properly understood with this *Qur’anic* verse in mind, since this *ayah* gives us hints as to how we can truly worship Allah Almighty. The Arabic word “*ibadah*” is related to other proximate words in Arabic like *abd*, *abid*, *abdi* (words to mean “servant”), *abdiyyah* (servanthood) and *ubdiyyah* (to

give ultimate worth/value, i.e., to worship). In worshipping Allah Almighty, we are exhibiting the undeniable truth that He is our Creator and we (and indeed, the whole cosmos) are his lowly creatures.<sup>i</sup> The whole of our existence is made for the sole purpose of giving praise and adoration to Allah Almighty at all times and in all spheres of our life. The word “*ibadah*” which is translated in English as “worship” literally means exhibiting the true character of servanthood. Hence all aspects and all moments of our life as Allah’s creatures are to be undertaken for the sole purpose of serving Him and should therefore become avenues of sincere adoration as well as humble submission to Allah Almighty’s heavenly decrees. The Islamic understanding of worship entails day-by-day “24-hour” servanthood to our Beloved Allah and moment-to-moment submission to His immutable decrees in all aspects of our life as His creatures who utterly depend upon Him for our daily sustenance and life’s existence. Since we will remain forever as Allahu Taala’s perpetual slaves; therefore for all eternity, the goal and end of our fragile existence is to worship Allah Almighty by our sincere and loving devotional service towards Him.

## The Paramount Importance of Proper and Right Intention (Niyyah) in all our Acts of Worship

As Muslims, we are perfectly aware that in the obligatory aspects of worship, there are certain forms or postures, ceremonial actions and devotional disciplines prescribed by the *Shariah* for the various acts of worship’s proper execution, accomplishment and fulfillment. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that our Holy Prophet (pbuh) stressed that over and above the formal aspects of worship, the rightness of our intention (*niyyah*) is of paramount importance. For the Holy Prophet (pbuh), the proper intention in all our acts of worship is that we perform them solely for the pleasure of our Beloved Allah (*raaza*). There is a well-known *hadith* accepted as sound and verified by all our Ahlus Sunnah scholars past and present: “Actions are judged solely by intention”.<sup>ii</sup> The above *hadith* was considered crucially important by the eminent scholar of *hadith*, Hazrat Imam An-Nawawi; this is why he placed this *hadith* as first (*hadith awwali*) among the forty *hadiths* he collected. In his *Bustan-e-Arifin*, Imam An-Nawawi called this *hadith* “*al-lati a’layha madar al-adab-ul-Islamiyyah* (the axis and pivot characterizing the summit of Islamic conduct). In this book, Imam An-Nawawi says that Islam insists upon the right intention (*niyyah*) in the performance of any external deeds related to worship; furthermore Islam stresses unequivocally that the true value of any outward forms of worship are directly assessed by the rightness and sincerity of our intentions in performing our devotional acts.<sup>iii</sup> As per Imam An-Nawawi, a worshipper can perform outward forms of an act of worship with wrongful intention and vain purpose such as to make a show (*ri’ya*) of his devotions and to

boast (*takabbur*) of his piety; and these wrongful intentions diminish and nullify the spiritual value of his worship. Hence, only those devotional acts done with the right intention (*raaza*, i.e., doing actions solely to please Almighty Allah) marked by authenticity (*ikhlas*) can lead the worshipper to inner spiritual purification and inward transformation. Outward forms of worship devoid of sincere intention are worthless and are nothing but vain and capricious acts which Almighty Allah absolutely hates and strongly detests.

The Holy *Qur'an* solemnly warns: “So woe to the worshippers who are neglectful of their prayers, those who want but to be seen of men, but refuse to supply even neighborly needs” (Surah Ma’un:4-7). In this *Qur’anic* ayah the importance of praying with the right intention is succinctly emphasized. *Salaah* (the formal prayer in Islam), and the most important obligatory act of Islamic worship commences with *niyyah*: no prayer is deemed performed even if one goes through the “motions of prayer” if such prayer lacks *niyyah*. Once *niyyah* is brought to one’s mind and heart before prayer commences, the worshipper then concentrates towards the performance of *Salaah* itself where he refrains from thinking of anyone and anything else except reflecting upon Allah’s greatness while filling his heart and mind with Allah’s remembrance (*dhikrullah*).

### **Worship as Means of Conscious Awareness to the Reality of the Divine Presence and as Vehicle to our Inner Transformation**

During *salaah*, the worshipper faces with one-pointed absorption and humble attention (*khushoo*) to the *Qiblah*, which is the direction of the Holy *Ka’abah*, Allah’s glorious house. The genuine believer who longs to behold the Beautiful Face of Allah knows that the all-pervading divine Presence (*hudhur/ hadhrah*) is not restricted to a specific location. Allah’s divine Presence is everywhere and at all times and in all climes (Surah Baqarah:115). The Holy *Qur’an* itself declares empathically: “Allah is with you wherever you are” (Surah Hadid:4). The spiritual reality and the inmost significance of facing the *Qiblah* can be explained in one beautiful *Hadith-e-Qudsi*: “All the heavens and all the earth cannot contain My Majesty; but I dwell in the heart of a true believer”.<sup>iv</sup> To face Allah’s glorious house (the *Ka’abatullah*) attunes our entire physical existence to be mindful of Allah’s divine Presence and inwardly denotes Oneness (*tawhid*) and one-pointed concentration (*tawwajuh*) and humble attention (*khushoo*) in which our whole heart focuses its spiritual gaze, sentiments of love and feelings of worship in Almighty Allah’s holy Presence.

The Holy *Qur’an* states: “We are nearer to him (i.e. the worshipper) than his jugular vein (to himself)” (Surah Qaf:16). Our sincere worship brings us closer to Allah since worship is a means to our inner reflection

and heartfelt realization that Almighty Allah is ever near to all those who call upon His Name in loving remembrance. In many *hadiths* of the Prophet (pbuh), the worshipper is exhorted to develop profound awareness of Allah’s presence by means of his regular acts of worship; this means that through the regularity and constancy of our worshipping Allah, our belief in Him will become a living faith borne by true and genuine realization of certainty (*ilm-al-yaqeen*) as we regularly commune with Him in our prayers and remembrance of his Name. The Holy *Qur’an* says: “Worship your Lord until certainty (*yaqeen*) descends upon you” (Surah Hijr:99). *Hadith-e-Jibrail* elaborated this *Qur’anic* verse by this statement: “*Ihsan* (authentic goodness) is to worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you cannot see Him, then indeed He sees you” (*Al-Bukhari and Al-Muslim. Kitab-ul-Ihsan:23*).

### **Inner Transformation in Worship Occurs When the Lowly Human Character is Decorated with Allah’s Beautiful Attributes**

Worship (*ibadah*) inwardly transforms our faith in Almighty Allah into a conscious and living awareness of His divine Presence leading towards the recognition of the True Sovereignty of Allah Almighty in our lives and our perpetual servanthood to His Majesty as articulated by our preexistent souls (*ar-ruah*) in the Primordial Covenant (*Ahd-e-Alast*), which was narrated in the Holy *Qur’an* in this manner: “And (remember) when thy Lord brought forth from the Children of Adam, from their reins, their seed, and made them testify of themselves, (saying): Am I not your Lord? They said: Yea, verily, [Thou art]” (Surah A’araf:172). In relation to this *Qur’anic* ayah (verse), there is also a *Hadith-e-Qudsi* that records this profound and beautiful saying of our Almighty Allah: “I was a hidden treasure and desired to be discovered, hence I created the cosmos”.<sup>v</sup> For Hazrat Ibn Arabi, the true intents and purposes in Islamic worship or *ibadah* are the following: as venue in recognizing Him as our Creator and Sustainer (*Rabb*), as platform to know and love Him and as a training-ground for our *nafs* (self) to submit to His holy will in every aspects of our life. All sincere acts of worship take a worshipper to the sublime summit of divine awareness, where he is enabled to feel the blissful Presence of our Beloved Allah in his day-to-day life. The effect of this divine consciousness in the believer’s existence becomes so deep that he totally becomes oblivious of anything except the Majesty of Allah Almighty.

Likewise, let us not forget that the importance of all physical and external acts of worship cannot be ignored as Muslims are solemnly enjoined to perform these acts of worship as required by the *Shariah* (Islamic Law). However, we must transcend the mere performance of outward forms of worship by properly understanding

these devotional and ritual acts to be our means of reaching the goal that these acts intend to achieve; the goal or ultimate intention of all our worship is to manifest our eternal servanthood in respect to Allah's Sovereignty, to achieve nearness (*qurbah*) to the Presence of Allah and to attain His good pleasure (*raaza*). Hazrat Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi says in his *Mathnawi*: "Our Lord has decreed: 'Prostrate yourself to Me, so you may draw near to me'..."<sup>vi</sup> In this short but meaningful quote, Hazrat Maulana Rumi points to us very clearly that our bodily prostrations, and indeed all our external forms of worship are vehicles by which our spirits can ascend (*mi'raj*) to Allah's divine Presence.

Inward spiritual transformation is a result of our loving service to our Beloved Allah. As we have seen previously, the *Qur'an* puts under the same rank of the impious those so-called Muslims who are neglectful of their prayers, those who loved to be shown by people when they perform their devotional acts of worship, and those who neglect to offer charity and refuse to show mercy to the needy and to the disadvantaged (Surah Maun:1-7). These verses clearly show that all our acts of piety and worship should transform us inwardly by making our spirits conduits and expressions of Allah's character of mercy and compassion to the world in need of our loving concerns. The relation between the "formal" aspects of worship and the "spiritual" effects that these forms of worship result in the inner life of believers is magnificently expressed and exemplified in the *Mathnawi*, where Hazrat Maulana Rumi reported that Almighty Allah informed Prophet Moses:

Ways of worship have profound impact upon my lovers. All forms of worship glorify me and in glorifying Me and giving me due honor, my lovers get a glimpse of my glorious and divine Attributes. It is not Me who benefits from these acts of worship; it is my lovers who benefit from the results of their fervent worship and their sincere devotion of Me. In their true worship of me and in their constant remembrance of my Name—gradually but surely—they mirror and reflect My divine character and imprint (*naqsh*) these attributes into the inner recesses of their souls.<sup>vii</sup>

### **Sincerity in Worship Guarantees Allah's Succour (Nusrat) for the Individual Muslim and Spiritual Renewal (Tajdid-e-Ruhaniyyat) for the Whole Muslim Ummah**

The *Holy Qur-an*, the *Sunnah* of the Holy Prophet (pbuh), and the spiritual examples found in the lives of the *Sahabah-e-Kiram* and our early Muslim predecessors (the *Tabi'en*) testify that the true power of Muslims were not dependent on military superiority nor of greater armed capabilities. The evil plans of the unbe-

lievers were not able to overwhelm the *Sahabah* during their time because of the *Sahabah's* pure intentions and sincerity as manifested in their actions and in all their acts of worship. The Holy Companions' practice of genuine spirituality is the reason why they were able to spread the liberating message of Islam to the ends of the earth.<sup>viii</sup>

The Holy Qur-an promised victory (*fath*) to those who "believe, do good, exhort one another to truth, and exhort one another to patience" (See *Surah Asr*, 103:3). In connection to this Qur'anic passage, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Sahib—the great Punjabi saint and the reviver (*mujaddid*) of the *Sunnah* of the Prophet in the Indian subcontinent during the last century of the British *Raj*—gave a very crucial advice to the Islamic *Ummah* so that the present Islamic community will regain its spiritual and cultural preeminence in the world. Hazrat Mirza Sahib advised Muslims to practice genuine sincerity in their spiritual worship since this is the singular key towards achieving authentic Islamic renaissance of the *Ummah*. Seeing the pathetic situation of the Muslims of his day, and their terrible condition of disunity and chaotic dissension in the ranks of the *Ummah*, Hazrat Mirza Sahib exhorted the Muslims to take Hazrat Abubakr Siddiq's life as a shining exemplar of genuine sincerity and bonafide worship. According to Hazrat Mirza Sahib, the sole object of Hazrat Abubakr's spiritual life is Allah alone. Similarly, his ultimate goal in all his acts of worship is Almighty Allah alone. To quote from Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Sahib:

The remedy for idolatrous pride is true sincerity as manifested in the lives of the companions of the Holy Prophet. The life of the first caliph of Islam shows his pre-eminent station of excellence in exercising sincerity. Sincerity may be attained by preferring the worship of God to the worship of one's own self, by making God's pleasure to vanquish the pleasure of the ego; by renouncing the material and moral reward to be had from men and expecting solely God's good-pleasure... Hazrat Abubakr demonstrates his virtuous ascendancy in the exercise of sincerity from the time he entered Islam as the first Muslim until he breathed his last as the humble, frugal, yet exemplary Caliph of the whole *Ummah*. All throughout his life, he expected his reward and vindication only from God and not from men".<sup>ix</sup>

In the abovementioned quote, Hazrat Mirza Sahib advised Muslims to aspire in gaining the pleasure of Almighty Allah in all the good deeds (*aamal-e-salihah*) that they perform instead of utilizing these good deeds for one's vanity, pride and showing-off to others.

Denying our egoistic propensities even in matters of worship is a potent medicine to ward-off our self-centeredness and self-absorbed egotism. By doing acts of self-denial, by constant practice of genuine sincerity (*ikhlas*), and by making Almighty Allah as the only Goal (*matlub*) and Center (*markaz*) of our existence, our individual spiritual reformation is already underway. God willing, if all Muslims will aspire to live a life of spiritual authenticity for the sake of gaining Almighty Allah's good pleasure, then the Muslim *Ummah* will be cured from the miserable state that it is in at the present time.

The Muslim *Ummah* can qualify for Allah's help (*nusrat*) only after the attainment of a high degree of spiritual cultivation (*ruhaniyyat*) which can only be achieved by undertaking the first step, which is self-reformation (*islah-e-nafs*). The promise of the *Holy Qur'an* that believers will receive the help and support of Almighty Allah is based on three conditions that Muslims should be able to fulfill, namely; moral purification (*islah-e-nafs*), sincerity of intention (*ikhlas-e-niyyat*), and cultivation of spirituality (*ruhaniyyat*). Righteous deeds (*a'amal-e-salihah*) acceptable by Allah are those actions that have passed through the doors of moral purification (*islah-e-nafs*) and sincerity (*ikhlas*). So-called "good deeds" that lack *islah-e-nafs* and *ikhlas* can never merit Almighty Allah's favor. A good deed devoid of sincerity and moral purification will never produce reformation and renewal in the Islamic *Ummah*. In the words of Shaykh Muhammad Maseehullah Khan Sherwani of Deoband:

The Holy Companions were the true models of Islamic worship and Muslim ethics after our Blessed Prophet, for they performed all their *ibadah* (worship) in humility and sincerity... *Iman* (faith) can never be perfected without *ikhlas* (sincerity). True spirituality (*ruhaniyyat*) means that ones' *batini* (inner) intentions and *zahiri* (outward) actions are similar. Whatever deeds one shows externally should be similar to the *niyyat* that is internal in his *qalb* (heart) and *hal* (inner condition). Our external actions should not contradict our internal aims. Our aim should only be for Allah's pleasure; and therefore all our *aamal-e-saleehat* (good deeds) should only be for the sake of Allah and not for showing-off (*riya*) to others. Only when our *zahiri aamal* (external actions) and *batini niyyat* (inner intentions) are in perfect harmony, can we be called true *mu'min* (faithful one).<sup>x</sup>

Therefore, as per Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Sahib and Hazrat Maseehullah Khan, all so-called good deeds (including all our acts of worship) if separated from sincerity will never merit any spiritual value in the

sight of Allah Almighty. The *Sahabah* were able to achieve great accomplishments for Islam since their outward conduct is perfectly harmonious with their inward intention. Our Beloved Allahu Taala gave His blessings and help in all the affairs of the *Sahabah* because they lived the life of pure sincerity. We, too, can qualify for Almighty Allah's assistance if we can model our life and worship with the authentic sincerity characterizing the conduct and worship of the *Sahabah-e-Kiram*.

### **Genuine Worship Results in Loving Compassion Characterizing a Proper Human Person: Performing Acts of Mercy to the Needy Solely for Allah's Sake**

For this final portion of this article, it is beneficial to quote another *Qur-anic* passage that illustrates the relevant spiritual dimension of Islamic worship as it directly relates to the practical demand of responding in charity, love and compassion to the poor, the needy, the oppressed, the downtrodden and the marginalized in the society. The *Holy 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 (*Surah Baqara:177*).

In explaining the above verse, Hazrat Muhaiyyaddin Ibn Arabi commented that although in Islam, there exists a specific direction and prescribed liturgical postures by which a Muslim faces when praying, yet the *Qur'an* equally acknowledges that the divine Presence (*hudhur/hadhrat/sakinah*) of Allah is found wherever His true devotees worship Him with sincere longing, genuine devotion and pure love. More importantly, for Hazrat Ibn Arabi, *Surah Baqara:177* encourages true worshippers to go beyond (i.e., to transcend) the ritual and formal demands of the different ceremonial expressions of worship and focusing further on the importance of acquiring the divine imprint of Allah's holy attributes to be reflected in one's heart while performing these various forms of worship. For Ibn Arabi developing the divine characters of mercy, love and compassion within one's being is one of the foremost goals that should enliven all forms of our worship. This means that aside from satisfying the good pleasure of Allah, human com-

passion towards others and persevering faith in the midst of trials and difficulties should likewise be the end goals of all our external forms of worship.<sup>xi</sup>

Hazrat Ibn Arabi further explained that in Islam, the divine purpose of the various prescribed acts of worship is for the spiritual education and practical training of humankind, aside from the avowed aim of glorifying or praising our Beloved Allah. For Hazrat Ibn Arabi, 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 humanely sensitive to the needs of others.<sup>xii</sup> The *Qur-an* therefore articulates very explicitly that in the all-encompassing Islamic perspective concerning worship as *ibadah*, all our acts of devotion to Allah Almighty is meant to acknowledge the Divine Sovereignty of Allah in our lives as His lowly servants and at the same time it is meant to divinely transform our materialistic existence and worldly attitudes by endeavoring to inwardly transform us into compassionate and “humane” persons who act with benevolence, kindness, justice and equality to every creatures solely for the intention (*niyyah*) of gaining our Beloved Allah’s good pleasure and approval.

May our Beloved Allah have mercy upon the *Ummah* of our Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) so that all Muslims will truly live a life of genuine servanthood to Almighty Allah’s divine commands through the regular practice of authentic worship solely for the sake of Allah’s pleasure. May our mind, heart and soul be decorated and beautified with Almighty Allah’s divine Attributes so that we will be enabled by Allah’s grace (*ni'mah*) to properly exhibit and showcase the beauty of Allah’s religion of Islam to the world. Amen—a thousand times Amen! ■

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- iii See Hazrat Imam An-Nawawi, *Bustan-e-Arifin* [The Garden of the Enlightened], Karachi, Pakistan: *Dar-al-Ruhani*, 1984; pp. 40-42. See also the entry: “*Ikhlas* [Sincerity] and Having Conscious *Niyyah* in all Affairs of *Ibadah*” in the same book.
- iv Quoted by Hazrat Imam Al-Ghazali in his *Ihya-al-Ulm-ud-Din* [The Revivification of the Faith]. Bangalore, India: Sunni Classics Reprint, 1969; p. 56.
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- xi See Shahabuddin Maliki, *Light from the Sayings of Shaykh-ul-Akbar Ibn Arabi*. Decca, Bangladesh: Markaz Towheedi, 1977; p.63.
- xii See Shahabuddin Maliki, *Ibid*; pp.69-70.

## Slavery and Concubinage according to Islam

### Two Misunderstood Concepts Diametrically Opposed to Islam’s Fundamental Goal of Liberating Humanity

By Lubna Ahmad

[This article addresses two (interrelated) topics, misunderstood by many non-Muslims and Muslims alike. It is believed by many that Islam endorses the enslaving of others and that Muslim men are permitted to have an unlimited number of concubines. As Mrs. Lubna Ahmad explains, these views are entirely baseless, unsupported by the primary sources of Islam. To the contrary, Islam commands the freeing of slaves and condemns all forms of bondage, whether physical, mental or spiritual. Moreover, the detailed prescriptions on marriage provided by Islam, its general rules governing relations between the sexes, and the moral quality of modesty inherent in these lessons, all refute the remotest possibility of concubinage being an accepted practice according to this faith.]

Islam today is plagued by great many misconceptions. The word “Islam” itself conjures negative images for many, which in turn raises disturbing questions in people’s minds. For instance, upon hearing the word “Islam”, many wonder:

- Does Islam protect individual rights and civil liberties?
- Does Islam endorse slavery?
- Is there gender equality in Islam or does it demean women?
- Does a woman have a say in her matrimonial decisions, or is her role as wife limited to

attending to household duties and catering to the sexual desires of her husband?

Unfortunately, critics of Islam, and even many uninformed followers of the faith, believe that Islam does in fact endorse slavery of individuals and limits the role of women to a secondary citizen status. The purpose of this article is to establish the veracity of the moral and spiritual teachings of the Holy Quran and of the blessed life of Holy Prophet Muhammad by dispelling the false notions about the acceptance of slavery and concubinage in Islam. Contrary to popular misconceptions, Islam condemns all forms of slavery and any form of concubinage. It emancipates the human body, mind and soul from all sorts of bondage, by total submission to Allah, the One and Only God of all creation.

### **Holy Quran: A Perfect Book of Physical, Moral and Spiritual Guidance**

*I, Allah, am the Best Knower:*

*This Book, there is no doubt in it, is a guide to those who keep their duty. (2:1-1)*

Allah, the Creator, the Sustainer, the Evolver and Nourisher unto Perfection, has provided man with the most valuable gift of the Holy Quran. Our Benefactor is the Best Knower of the strengths and weaknesses of the human soul. The Holy Quran, the Word of Allah, the One and Only God, was revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him. It is a spiritual guide to those who read it with understanding, believe and absorb the message and act upon its teachings. Is it not the duty of a Muslim, to fulfill his/her oath of allegiance to Allah and His Prophet Muhammad with humility and sincerity? Is it not imperative to rely on the Truth of the Holy Quran, and shun any doubtful meanings that are put forth by a religious leader, cleric or a critic of Islam? Are we as Muslims not responsible for making sure that we ourselves do not distort and violate the teachings of the Holy Quran? Is it not our moral obligation and service to humanity to make sure that the correct message of the Divine Being is presented to the critics of Islam? Is it not the duty of critics of Islam to explore the primary sources of Islam, and not draw sinister conclusions from any un-Islamic practices that may occur in the Muslim world today? The Holy Quran draws our attention towards this moral and civic obligation in the following words:

*(This is) a Book that We have revealed to thee abounding in good, that they may ponder over its verses, and that the men of understanding may mind. (38:29)*

It is due time for both Muslims and non-Muslims alike to broaden and change their way of analyzing and forming opinions about Islam. I, as a Muslim, must exhibit reverence to the Holy Quran by not decorating it on my

book shelf, but by carefully studying it with intent to practice its teachings. The approach of a seeker of truth belonging to any faith or tradition should be with an unbiased disposition to learn and find answers themselves. The Holy Quran is the most reliable source, with unaltered text, the veracity of which has been proven time and again and is safeguarded for all times to come. In regards to previous scriptures, the Holy Quran dispels any false accusations about the character of various prophets, yet preserves in its teachings, the truths mentioned. As the Holy Quran states:

*And that which We have revealed to thee of the Book, that is the truth, verifying that which is before it. Surely Allah is Aware, Seer of His servants. (35:31)*

### **Rules of Interpretation of Islamic Principles**

In order to seek guidance from the Holy Quran on any given issue, a proper method of interpretation must be employed. This method for interpretation is provided for in the Quran itself:

*He it is Who has revealed the Book to thee; some of its verses are decisive — they are the basis of the Book — and others are allegorical. Then those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part of it which is allegorical, seeking to mislead, and seeking to give it (their own) interpretation. And none knows its interpretation save Allah, and those firmly rooted in knowledge. They say: We believe in it, it is all from our Lord. And none mind except men of understanding. (3:7)*

By studying this verse, the following points emerge:

- a. There are two kinds of verses in the Holy Quran, decisive ones and allegorical ones. The decisive verses are clear and do not require any interpretation, but the allegorical verses can be interpreted in different ways, and they do not effect the basic principles of belief made clear in the decisive verses.
- b. The fundamental principles are laid down in the decisive verses and they form the basis of the Book. This signifies the fact that the fundamental principles stay unaffected by the interpretation of the allegorical verses.
- c. The allegorical verses must be interpreted in light of, or with the help of, the decisive verses; simply giving one's own meaning without any basis to decisive verses of the Quran is discouraged.
- d. All verses of the Holy Quran are the revealed word of Allah and therefore there cannot be any inconsistency of meanings between them. The Holy Quran is the final word of God, for all nations and all times.



- e. The theory of abrogation is not valid in respect to the Holy Quran, which is the final word of God. As such, one verse cannot override another. They all complement each other and have to be studied with reference to the subject matter under discussion.

### **The Hadith or Sunnah (Sayings and Practices of the Holy Prophet Muhammad)**

The Hadith is second in precedence after the Holy Quran as a source for the principles of Islam. The authenticity of a Hadith must be determined, though, and any Hadith which is not in agreement with the teachings of the Holy Quran must be rejected.

The following considerations regarding the authenticity of Hadith, accounts of the life history of the Holy Prophet (*Sirat*) and wars (*maghazi*) should be taken into account.<sup>1</sup>

- a. Books of *Sirat* and *Maghazi* do not contain dependable accounts of the Holy Prophet's life. Books of *Sirat* and *Maghazi* belonged to the early days of Islam, and need to be assessed in light of Books of Hadith to determine their reliability. Hafiz Zainuddin, a traditionist, confirms in his book *Al-Fiya Fissyar* that the books on Biography (*Sirat*) of the Holy Prophet Muhammad have traditions and sayings in it which may or may not be true, as many unreliable accounts of the life of the Holy Prophet crept into them in the form of fiction.
- b. Waqidi and his Katib, the biographers of the Books of *Sirat* and *Maghazi*, were least trustworthy and not accepted by many traditionists. Of the former, Ibn Khalikan speaks thus: "The traditions received from him (Waqidi) are considered of feeble authority, and doubts have been expressed on the subject of his veracity (vol. iii, p. 62). Imam Shafi – one of the four great Imams of the Muslim world – says that all the books of Waqidi are a load of lies, and other "traditionists" say the same.
- c. In the past, European writers and critics of Islam made use of the unreliable accounts by Waqidi, to malign the character of the Holy Prophet Muhammad.
- d. Reliability of Hadith, depends on the following:
  1. *Asma-ur-Rijal*, a special branch of Arabic Literature has the names of those who have either spoken to or seen the Holy Prophet Muhammad. It also contains the account of the lives of the various narrators. It is on basis of this that some are accepted because of their high moral standing, and others are rejected.

2. The traditionists took long journeys to meet and interview the persons who could relate any events of the life of Holy Prophet Muhammad. The narrator of a certain hadith should be trustworthy and of high moral standing. He had to have good memory to have remembered the details of the Hadith.
3. It was under this system of sifting the truth that the books of *Sihah Sittah* - six reliable books of traditions - were prepared and became the basis of all other books on the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad.
4. In the books of Hadith, there are the statements of about 13,000 persons - who had spoken with the Holy Prophet and seen him - that have been written down and passed on to us.

Keeping the foregoing method of interpretation and considerations about secondary sources in mind, we are able to accurately assess the issues pertaining to slavery and concubinage.

### **The "Uphill Road"**

The Holy Quran explains that life comprises two conspicuous ways (symbolically spoken as the path on the right and the path on the left):

*Have We not given him two eyes,  
And a tongue and two lips,  
And pointed out to him the two conspicuous ways?  
But he attempts not the uphill road;  
And what will make thee comprehend what the  
uphill road is?  
(It is) to free a slave,  
Or to feed in a day of hunger  
An orphan nearly related,  
Or the poor man lying in the dust.  
Then he is of those who believe and exhort one  
another to patience, and exhort one another to  
mercy.  
These are the people of the right hand.  
And those who disbelieve in Our messages, they  
are the people of the left hand.  
On them is Fire closed over. (90:8-20)*

The first thing that is mentioned for the traveler on the uphill road is freeing of the slave. The freedom from slavery mentioned here can be understood as freedom from not only physical oppression but from freeing oneself or another person from a variety of forms of bondage.

### **Different Forms of Bondage or Slavery**

Slavery may take various forms, some quite transparent and others not so obvious. For instance:

1. Physical Captivity (traditional meaning of slavery)

*(Zakat) charity is only for the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer it, and those whose hearts are made to incline (to truth), and (to free) the captives, and those in debt, and in the way of Allah and for the wayfarer — an ordinance from Allah. And Allah is Knowing, Wise. (9:60)*

According to this verse, the funds from the institution of *Zakat* (i.e. compulsory charity) are to be used for freeing those in captivity (i.e. slaves) by paying a price for them and then giving them freedom to live a life of their own and choose the religion of their own choice.

## 2. Spiritual Servitude to Others (Association with Allah, the One and Only God)

*And serve Allah, and associate naught with Him (4:36)*

## 3. Slave of Low Desires (sexual desire, wealth and power)

The basic desires of procreation (through marriage), wealth (acquired through legal means) and power (that protects the rights of others), are the driving forces for survival; we become their slaves if we exceed limits and let them control us.

## 4. Intellectual Slavery

This entails listening to people and following practices without using one's own sense of reasoning and judgment.

*Follow not that of which thou has no knowledge (17:36)*

## 5. Class Slavery

This is when the rights of the lower classes (usually the poor) are suppressed and repressed by the higher classes (the affluent).

## 6. Political slavery

This entails giving undue importance to politicians for political gain or otherwise.

## 7. Religious Slavery

This occurs when one follows blindly religious clerics (by accepting their opinion without verification from the scripture and even when contradicting scripture).

*They take their doctors of law and their monks for lords besides Allah, and (also) the Messiah, son of Mary. And they were enjoined that they should serve one God only — there is no god but He. Be He glorified from what they set up (with Him). (9:31)*

## 8. Gender Slavery

This is when one contributes to a system in which one gender is considered superior to the other.

## 9. Racial Slavery

This is when one considers a particular race superior to the others.

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

## 10. Slavery to customs

This entails feeling compelled to abide by or live up to certain customs (example: extravagance in marriages) without the will (or possibly the means) to do so.

The Holy Quran mentions freedom from *all* kinds of bondage or slavery. The faithful and truthful believer is one who undertakes this spiritual journey on the “Uphill Road” and fulfills the obligation as a member of the human race, and seeks the protection of the rights of others.

### Practice of Concubinage Abolished by Islam

Concubinage refers to the cohabitation and unlawful sexual relations between two persons. A concubine is usually an underprivileged mistress under the control of a wealthy, married man. This behavior is considered detestable and distasteful in the eyes of society in general. There may be free intermingling of the genders in modern societies, yet having mistresses is deemed unacceptable, as is seen by it becoming an important criterion to determine the fate of a political contender; found guilty of such behavior, a politician loses credibility and popular acceptance.

The obvious question arises as to how Islam can endorse concubinage when it seeks to liberate all persons in society? Equally important is the fact that there is no mention of the practice of concubinage found in the Holy Quran. Is it not the purpose of a religion to nurture goodness in the human soul and save it from the clutches of degeneration? It is for this reason the Holy Quran is so specific in giving the minutest details about gender relationships and human relationships in general. The Holy Quran discourages free intermixing of the sexes as a preventive measure to avoid such pitfalls of the human flesh and mind. The only form of sexual relationship that Islam allows is through the institution of marriage.

No doubt, women of the days of ignorance in pre-Islamic Arab society were treated as personal possessions. They lacked individuality, were inherited as pieces of property and held against their will. At times, they were kept in temporary marriage and shared by many men. Polygamy, and out-of-marriage relationships had no limitations placed on them. Concubinage, or cohabitation and illicit sexual relationship of a male

and a female slave, was undoubtedly practiced in Arabia before Islam. The concubines were slaves or prisoners of war. And some Muslims may have practiced it, but only until the revelation of the following verse:

*And marry those among you who are single, and those who are fit among your male slaves and your female slaves. If they are needy, Allah will make them free from want out of His grace. And Allah is Ample-giving, Knowing. (24:32)*

This verse established freedom of the female slaves through the institution of marriage, just like any other woman. The practice of concubinage was, accordingly, abolished by Islam.

### Holy Quran's Directive for Marriage and Chastity

Islam is a practical religion that raises the collective consciousness of members of a society. Accordingly, it firmly establishes the importance of the institution of marriage, as opposed to relations such as concubinage. The need for procreation and gradual strengthening of the bond of love, compassion and kindness, all stem from the lawful practice of marriage. These morals are instilled only through marriage and gradually extend from the married couple to their family and from there into the broader community, the nation and to the world at large. A human being in a married state is more conscious of his/her rights and duties and is more willing to step up and take responsibility for the whole family. This is not true in the case of unlawful cohabitation, where either side can just walk away at the slightest argument, leaving the other party economically, emotionally and morally vulnerable. Islam is the custodian of human rights and prescribes a code of ethics to live with other human beings.

In chapter 24 of the Holy Quran, preventive measures (by both males and females) in intimate relations are dealt with. It must be remembered that the Holy Quran recognizes the importance of chastity and modesty of both men and women, alike. This further facilitates an understanding of the significance of marriage and the negation of concubinage in Islam.

*Say to the believing men that they lower their gaze and restrain their sexual passions. That is purer for them. Surely Allah is Aware of what they do.*

*And say to the believing women that they lower their gaze and restrain their sexual passions and do not display their adornment except what appears thereof. And let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms. And they should not display their adornment except to their husbands or their*

*fathers, or the fathers of their husbands, or their sons, or the sons of their husbands, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or those whom their right hands possess, or guileless male servants, or the children who know not women's nakedness. And let them not strike their feet so that the adornment that they hide may be known. And turn to Allah all, O believers, so that you may be successful.*

*And marry those among you who are single, and those who are fit among your male slaves and your female slaves. If they are needy, Allah will make them free from want out of His grace. And Allah is Ample-giving, Knowing.*

*And let those who cannot find a match keep chaste, until Allah makes them free from want out of His grace. And those of your slaves who ask for a writing (of freedom), give them the writing, if you know any good in them, and give them of the wealth of Allah which He has given you. And compel not your slave-girls to prostitution when they desire to keep chaste, in order to seek the frail goods of this world's life. And whoever compels them, then surely after their compulsion Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.*

*And certainly We have sent to you clear messages and a description of those who passed away before you, and an admonition to those who guard against evil. (24:30-32)*

The following points emerge from these verses:

1. Both believing men (v.30) and believing women (v.31) are to control their gaze and hold back sexual desires in the company of the opposite sex.
2. Women are asked to not show their adornment, other than their face and hands, except to the different categories of persons mentioned in verse 31 [husbands, fathers, sons, those whom their right hands possess (which means male and female slaves who were acquired during war), or male servants who are working with an honest intent to earn money and had no other motive]. This is to make it more practical and comfortable for the women to work around their house in the presence of these people.
3. Men are told (v.30) that by obeying Allah in matters of modesty it is purer for them, and Allah is Aware of their intentions and actions if they behave otherwise. Does this not mean that they are to reserve their gaze and sexual passions for their wives only?

4. If an out-of-marriage relationship with a female slave was acceptable in Islam, then would it make any difference if this lustful behavior of a man was also directed to any female that came his way? Was this not the behavior that was condemned by Islam and the type of society from which women were pulled out and raised to a respectable position?
5. Women are asked to follow the guidelines of modesty in their dress and behavior, as this is what will make them successful. By maintaining such a humble disposition, they will enjoy both moral and spiritual success.
6. In verse 32 it is important to note that it is not just female slaves but also male slaves with whom marriage is allowed. Would this not mean that believing women can also marry male slaves? If so, then why is so much importance given to female slaves only and not male slaves as well? Does the Holy Quran not mention both.
7. The males who cannot afford to give dowry for marriage are to:
  - a. Remain chaste and not indulge in out-of-marriage relationships.
  - b. Not force slave girls into prostitution. Reference is made here to, Abd Allah ibn Ubayy, the leader of the hypocrites who kept slave girls for prostitution. This behavior was prevalent in pre Islamic Arabia.
  - c. Memorialize their freedom in writing, if they so desire.
8. Verse 34 emphasizes the clarity of the messages from Allah, and also the description of the previous nations and people who indulged in unlawful practices.

Clearly, the detailed prescriptions on marriage, the general rules governing relations between the sexes, and the moral quality of modesty inherent in these lessons, all refute the remotest possibility of concubinage being an accepted practice according to Islam.

Moreover, the following verse also provides permission to marry slaves who come under one's control during times of war (i.e. what your right hand possess):

*And if you fear that you cannot do justice to orphans, marry such women as seem good to you, two, or three, or four; but if you fear that you will not do justice, then (marry) only one or that which your right hands possess. This is more proper that you may not do injustice. (4:3)*

This verse (4:3), which gives permission to marry slaves (i.e. prisoners of war) must be read in conjunction with 4:25, which states:

*And whoever among you cannot afford to marry free believing women, (let him marry) such of your believing maidens as your right hands possess. And Allah knows best your faith — you are (sprung) the one from the other. So marry them with the permission of their masters, and give them their dowries justly, they being chaste, not fornicating, nor receiving paramours; then if they are guilty of adultery when they are taken in marriage, they shall suffer half the punishment for free married women. This is for him among you who fears falling into evil. And that you abstain is better for you. And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. (4:25)*

The following points emerge from this verse:

1. Those who can afford to give a dowry, according to their means, should marry believing women.
2. Those who cannot afford to give a dowry can give freedom to a believing maiden through marriage.
3. The “masters” referred to in this verse were the guardians who were assigned to give protection to the female prisoners of war. If marriage with the prisoners of war was only allowed under strict guidelines, then it is irrational to believe a master to have been able to have out-of-marriage relationship with them. Marriage is the only means by which one is permitted to engage in a legal sexual relationship. The only right that a master could reasonably claim would be that he does not require the permission of anybody else; that is, he himself could marry a slave (prisoner of war) and give the slave his/her freedom, without seeking anyone else's permission.
4. The believing maidens could be given in marriage to others through permission from their masters, and their individual right of consent. The idea behind this was to ensure their freedom and chastity.
5. Equality and justice is to be afforded to believing women, both free and slaves.
6. Chastity of the slaves is to be respected, through the contract of marriage.
7. Fornication, prostitution and having secret relationships are unlawful (with special reference to slaves).
8. Punishment of the slaves for adultery is half that of the free believing persons.

9. Marriage entails consent, contract with witnesses, dowry (according to one's means), and public announcement.
10. The believers are reminded that all these steps of self-restraint are beneficial for their own spiritual growth. Such persons are afraid of falling short of their commitment to their oaths with Allah. His Beneficence, Mercy and Forgiveness are for those who repent and restrain.

Accordingly, the Holy Quran gives permission to both men and women to marry slaves; just as men are given permitted to marry female slaves, so too are women allowed to marry male slaves.

Cohabitation outside of marriage is ruled out. The only kind of sexual relationship lawful with either a male or a female slave is through marriage. Both men and women are asked to marry those who are single (reference is to single free believers) or from the slaves (who could be married or unmarried.) It must be borne in mind that the slaves were captives from wars, who came from the enemy side and were non-Muslims. The male slaves were set free to go back, or stay. This was true in the case of women slaves as well. They were set free and those who accepted Islam were given the choice of marriage with a Muslim. Marriage of such women afforded them protection. For if they were to return to their homes, they would not have been readily accepted by their families due to two reasons. First, they would not be accepted for having changed their religion, and second, they would have been suspected of being ravaged in captivity, as was the prevailing practice by most others at the time. This would have jeopardized not only their lives, but also may have compromised their newly discovered Islamic faith. The slave women were set free, given respect and shelter from the challenges of the outside world, not forced into prostitution to support themselves, and a chance to get married and be part of a lawful, loving relationship.

In further support of these arguments is the example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. The Holy Prophet Muhammad had taken two women as wives out of the prisoners of war: Safiyyah (from among the Jews) and Juwairiyah (from among the Bani Mustalaq). They were not concubines but lawfully married wives, taken as wives in as honorable a manner as any of the others. If there was any difference, it was that their freedom was considered as their dowry. Thus, the Prophet's example shows that when a prisoner of war was elevated to the status of a wife, she was also set free. Mary the Copt was sent as a gift from the King of Egypt at a time when there was no war. On her way, she became a Muslim and the Holy Prophet Muhammad married her. She was called "Mother of Believers", like other wives of the Holy Prophet Muhammad were called. Concubinage was customary amongst non-Muslims,

but it certainly was not practiced by Muslims. It was abolished as one of the many reforms for the uplifting of the social and moral status of women in Islam.

### Conclusion

When trying to understand the Islamic perspective of a particular issue, the hierarchy of primary sources of the religion needs to be understood. The Holy Quran is the primary source for all beliefs and practices. The Hadith is a secondary source, which must be verified with the Holy Quran as to its legitimacy and correct application. Regarding the issue of slavery, it is abundantly clear that Islam promotes the protection of human rights for all regardless of gender, race or creed and, therefore, does not condone such a practice. To the contrary, Islam aims at freeing individuals from all forms of bondage, whether physical, political, mental or spiritual. In particular, concubinage (a form of slavery in which women normally suffer) was to be eradicated with the advent of Islam by restricting conjugal relations to the institution of marriage, and by emphasizing marrying of slaves in order to free them. This was the example set by the Holy Prophet, which confirms the correctness of his view. ■

### Reference:

1. These considerations are reproduced from "The Ideal Prophet", by Khwaja Kamal-u-Din.

## Lessons on the Quran

### Sura Al-Baqarah Section 24

By Fazeel S. Khan, Esq.

*[Lahore Ahmadiyya members in various cities in the USA gather each week for a Quran study group via skype. The study group commenced with lessons from Sura Al-Fatihah and continued with a subsequent section of the Quran every week. Members take turns presenting on a particular section, and discussion from all participants follow. This article is based on a lesson presented to the study group by the Editor. It deals with Section 24 of Sura Al-Baqarah.]*

Today, we'll be discussing Section 24 of Sura Al Bakarah. There are a variety of issues raised in this section. The section begins by mentioning the "moon" and its significance. Then, there are the specific provisions related to "fighting in self-defense". This follows with guidance on "spending in the way of Allah". And the section ends with reference to accomplishing the "pilgrimage".

The section is titled "Fighting in Defense" by Maulana Muhammad Ali in his translation and commentary, and for good reason: the concept of permissible or justifiable war in Islam is addressed in this sec-

tion. While studying this section, a broader theme came to mind: that of “keeping one’s duty”. The reminder to “keep one’s duty” is stressed repeatedly in this section:

- In the very first verse (v.189), it states: “he is righteous who **keeps his duty**” and then again “and **keep your duty** to Allah, that you may be successful”
- In the middle of this section (v.194), it is repeated: “and **keep your duty** to Allah, and know that Allah is with those who **keep their duty**”
- And in the last verse (v.198) we read: “And **keep your duty** to Allah, and know that Allah is Severe in requiting (evil)”.

The various subjects addressed in this section seem to provide examples or illustrations for us on what “keeping one’s duty” entails (in both the spiritual and temporal spheres).

### Verse 189

Verse 189 begins by stating:

*They ask thee of the new moons. Say: They are times appointed for men, and (for) the pilgrimage.*

As Maulana Muhammad Ali explains in his commentary, the appearance of the new moons holds special significance due to the holy months being recognized by them. And the reference to the significance of the new moons at this juncture of the Chapter seems appropriate due to the subject matter of the previous and subsequent sections. The previous section dealt with “fasting” and the one that follows deals with “pilgrimage”. With regard to fasting, the timing of Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr are both connected with the appearance of the new moon and so too is the timing of when pilgrimage can be performed and when Eid-ul-Adha takes place.

The moon, however, also holds a special significance in the spiritual realm. As we know, just as the Prophet Muhammad has been referred to as the “light-giving sun” (33:46), the moon represents those holy persons (*auliyas*) who follow the example of the Holy Prophet to such an extent that they become a manifestation of him and are able to reflect that light on to others, just as the moon reflects the light of the sun on to the earth. And this seems to be the first lesson in this section on “keeping one’s duty”. That keeping one’s duty not only entails seeking the new moons for purposes of partaking in the religious observances, but also modeling our lives after the Holy Prophet Muhammad. Just as the moon goes around the sun in its orbit, so too are we to pattern our lives around the example of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, and reflect or demonstrate those lessons and teachings in our daily lives.

And the verse goes on to state:

*And it is not righteousness that you enter the houses by their backs, but he is righteous who keeps his duty. And go into the houses by their doors; and keep your duty to Allah, that you may be successful.*

MMAli explains that the reference to entering houses by their doors and not by their backs may be due to certain superstitious practices held by the Arabs, and goes on to explain that “entering by the back indicates turning aside from the right course, while entering by the doors signifies sticking to the right course”. In line with the theme of “keeping one’s duty”, it appears that it is being intimated that in terms of spiritual development one can’t cut corners (or sneak in so to speak), but rather must follow a steady path. Like the moon follows its course orbiting around the sun, not diverting from its steady path, “success” for us lies in following the steady course of being dutiful, not seeking quick fixes to attain “righteousness”. The last verse in this section mentions the *hajj* (or pilgrimage), that event in which people the world-over journey to Mecca to be before the Kabba (or the “House of Allah”, as it is referred to). The pilgrimage is viewed as the last of the pillars of Islam and many people plan on performing this duty late in their lives under the impression that its performance washes away all of one’s past sins. The lesson we may learn from this is that such thoughts of short cuts to righteousness are not supported in the Quran; although we are to strive to accomplish this pillar of the faith and attend to the House of Allah, we are not to be unmindful of all of the various houses of opportunities and trials and circumstances we find in our lives every day; being dutiful and entering those houses in the proper way, we are told, is what leads to righteousness.

### Verses 190 to 194

The next 5 verses deal with regulations on fighting or war. They provide a very clear outline of the circumstances under which fighting is permissible or justified.

Verse 190 and 191 state:

*And fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you but be not aggressive. Surely Allah loves not the aggressors.*

*And kill them wherever you find them, and drive them out from where they drove you out, and persecution is worse than slaughter. And fight not with them at the Sacred Mosque until they fight with you in it; so if they fight you (in it), slay them. Such is the recompense of the disbelievers.*

Here, we are clearly told that Muslims are permitted to fight “against those who fight against you”. The clear implication being that fighting in Islam can only be for purposes of self-defense. This is clarified further by the

verse going on to expressly state: “*but be not aggressive. Surely Allah loves not the aggressors*”. And despite such clear provisions on when fighting is permissible or justified, we routinely have critics of Islam quote the beginning part of the next verse (v.191) in support of the view that Islam requires Muslims to be in a constant state of war with infidels (or non-Muslims) and mandates aggressive force for the expansion of the faith. The infamous phrase at the beginning part of Verse 191 states: “*And kill them wherever you find them*”. If the previous verse was not enough to show the context in which this phrase is employed, the latter part of this very sentence itself clarifies that this is applicable only when engaged in a defensive war. As the verse continues: “*and drive them out from where they drove you out, and persecution is worse than slaughter.*” There is no mention of driving them out of their lands so that Islam will spread and dominate those areas. What is stated is that when war is engaged in because you were attacked (and driven out from your lands) and were persecuted, under those circumstances, during the time of war, you are to kill the enemy wherever you find them. This should not be shocking, as this is what is done in war. And the manner in which permissible war was to be conducted was strictly regulated Holy Prophet Muhammad and the Righteous Caliphs. Women and children were not to be harmed, monks and priests and the elderly were not to be harassed, places of worship and trees/crops were not to be mutilated. All of these rules show that **only** those who were the aggressors and were interested in attacking the Muslims were to be engaged.

The next 2 verses continue to reinforce the *defensive* nature of permitted war in Islam. They state:

*But if they desist, then surely Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.*

*And fight them until there is no more persecution, and religion is only for Allah. But if they desist, then there should be no hostility expect against the oppressors.*

Such strict limits and clear conditions on fighting are not found in any other scripture. It is simply amazing how it is possible for the Quran to be perceived by many non-Muslims as a book of violence. But what is even more disconcerting is finding some Muslims themselves (those who have access to the Quran and recite it in their daily prayers) also believing that Islam condones aggressive warfare for purposes of expansion of the faith.

And verse 194 brings our attention to the second lesson on “keeping one’s duty”; it states:

*The sacred month for the sacred month, and retaliation (is allowed) in sacred things.*

*Whoever then acts aggressively against you, inflict injury on him according to the injury he has inflicted on you and keep your duty to Allah, and know that Allah is with those who keep their duty.*

Quite opposite to encouraging Muslims to fight, the significance of this verse (made clear when read along with the previous ones) is that like everything we encounter in life, we can use what is before us in a good or a bad way. From our lesson on Sura Fatiha we know that as humans we have natural inclinations or drives and when channeled in the appropriate way, those desires can become moral qualities. These “primary” drives are for wealth, property, control or power and sex. And wars are always based on attempts to attain or secure acquisition of such things. So, the lesson here appears to be that giving in to one’s inner passions and fighting for these causes is not “keeping one’s duty”. The true intention for fighting in Islam is actually based on “self-sacrifice”. A couple of sections later in v.216 we are told: “*Fighting is enjoined on you, though it is disliked by you; and it may be that you dislike a thing while it is good for you, and it may be that you love a thing while it is evil for you; and Allah knows while you know not.*” So, although fighting is usually perceived as a bad thing, we are told here that fighting to maintain justice is actually a moral quality. Though we may perceive a pious person to be completely averse to inflicting injury to another, we are told that maintaining justice is a sacrifice that is required in the real world. This is the real significance of fighting in Islam: standing up for the persecuted, the oppressed and the disadvantaged. Fighting must be for these purposes *only*, and that is within “keeping one’s duty”, not giving in to the temptations of fighting to satisfy one’s base/animal desires. This understanding of what fighting entails clarifies what is meant by the phrase “*fighting in the way of Allah*”: not fighting for your own selfish gains, but for a higher cause and for the betterment of humanity. Further, although the conditions for fighting in the physical sense may not be present today, understanding the nature of the significance of this effort allows one to seek opportunities to satisfy the underlying meaning of the cause. Today, we may still fight to maintain justice and stand up for the disadvantaged, whether it be by volunteering in community activities geared towards helping others, by participating in advocacy efforts aimed at improving the societies in which we live, by choices we make in the political process to advance equality and fairness for all, etc.

#### Verse 195

And Verse 195 seems to reinforce this principle; it states:

*And spend in the way of Allah and cast not yourselves to perdition with your own hands*

*and do good (to others). Surely Allah loves the doers of good.*

Just as we are told to sacrifice by “fighting in the way of Allah”, so that justice may be maintained, we are also told to sacrifice by “spending in the way of Allah” and “doing good to others”. And we are told in this verse that such sacrifices and struggles are the key to preventing one’s self from steering off onto the wrong path towards perdition.

### Verse 196

Verse 196 states:

*And accomplish the pilgrimage and the visit for Allah. But if you are prevented, (send) whatever offering is easy to obtain; and shave not your heads until the offering reaches its destination. Then whoever among you is sick or has an ailment of the head, he (may effect) a compensation by fasting or alms or sacrificing. And when you are secure, whoever profits by combining the visit with the pilgrimage (should take) whatever offering is easy to obtain. But he who cannot find (an offering) should fast for three days during the pilgrimage and for seven days when you return. These are ten (days) complete. This is for him whose family is not present in the Sacred Mosque. And keep your duty to Allah, and know that Allah is Severe in requiting (evil).*

In the final verse of this section, the *hajj* and *ummrah* (or “the visit” as MMAlI translates it) is mentioned and some of the specific observances that take place during these practices are outlined. This verse seems to be a prelude to the main subject matter in the next section.

And just as we discussed in the previous section concerning fasting, with the pilgrimage as well, the Quran provides possible forms of redemption for those unable to perform it. In fact, with whatever practice is prescribed – whether prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, rules concerning diet, etc. – the Quran expressly permits reasonable accommodations to be made under extenuating circumstances. Contrary to popular belief, the words of the Quran paint a very different picture than the strict and rigid religion that others try to make it out to be.

The last point I’ll make before concluding is about the reference to the pilgrimage in this last verse. I wondered why mention of the pilgrimage was made in this section, and how it connected with the subject matter being addressed. Seeing that the next section deals almost exclusively with the subject of *hajj*, it seemed that it would have been more appropriately included therein. After thinking about it for a while, I realized that the key elements of the pilgrimage can actually be

seen as representations of the lessons discussed in this section. For instance:

- Reference is first made to the “moon”. And like the moon orbiting around the sun (the center of our solar system) in a steady course, the pilgrims who have journeyed to Mecca circuit around the *kabbah* (the physical center of the faith) in a most beautiful display of balanced and continual movement.
- Reference is then made to the struggles and fights we must engage in to establish justice. And during the pilgrimage we find the pilgrims performing physically exerting tasks, like running between Saffa and Marwah, memorializing Hazrat Hagira’s efforts to “fight in the way of Allah” by sacrificing, not for her own benefit, but for her infant child and for the overall mission of Prophet Abraham.
- Reference is then made to sacrificing by “spending in the way of Allah”. And at Eid-ul-Adha, at the end of the pilgrimage, sacrifice of an animal is the prominent ritual, a representation of killing the animal within (the true significance of spending or sacrificing), and a method by which charity to the needy is performed.

May Almighty Allah assist us in our striving to “keep our duty”. Ameen. ■

## Responding to Abuse of the Holy Prophet and Islam

Patience and Tolerance is Key

By Maulana Muhammad Ali

(Translated into English by Dr. Mohammed Ahmad)

*[This article is a transcript of a Jummah Khutba (sermon) delivered by Maulana Muhammad Ali on March 22, 1929. In this sermon, Maulana Muhammad Ali examines an issue that is very applicable to current times: that is, the appropriate response to abuse of the Holy Prophet Muhammad and Islam. Maulana Muhammad Ali methodologically discusses this issue by first addressing the source of the popular myths concerning this matter and then providing an explanation of the response that is actually mandated by the Quran and Hadith. With the recent attack on the U.S. Embassy in Libya, purportedly in response to a tasteless independent film about the Holy Prophet Muhammad, this article is a timely reminder that misguided actions by certain Muslims should not automatically be conflated with what the religion of Islam actually prescribes.]*



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

Neither those who disbelieve from among the People of the Book, nor the polytheists, like that any good should be sent down to you from your Lord. And Allah chooses whom He pleases for His Mercy; and Allah is the Lord of mighty grace. (2:104,105)

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

#### **Difference between Books of *Hadith* (Tradition), and *Sirat* (Biography)**

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

#### **The Holy Quran and reports of *Sirat***

I have deeply pondered in this matter and have come to the conclusion that these reports are not even remotely connected with the persona of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The more we reflect upon the Holy Qur'an, we can see clearly that the Holy Prophet's character ascended far above such triviality. In fact, the Holy Qur'an is the only authority which keeps us on the right course. These reports have been tainted to a great degree by the thought process of the narrator. Whatever understanding of certain occurrences the narrator had, he described it according to his own perception. In particular they have greatly misunderstood the causes of the battles in which the Holy Prophet took part. The process of collecting these reports occurred at a time

when Muslims had power and kingdom. Their mental attitude was that of a dominant power, where use of aggression against other nations was not considered objectionable. As a result of this mind set such reports made their way into books of *Sirat*.

#### **Qur'anic Directive**

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

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

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

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

#### **Holy Prophet's Conduct in Dealing with Slanderers**

You are all aware that among Muslims there is a prevalent idea that whosoever abuses the Holy Prophet should be put to death. I have explored this issue, and found it in contradiction of the Qur'anic teachings. As I have pointed out, the Holy Quran gives clear instruc-

tions to bear slander with patience, tolerance and benevolence. We find incidents in the life of the Holy prophet in which he faced such circumstances, yet he never responded in the manner commonly perceived by the Muslims and which they attribute to him. Take for example the case of Abdullah bin Ubayy. In one of the campaigns outside Medina, he threatened the Muslims thus: “Upon return to Medina, we shall see how the respected and honored inhabitants will expel the wretched ones.” In spite of this insolence he was not reprimanded by the Holy Prophet for it.

### **Harmful Effects of Intolerance and Rage**

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

### **Response to Abuse**

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

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

The Holy Qur’an extols the Holy Prophet in the following words: “And hadst thou been rough, heard-hearted, they would certainly have dispersed from around thee.”

(3:159). This is the principal of strengthening an organization. A person should not be abrasive, but instead be so kind hearted as to tolerate abusive language and be ready to forgive. The Holy Qur’an contains such teaching in abundance. In one verse it states: “And say to my servants that they speak what is best. Surely the devil sows dissension among them.” (17:53). Another verse tells us: “Repel (evil) with what is best (41:34). And if you adopt this attitude, you will find that, “he between whom and thee is enmity would be as if he were a warm friend.” (41:34).

### **Essence of Qur’anic Teaching**

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

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

### **The Question of Apology**

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

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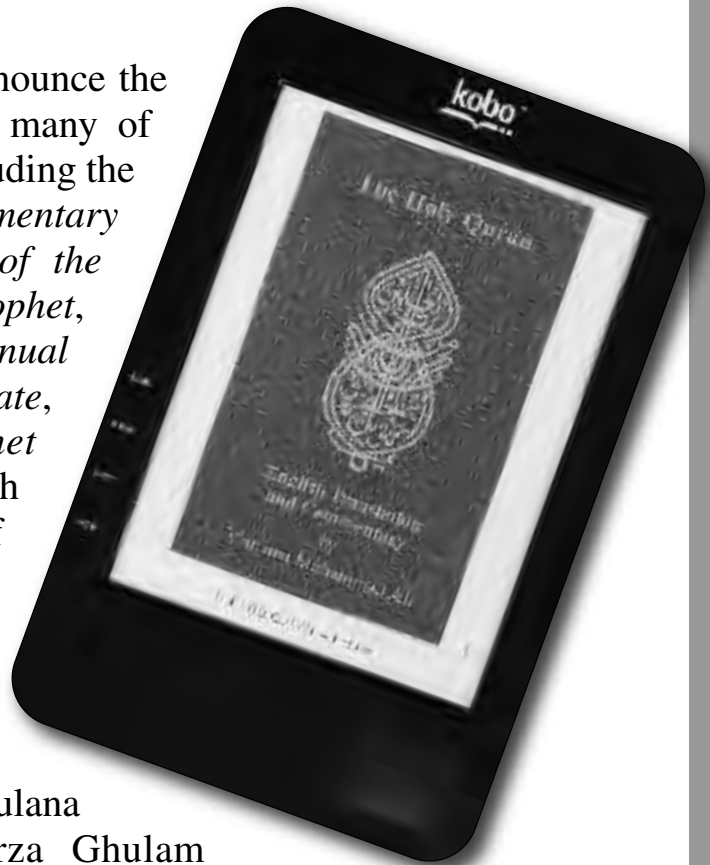
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