

“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

**January – March 2014**

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. ◆

**The Light** was founded in 1921 as the organ of the AHMADIYYA ANJUMAN ISHA'AT ISLAM (Ahmadiyya Association for the Propagation of Islam) of Lahore, Pakistan. **The Islamic Review** was published in England from 1913 for over 50 years, and in the U.S.A. from 1980 to 1991. The present periodical represents the beliefs of the worldwide branches of the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam, Lahore.

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The main objective of the A.A.I.I.L. is to present the true, original message of Islam to the whole world — Islam as it is found in the Holy Quran and the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, obscured today by grave misconceptions and wrong popular notions.

Islam seeks to attract the **hearts and minds** of people towards the truth, by means of reasoning and the natural beauty of its principles.

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

**International:** It recognizes prophets being raised among all nations and requires Muslims to believe in them all. Truth and goodness can be found in all religions. God treats all human beings equally, regardless of race, nationality or religion.

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

**Tolerant:** Gives full freedom to everyone to hold and practise any creed or religion. Requires us to tolerate differences of belief and opinion.

**Rational:** In all matters, it urges use of human reason and knowledge. Blind following is condemned and independence of thought is granted.

**Inspiring:** Worship is not a ritual, but provides living contact with a Living God, Who answers prayers and speaks to His righteous servants even today as in the past.

**Non-sectarian:** Every person professing Islam by the words **La ilaha ill-Allah, Muhammad-ur rasul-ullah** (There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah) is a Muslim. A Muslim cannot be expelled from Islam by anyone.

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

#### About ourselves

Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore has branches in many countries including:

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

#### History:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Reviving the Classical Wisdom of Islam in the Cherokee Tradition

By Dr. Robert Dickson Crane

*[Dr. Robert Dickson Crane (born March 26, 1929) is the former adviser to the late President of the United States Richard Nixon, and is former Deputy Director (for Planning) of the United States National Security Council. Dr. Crane officially accepted Islam at the age of 50 years old, and has been a Muslim activist since the early 1980s. He founded and held prominent positions in various public policy and research organizations aimed at advancing Islamic education, including being the founding President of the American Muslim Bar Association. Dr. Crane has co-authored over a dozen books (mostly dedicated to geo-political and foreign policy issues) and is an editor of the online magazine "The American Muslim". In this article, Dr. Crane presents a fascinating perspective on Islamic influences on the Cherokee tradition and, in doing so, provides an insightful view on the origins of modern America.]*

### The Greatest Event in Five Hundred Years

On September 21, 2004, the National Museum of the American Indian opened on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., after a highly successful fund-raising drive, largely among Native American tribal leaders. This culminates a history of false starts and false pretenses.

When asked in January, 2004, what the purpose of the new Museum of the American Indian is, its director, Dr. Richard West, Jr., affirmed that every display and every project and every part of the museum is to affirm the constitutional sovereignty of Native American nations and to preserve their spiritual heritage for future generations.

The grand parade of 25,000 Native Americans representing more than two hundred nations, tribes, and bands in all their traditional finery proceeded for two hours eastward down the mall toward the Capitol building to the adjacent museum which had been off-limits and now was to be opened to the public. Maria Cuch, a Ute from Utah, exclaimed, "Life and culture is not about an object or even a building. It is about the people. You can stand here and look at the movement of people and it is like blood, the blood coming into it and bringing it alive." This introduced a celebration with story-telling and dances through the day and all through the night.

The museum itself is a quarter-billion dollar masterpiece of art that fills the last open space on the mall with

a breathtaking creation resembling a natural geological formation from the American Southwest. Its interior exhibits are designed entirely by Native Americans and portray a history that has been secret for more than a century, including original copies of the official governmental decrees that were designed to eliminate Native Americans from existence and from historical memory. Countless separate rooms were designed by individual nations and tribes to portray not merely their past but especially what they have to offer America in the future. For the first time, the smaller tribes were given equal priority with the larger ones, because they have been the most vulnerable to extermination.

A Cherokee chiropractor from Colorado, Nate Mayfield, exclaimed that, "This is the greatest thing to happen to Indian people in 500 years." Daphne Strickland, a member of the Lumbee-Tuscarora (both related to the Cherokee) stated, "This represents a healing, a coming together. We have survived a holocaust in the Americas, and the story has not been told. This is the beginning of telling the story."

The spiritual heritage of individual nations in the great Native American community can be preserved only by their members, because anthropologists, government bureaucrats, and even academics either consciously or unconsciously, have their own agendas. Even within each nation, individual clans and groups differ in their own favorite origin stories and prefer their own historical spin. This diversity must be preserved, because its wisdom is part of the visions of past, present, and future that native legends say will be passed on to enrich people from foreign lands.

The Cherokee origin story highlighted at the museum comes from the Eastern Band of Cherokees, who succeeded in eluding the government troops that in 1839 drove most of the Cherokees westward from Georgia and the Carolinas to Oklahoma in the middle of winter. In this museum they had the freedom to ignore the official anthropological studies that imposed outsiders' versions of their religion and history.

Perhaps someday another native history of the Cherokees will also be given prominence. This is the tradition that the Cherokee religion came from a great fleet of ships that brought "The Book" out of the East. This has been rejected as "heresy" by some "authorities," both Anglo and Indian. What is the truth? No-one can say for sure, but this origin story deserves original research in the vast amount of materials still waiting to be mined for details.

### The Tradition of the Ani Waya

One source, according to my family's tradition, is the Ani Waya Clan. Of the original seven Cherokee clans,

three were officially disestablished by the federal government in 1905, when the Cherokee system of representative government was abolished in favor of a single chief appointed by the President of the United States and when the Cherokee religion was declared to be subversive and was officially abolished. One of these three was the Ani Waya, which means Clan of the Wolf. The function of this clan was to preserve the religion and the traditions.

After the loss of the written tradition, the oral history of the Cherokee religion passed down through the Ani Waya to what are called the traditionalists, including the present author's great uncle Joseph Franklin Bever (who had another name in Oklahoma). He was one of the last formally trained Cherokee imams. He called the athan every morning, but when challenged he replied simply that he was calling the hogs. Like all Cherokees, he started every prayer with "Ya Allah." All the prophets, starting with Abraham, are honored in the tradition. Until 1895, the Cherokees held the hajj, with tawaf, on the land of Uncle Henry Bever (spelled Beaver among the Oklahoma Ani Waya) three miles southwest of Hillsboro, Indiana. The remnants of this hajj, including the sai, can still be seen on a large flat meadow surrounded by swamp on three sides and by a steep hill to the East. The last custodian of this sacred land lived along the stream immediately to the north when I lived a mile away until shortly after Pearl Harbor.

Until the last hajj in 1895, Cherokees came all the way from Oklahoma to attend, but only those with native fluency in Cherokee were permitted to participate, including my great-grandmother, who was born seven years after the forced migration in 1839, known as the Trail of Tears, from North Carolina and Georgia to Oklahoma. She moved in 1855 to Indiana and in her old age helped raise me. The last of those who were trained by my great uncle was Ben Mitman, my second cousin, who died in April, 2004, at the age of 95, but left a written account of his life for his descendents. My father, John Bever Crane, died in 2001 at the age of 98, but left no written history. My great grandmother, who spoke only Cherokee after she announced that it was time to die, had coal black hair down to her waist when she was in her nineties. We have a home video of another of my great grandmothers dancing at the age of ninety-six at one of the last great Bever-Crane clan reunions. As a boy, I carefully listened to the stories of the "old timers" at the great clan reunions, but now I may be the last to remember.

The "Indian way" is not to build museums and, in fact, not to divulge the past publicly with its spiritual messages, because this would make it vulnerable to destruction.

Kitcheyan of the San Carlos Apaches in Arizona commented at the Grand Opening of the museum, "Old things were never show-cased. In our teachings those things are supposed to be passed on to someone else to be taken care of." This is similar to the custom of the Sufis in Islam, because those who would see the externals would fail to see the essence and would corrupt the truth. There is a time, however, for unveiling the truth in its various expressions, and the success of the museum is testimony that this time has come.

For the Cherokees, the Trail of Tears was the last of the great acts of ethnic cleansing that began with the American Revolution. The first period of genocide came when the younger generation sided with the British against the encroaching American settlers. The older traditionalists opposed war in principle and refused to be pawns in foreign wars. Although the wisdom of the traditionalists eventually triumphed in a feeble cultural renaissance after the American Revolution, this strategy of what Gandhi called satyagraha failed in the end. In 1839, despite the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court under Chief Justice John Marshall that the Removal Act of 1830 was illegal and that Cherokee sovereignty was higher than that of the State of Georgia, the president of the United States ordered the U.S. Army to drive the Cherokees in the middle of winter a thousand miles all the way to Oklahoma.

Although reportedly a third of them died en route while the federal troops watched, not all of this third actually died. Three groups broke off from the Trail of Tears, one going to Ohio and two to Indiana, because they feared extermination once they would arrive in Oklahoma. The Cherokee religion was best preserved for more than a century in an isolated Indiana group, because the Christian and U.S. governmental drive to stamp out the Cherokee religion in Oklahoma had significant success. My great uncle went from the other group near Hillsboro, Indiana, in 1903 at the age of 22 down to Oklahoma, where the formal religious training was headquartered.

The traditions were also maintained by the Eastern Band in North Carolina, but contact among the various groups of Cherokees gradually was lost during the century after the great removal. The tradition of the Ani Waya is that the almost nomadic history of the Cherokees should teach that the religion and culture are independent of both place and time because they are gifts to all humankind.

In 1905, after Franklin Joseph Bever had studied for two years at the seminary in Oklahoma, the U.S. government abolished the Cherokee religion and imprisoned everyone who performed the salah publically. The Katoowa Society was formed to fight back, but they

were crushed. It still exists today but its origins are now lost in legend. My great uncle then spent two years trying to organize all the Native American tribes to fight for religious freedom, but despite some interest among the Navajo, Hopi, Crow, and Blackfeet, he failed miserably and so went back to Indiana where I knew him as a boy. I was impressed because he knew the names of 269 plants.

### **Pre-Columbian History**

The true knowers of the Cherokee religion have kept it secret. The traditionalists who live isolated in the woods of western Arkansas and eastern Oklahoma told me when I was last there in 1970 as a personal emissary of President Nixon that when anthropologists come to study the religion, the traditionalists entertain them with a bunch of nonsense and then whoop with laughter when they see this nonsense printed in scholarly books.

According to the traditionalists, the Cherokee religion came in the form of a book that was brought in a great fleet of ships out of the east when the Cherokees lived on an island where it was never cold. After three generations, the bad people from the south killed almost everyone on all the islands and destroyed the book. The remainder of the Cherokees immigrated west to the Great Land.

Their mass migration from a tropical island in the Caribbean to the Yucatan Peninsula in the late 1300s was verified by the leading Meso-American archeologist, T. B. Irving (Al Hajji Ta'alim Ali). He was the only person who had recorded the relevant inscriptions. Twenty years ago, he said he would write up this history, but he died last year without ever doing so. I have visited the Yucatan and asked other Mesoamerican archeologists about this history, but they know nothing about it.

After some more generations, the number of which I have forgotten, the bad people attacked again. This time the Cherokees all migrated north and eastwards to find the lost book, because they knew that it came out of the east. This is the origin story according to the Ani Waya clan.

What this all means is open to modern research and interpretation. There is now thorough documentation of a great expedition of da'wa that the Emir of Mali, Abu Bakr, sent across the Atlantic in 1310 A.C. after he met Chinese Muslims in the hajj. Scholars do not seem to be clear on whether he was hoping to bring Islam to China or to America, because there is evidence that at least two earlier Muslim expeditions had visited America, one in 1100 going westward from Africa and the other in 1178 eastward from China. When the first expedition did not return, Emir Abu Bakr sent a second expedition

two years later in 1312, reportedly including Mandinga members from what is now Liberia. The detailed manifests of each of the Emir's ships are now of historical record.

In recent years hidden libraries have been found in Timbuktu on the southern edge of the Sahara Desert in Mali. I attended a conference in Mali's capital Bamako in 1999 but could not get permission to travel the 200 miles north to Timbuktu, because, I was told, the French-influenced government in Bamako wants to hide its great Islamic past. These libraries should be micro-filmed while they still exist in order to compare the practices of popular Islam with those of the Cherokees.

Although the customs of several tribes, some archeological evidence, and ethno-linguistic analysis give circumstantial evidence of this early presence of Islam in America, the only oral tradition, as far as I know, comes from my own ancestors in the Ani Waya tribe of the Cherokee. We are not supposed to interpret tradition, because this can introduce distortions, but the ancient Cherokee traditions of what is called simply the "people" (Ani Yunwiya) coincide with the devastating attacks by the Caribs from what is now Venezuela at the end of the 1300s. And Mayan inscriptions of the next century record the arrival of a great people from the east. The details about this people may be buried in the personal papers of the Muslim translator of the Qur'an, T. B. Irving. Early evidence of Islam may be found only by scholars who are specifically looking for it.

### **The Modern Period**

The history of the Cherokees after they arrived in the Carolinas is part of modern America, but it is not much clearer than their history in the earlier period, despite a wealth of documentary material and shelves of books on the subject.

Historians acknowledge that the Cherokees when first encountered by Europeans lived in large towns of several thousand people with two story brick buildings and an advanced system of legislative, executive, and judicial government. They also acknowledge that within two hundred years from 1600 to 1800 their population had been reduced to only a fraction of what it had been. This was part of the universal history of European colonialism, which managed to reduce the total native population in America from at least ten million to as little as a few hundred thousand. With this catastrophic disruption came a similar loss of their religious and cultural heritage, including, in the case of the Cherokees, the dilution of authentic Islam.

Some Western anthropologists have speculated that the Cherokee religion with its emphasis on a sophisti-

cated divine law and system of government may derive from a lost Jewish tribe, but this may be merely an attempt by Christian missionaries to hide the Cherokees' true Islamic identity.

Perhaps the best, recent research may be found in the book by Thomas E. Mails, *The Cherokee People: the Story of the Cherokees from Earliest Origins to Contemporary Times*, published by Marlow and Company. Mails leads the others in his conclusion that the remarkable similarities between the Abrahamic religions and the traditional Cherokee religion precede any possibility of adoption from European influences.

Like the others, however, he concludes that such similarities must come from the ancient Hebrews. This probably stems from his ignorance of Islam and his familiarity with the commonalities with the Jews in the Cherokee origin stories, including Adam and Eve, the flood, the Tower of Babel, Abraham, the crossing of the Red Sea, Moses, the wandering in the wilderness, and the ark. It is difficult to understand how he can ignore the fact that the traditionalist Cherokees started every prayer with Ya Allah and prayed five times a day and fasted during Ramadhan, though it is understandable that Mails does not know the Cherokee rituals of the Hajj, since these have been kept highly secret.

Unfortunately, only a knowledgeable Muslim would be able to mine the wealth of very difficult source material to compare this with Islam. The major original source, since the Cherokees had lost their written language long before they moved to what is now the United States, is the fourteen volume collection known as the John Howard Payne Papers, Ayer MS 689, in the Ayer Collection of Americana, Newberry Library of the University of Chicago. These are in miniscule handwriting and in script that is very difficult to decipher. The Payne papers are by Payne and by a couple of others who authored individual chapters, especially Daniel Sabin Butrick, who was a Christian missionary to the Cherokees from 1817 to 1847.

In another file on the Cherokees that probably is in my sister's historic stone barn in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, I have reference to a typewritten copy of the Payne originals prepared by his great granddaughter. She spent an entire year turning the almost illegible manuscript into readable copy. Payne, who lived from 1791 to 1852, unlike Butrick, was sympathetic to the Cherokees. His informants among the Cherokees were born as early as 1735 at a time when contact with outsiders had barely begun. Payne was a poet by trade and lived with the Cherokees during the period of their successful effort to gain U.S. Supreme Court acceptance of their sovereignty and their unsuccessful effort thereafter to stop their removal to

Oklahoma. One would have to examine the so-called Payne papers to determine what may be authentic scholarship on the Cherokees and what was propaganda and spin to demean them. My impression is that the unexpurgated Payne writings are available to whoever can find them or at least were until forty years ago. In all research on the wisdom of Islam in the Cherokee religion, one must beware of a long history of cultural genocide.

The earliest account of the Cherokees was James Adair's *The History of the American Indians*. He was a trader with the Cherokees in 1736 and first pointed out the identity of the Cherokee religion with Abrahamic sources. In 1888, James Mooney's *Myths of the Cherokee and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees* does not discuss these origins but does treat in detail Cherokee astronomy, which he learned about from Cherokees who were born as early as 1800. Other books, such as Haywood's of 1823 and Washburn's of 1869 should be compared with the more recent books, such as *The Eastern Cherokees* by William Harlen Gilbert, Jr. and others, which are stored, together with my most valuable books, in my sister's barn.

The more recent books in some ways are more objective, but the definitive history of the Cherokees, and especially analysis of the relation of Islam to the founding of America has yet to be written. This is the task of young American-born Muslims, because they know that other Americans fear what they do not know and that this history would show that Islam is not foreign to America.

### **The Original Founders of Modern America**

The Cherokee were Grandfathers of the Great American Experiment in the holistic symbiosis of order, justice, and liberty. Jefferson said that he borrowed the American system of government from the Iroquois confederation. If the Cherokee religion and political culture were introduced into America by Muslim settlers from North Africa two hundred years before Columbus "discovered" America, then it remains to be researched whether the Iroquois system of representative government comes from the Cherokee nation.

Jefferson was familiar with the Iroquois and maintained contact with the leaders of a great religious revival among the Iroquois from about 1800 to 1810. He spent some time with their greatest religious leader, known as Handsome Lake of the Seneca, and not only corresponded with him but invited him twice to the White House. The details are in *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* by Anthony F C Wallace, Vintage, 1972, 395 pages.

The origin of this religious rebirth, like that of the coeval rebirth among the Cherokee further south, lay in

their response to the destruction of the native way of life by the white settlers, especially by the introduction of alcohol and gambling, and by the destruction of the nuclear family and of moral community. It was also a reaction against the missionary efforts of the Christians who wanted the Iroquois to assimilate into Western society and disappear. Handsome Lake was convinced that his people could not adopt Christianity without adopting everything bad about Western society along with it.

Part of the spiritual quest by young American Muslims today should be to explore whether the religion that he revived was Islam as borrowed from the Cherokee, who had been adopted under the tribal name of Tuscarora into the Iroquois confederacy. By the year 1500, the Cherokee had established a vast trading empire in eastern North America, and a portion of them, known as the Tuscarora, moved from North Carolina to Iroquois country before the arrival of the first European settlers. The Tuscarora who lived with the Iroquois were the first to adopt Christianity as their religion, but the original religion of the Tuscarora was not the ancient Iroquois religion but Islam. This origin of the Seneca rebirth was not known to Wallace, but he recounts in detail the revival of this religion and Jefferson's admiration of it.

According to an article in *The Message*, published by the Islamic Society of North America, in July, 1996, the last Cherokee chief with a Muslim name was Ramadhan ibn Wati, who lived from 1806 to 1871 and governed during the time of the great split between the Union Cherokee and the Confederate Cherokee in the American Civil War. Chief (Emir) Ramadhan was a Confederate brigadier general who shared the South's opposition to the encroaching power of the industrialized North. He surrendered his command to President Lincoln on June 23, 1865, and his young son, Saladin Watie, named after the famous liberator of Jerusalem in 1187, Salah al Din, served in the Southern Cherokee delegation to sign a treaty of surrender in Washington, D.C.

The traditionalist Cherokee political system was based on governance from the bottom up, rather than from the top down as was common in Europe. The ultimate sovereign was Allah and he governed through the individual members of the Cherokee nation, each of whom carried the *amana* to be a representative of the divine on earth. The nation was composed of autonomous bands or clans, such as the *Ani Waya*. The members of each band chose their leaders through a system of indirect election of at least four communities. One community represented the warriors, one the reli-

gious leaders, and one the merchants. The fourth I believe may have been the judicial community. These four elected leaders in turn elected the head of the band, and the heads of the bands elected the leader of the nation.

This system today is known as constitutional or republican federalism. It contrasts with the system of absolutist democracy bound by popular majority rule, which all of America's founders condemned as inherently unjust and dangerous.

In times of trouble, women rose to prominence, especially to arbitrate between the young warriors who wanted to risk the lives of their sons and the elders who preached non-violence in all except the greatest threats to group survival. This matriarchal custom still existed at the time of the American Revolutionary War, according to Theda Perdue's "Cherokee Women and the Trail of Tears," published in *Journal of Women's History*, vol 1, 1989, pp. 14-17. But, the butchering of the Cherokees by the American settlers and their abandonment by the British undercut the traditionalists and nearly destroyed the entire set of cultural traditions that had survived for centuries since the time of the origins in the Caribbean. This period of Cherokee history, which exceeds in its tragedy even that of the Trail of Tears, and the role of the Cherokee women is described in Tom Hatley's book, *The Dividing Paths: Cherokees and South Carolinians through the Era of the Revolution*, Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 220 ff.

The Cherokee leaders often were known by Anglo names. The most famous was Nancy Ward, who was known as the principal *Ghigau* of the Cherokee Nation, a term translated by the colonialists as "war-leader." In fact, she was the principal peace leader, as described in Norma Tucker's article, "Nancy Ward: *Ghigau* of the Cherokees," in *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, vol. 53, 1969.

She persuaded the Raven of Chota, who was the war leader of the principal Cherokee town, to seek peace. As the official emissary of the entire nation, she persuaded Jefferson's emissary, Arthur Campbell, to declare an armistice or truce prior to the signing of a peace treaty. Unfortunately, according to Campbell's own diary, "I wished first to visit the vindictive part of the nation ... and to destroy the whole as much as possible by destroying their habitations and provisions." Although he had spared Chota in the past out of respect for Nancy Ward, he attacked in the middle of winter and commenced to destroy a thousand houses, fifty thousand bushels of corn, and all but a few small towns. The Raven of Chota reported later, as recorded in O'Donnell, *Southern Indians in the American Revolution*, pp. 118-119, the Virginians "dyed their

hands in the blood of many of our women and children, burnt 17 towns, and destroyed all our provisions by which we and our families were almost destroyed by famine this Spring.”

Jefferson was a Virginia politician so he did what was politically correct. But, at the same time, he was impressed by the Cherokee traditionalists, including the women leaders at the time of their maximum tragedy, who tried to practice what Mahatma Gandhi called satyagraha or peaceful defense based on spiritual power. This is a well established practice in Islamic history (see the section on heroes in [www.theamericanmuslim.org], but needs much further research.

The Iroquois adopted the best of the Cherokee religion, and this is what most impressed Jefferson in later years. The religion as revived by Handsome Lake opposed both cultural assimilation, which is suicide, and cultural nativism, which is the continuation of a culture based on worship of one’s own ethnic group rather than on the enlightened understanding of divine revelation and natural law. According to Wallace’s book, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca*, Handsome Lake’s primary message consisted of four basic principles:

1. All people came from the same source, a transcendent God, and thus are equal in dignity.
2. All religions are legitimate paths to God. Therefore one should not blame the Christians for not accepting the divine revelation that he was reviving. They should follow their religion until they understand that the religion that he was reviving teaches a truer knowledge of God.
3. Violence results from ignorance of true religion. Therefore knowledge is the most powerful weapon against war, and war is almost never the best solution to conflict. And
4. More important than knowledge is love of the transcendent God, because love is the path to knowledge.

Much research remains to be done to connect Jefferson’s then unique concept of federalism with Islamic concepts of religious and political pluralism. The efforts of both the Cherokees and Iroquois to conduct interfaith meetings with the Europeans as equals impressed the Christian missionaries, since such interfaith outreach without any effort to convert others was almost unknown in the Christian world.

Jefferson tried to keep his personal relationship with God secret and largely succeeded, though recent research in his twenty volumes of hitherto secret personal correspondence should shed much light on this, including the influence of Islam.

Perhaps his major message was the same as that taught by the Cherokee and Iroquois. No people, he said, can remain free unless they are educated; education consists above all in knowledge of virtue; and no people can remain virtuous except within a religious framework, whether it be Christian or of some other faith tradition, and unless this framework of respect for the divine legitimacy of cultural and religious pluralism and for the power of interfaith cooperation pervades all public life.

This is the profound wisdom of the Great American Experiment, but we have just begun to explore its ancient roots. ■

## Phenomenon of Revelation

### Dispelling the Mystery of Divine Communication

By Dr. Basharat Ahmad

*[This article is authored by Dr. Basharat Ahmad, a close companion of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement) and a pioneering member of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement. In this article, Dr. Basharat Ahmad discusses the topic of “Revelation”. In a brilliantly thorough yet expressive manner, he explains the concept of revelation in terms of what it is and (equally important) what it is not, how such a phenomenon arises, and the source from which it comes, thereby distinguishing imagination or vain desires from true revelation. The analysis further explains the purpose for revelation, the very basis for all religious/spiritual orders.]*

*And it is not vouchsafed to a mortal that Allah should speak to him, except by revelation or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger and revealing by His permission what He pleases. Surely He is High, Wise. (42:51)*

The Arabic term “*wahy*” is another name for Divine communication, and it is revealed upon the human mind from an outside source. In relation to the material and external world, it is an internal and spiritual matter. However, in relation to the human mind and self, it is an extrinsic matter. God’s communication with man will always be an extrinsic matter and not a part of essential human make-up. Although Allah, the Most High, in the matter of His attributes is manifest in the external creation, in His person He is above all material conception. Divine communication therefore does not require the external human senses, and is revealed directly to the inner centers of the human mind. In this sense it is an internal perception, but as far as the human mind and self is concerned, it is an extrinsic matter. Despite all of

the visual and auditory perceptions being received by the external senses, in reality it is the internal senses or the mind that perceives them. The external senses act merely as portals. Visual images or sounds whether they are from the physical or spiritual dimension are therefore perceived by the human mind in a similar manner. To the recipient of revelation and true visions they are felt with the same intensity. They believe in the validity of these auditory and visual experiences with the same degree of certainty that we ordinarily attribute to what we see or hear in our external environment.

### Human Faculty of Imagination

Worldly-minded people have fallen into an error regarding what revelation is, as a result of confusing it with the faculty of imagination. They have difficulty separating the two. Imagination is a faculty in the human mind by means of which the knowledge obtained by man from the external environment, and saved in his memory, is presented to the faculties of intelligence and comprehension. Whatever an individual has perceived through his senses he evaluates and assesses in his mind. He may have heard the opinions of his friends and enemies, and experienced different visual events. He ponders upon these and draws conclusions from them, or he may rearrange them in a new order in his mind in accordance with his desires and wishes. He makes plans about his future based on these or sometimes uses these as the basis of his fantasy. This is called the thought process. When submerged in one's thoughts one frequently repeats in one's mind that which he may have heard from friends, and about which he may have pleasant feelings. Similarly he thinks about the opinion of his enemies and sometimes these thoughts may be so intense that he may seethe with anger inside. His wishful thinking and desires sometimes rearrange these visual and auditory impressions within him and one may, as a consequence, experience strange flights of imagination. Because man has intellectual and comprehensive faculties, all these elements have arrangement and order to them, except when one loses his mental balance or when one falls asleep.

### Disturbances of the Thought Process in Mental Illness

In mental illness, the higher centers of the brain are not functioning properly and the faculties of understanding and will power are not in a healthy state. The visual and auditory impressions of the thought process, which in a healthy state of mind are arranged in an orderly fashion by the faculty of imagination, become deranged and confused in mental illness. Since the intellectual faculty has deteriorated, these imaginative audiovisual impressions appear very real to the patient, although they do not exist in reality and are merely a figment of imagination.

### Confused Dreams

Similarly in a state of sleep, the higher centers of the brain and the intellectual and comprehensive faculties are temporarily suspended. During sleep the sights and sounds of imagination, which are not real and exist purely in one's thoughts, circulate randomly and in a disorganized manner in the mind. Distressing thoughts are experienced during the state of awakening and the confused dreams during sleep are similar in nature. In the religious terminology of Islam such dreams are called *azghaas-i-ahlaam* (confused dreams) and the voices heard in these dreams are termed *hadith -i-nafs* (imaginary voices pertaining to one's desires). The Holy Qur'an uses this terminology in the following verse:

*They said: Confused dreams and we know not the interpretation of dreams. (12:44).*

An inability to differentiate between these confused dreams or mental illnesses and the true visions (*kashf*), revealed words (*ilham*), and true dreams (*rauya*), is like considering the imaginary audiovisual impressions of a person's thought process akin to what he actually observes and hears in his external environment.

Is there not any difference between these? Is it not a fact that the human mind can clearly discern between the two through its faculties of intelligence and comprehension? In fact the audiovisual signals from the external environment are clear and visible and the mind affirms their reality with conviction, because they leave a distinct impression upon the inner senses. Similarly, the visual and auditory forms of revelation that arise from the spiritual dimension are based on truthful observation, and possess the same degree of clarity and luminescence. The mind, therefore, acknowledges them with the same degree of certainty as the audiovisual impressions of the external environment and, by their effect on the inner senses, establish the reality of their existence and bring new knowledge to the human mind.

The auditory and visual perceptions of the spiritual dimension affect the very same inner senses and make manifest the reality of their existence and bring new knowledge with them. Such visions and true dreams are clear as the dawning of daybreak, and the mind confirms their luminescence and truthfulness with the same degree of conviction it attributes to the external environmental perceptions. For example, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in the last year of his life said:

"It appears to me that the time of my death is near. During every month of *Ramadhan*, Gabriel would recite the entire Holy Qur'an with me once, this year he went over it twice."

One could say that for the Holy Prophet, Gabriel's recitation of the Holy Qur'an with him was similar to someone who sits down with a very capable teacher (who has committed the Holy Qur'an to memory) and recites the Holy Qur'an under his tutelage. This was a spiritual experience, but one cannot find it lacking behind in any way with a comparable event in the physical world.

### **Experts in Material Sciences are Unqualified to Decide Matters of Spirituality**

Any form of scientific knowledge is based on observation and experimentation. The phenomenon of revelation belongs to the realm of spiritual science and complete understanding of it, like other branches of science, requires observation and experimentation. Experts of material sciences (or their follower's) who do not possess this capability are quick in their denial of it because of their self-pride. As a consequence of this, they consider their expertise in physical sciences as giving them the capability to dispense the correct opinion in all matters, whether they belong to the physical or spiritual dimension. This is a very serious error. Even within the various branches of the material sciences this rule is not valid, not to mention its application beyond its limits (i.e., in the field of spiritual science). For example, a physician is not capable of rendering an opinion in the field of engineering. Similarly within the medical discipline itself, not much credibility would be given to the opinion of a medical expert regarding a complicated surgical procedure. What could, therefore, be more irrational or ostentatious than an expert in material sciences opining in matters pertaining to the realm of spiritual science? Such conduct beyond the limits of their capabilities is truly driven by their self-pride.

### **Imaginative "Revelations" of Ignorant People**

Some uninformed individuals with imaginative thought processes, who get overwhelmed by their wishes and desires, mistakenly consider their confused dreams (*azghaas-i-ahlaam*), and the imaginary voices hear pertaining to their desires in these dreams (*hadith-i-nafs*), as Divine revelation. As a result of this they claim to be recipients of Divine revelation. Their mind is not as yet cleansed of the devils influence, who in accordance with their wishes and desires, acts through their faculty of imagination and presents them with various visual and auditory impressions. They consider these impressions as factual and as a result are misled. In fact these poor souls are quite unfamiliar with the reality of Divine revelation, confusing the mirage for the real spring of water, and taking their imaginary thoughts to be true revelation. They are in actuality far from the real experience and have fallen prey to their own wishful thinking and desires.

### **Distinctive Features of True Revelation**

It therefore becomes mandatory for every intelligent person to differentiate between these flights of imagination and true revelation. There are four distinguishing features of Divine revelation.

**1) Divine revelation has within it the same clarity, lucidity and conviction associated with an occurrence witnessed in the external environment.** It is not merely a nebulous imaginary scene or a faint incomprehensible voice, akin to what is frequently experienced in ones thoughts and dreams. What differentiates these imaginary thought processes from the real world events also separates them apart from true auditory and visual experiences of revelation (which likewise are also based upon reality). The former, on the other hand, are mere figments of human imagination.

**2) The recipient of revelation possesses a high moral character.** He is well advanced in the practice of guarding himself against evil, and worshipping the Divine Being with complete submission and humility. His heart and mind is free of sensual desires and wishful thinking. The portals through which the devil gains entry and plays with human imagination are therefore closed in these individuals and the risk of falling prey to their own desires or satanic influences is annulled.

**3) The recipient of revelation is not mentally ill.** Those who keep his company and listen to his speech are given the light of knowledge and wisdom, and their minds are inspired with pure thoughts.

**4) The revealed word itself consists of knowledge wisdom and guidance for the human nature.** It contains knowledge of the unseen, the like of which cannot be the result of human endeavor. The knowledge and power of Allah, the Most High is manifested through it before which many a disbeliever falls humbly in submission. As a result of it the hearts and minds of men are filled with faith. Such manifestations of Divine knowledge and power are called miracles.

At this juncture I would like to point out that the revelation of Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) manifested all these attributes to the highest degree.

### **Scientific Analysis of the Phenomenon of Revelation**

#### *Human Mind and Ego*

In order to understand the three forms of revelation mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, it might be helpful to further elaborate on the nature of the human mind and its external and internal senses. There is what is called, in scientific terms, the human Ego, which recognizes the Self (*Nafs*), and the Mind (*Qalb*), and obtains

knowledge through the senses. The human mind analyzes and understands all the data presented to it by the senses with its intellectual capacity and presents it to the self or ego. In order to understand this, one may use the analogy of the ego being the *king* and the mind being its *chief minister*, who after thoughtfully and intelligently understanding every subject presents it to the ego. The human ego most of the time acts upon this counsel, but when it gets overwhelmed by the animal desires, it rejects such guidance. In this situation it rejects the voice of intellect and follows the animal desires. Such influence is manifested by actions such as cursing, injuring or killing someone out of anger, or committing adultery and impiety after becoming overwhelmed by sexual desires.

#### *External Senses of the Human Mind*

The human mind is also the center of intellect, understanding, perception and wisdom. In order to give knowledge to the human mind, Allah, the Most High has endowed it with external and internal senses which are five in number. According to current research they are not limited to the five senses but may be more. The five senses, however, are quite apparent and easily understood.

1. Sight - sense through which one is able to see;
2. Hearing- sense by means of which one is able to hear;
3. Taste -sense by means of which one is able to taste;
4. Smell - sense enabling one to smell;
5. Touch - sense providing one with the sensation of touch.

#### *Internal Senses of the Human Mind*

The human body is endowed with these faculties, and has external organs specified to perform these functions, such as the eyes, ears, tongue, nose and the skin. Corresponding exactly to these external senses, within the human brain are centers for sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch.

#### *Interaction of External and Internal Senses*

Interaction of both these external and internal faculties is essential for perception of the external environment. In fact the real task of perception is performed by the centers within the human brain. The external organs only act as the means or conduits to convey the actions and impressions from the external environment.

For example, when the eye observes a man walking, it acts as a channel to convey this impression of the man and his action to the visual center in the brain. In reality it is the mind's eye or the visual center in the brain, which truly sees or perceives this visual phenomenon. The external eye is thus unable to function without the internal visual faculty. It is a common observation, that quite often when we are in deep thought, we may com-

pletely miss a person who passes right in front of our eyes. This is because at that very moment the visual center in the brain is not working in conjunction with the eyes.

Similarly we can completely miss a conversation in our close proximity if we are distracted by our own thoughts, although the sound does hit our eardrums. The reason for this is that at the very moment our internal hearing faculty in the brain is not working simultaneously with the ears or the external hearing faculty. The same is true for the remaining senses.

Unless the internal senses or centers in the brain cooperate with the external organs, one is unable to perceive any form of sensory stimuli. The external organs merely act as portals for these sensory stimuli. In fact the sight, hearing, taste and smell are truly perceived by the internal sensory faculties with their centers in the brain. A visual impression, sound or any other form of sensory stimulus, which appears in the external environment, therefore has to pass through the portals of the external senses before making an impression on the internal organs of perception in the human mind.

#### *Spiritual Phenomenon and the internal Senses*

A spiritual phenomenon, since it has to do with the internal senses of man does not require the external faculties for its perception. It is directly conveyed to the internal centers of the human mind. If it is a vision, the mind's eye will perceive it as such without the intervention or need for the external eye. Similarly, a voice or any other sensory stimulus belonging to this category will be heard and felt without the agency of the external faculties. That is why regarding its revelation to the Holy Prophet, the Holy Qur'an states:

*Whoever is the enemy of Gabriel, surely he revealed it to thy heart by Allah's command. (2:97).*

What this means is that the visual perception of the Angel Gabriel that the Holy Prophet experienced, and the voice of revelation of the Holy Qur'an that the Holy Prophet's mind heard, being a spiritual phenomenon related to his inner faculties, did not require the external environment or the external faculties for their manifestation. It would be a meaningless exercise contrary to Divine wisdom to use the external environment or the external sensory portals for this purpose, when they can be revealed directly to the mind of the recipient. This is why the perception of such phenomenon is directly linked to the inner state and senses of the recipient.

Why would then an indirect and unnecessary route (i.e., going through the external milieu and external sensory portals) be chosen for this purpose? The mind, however, will perceive them in the same manner as it

perceives the external sensory stimuli (i.e. in the form of visual, auditory, tactile, taste or smell sensations). For the human mind, they have both come from the outside. One stimulated the internal centers directly, while the other gained entry through the external portals, and then stimulated the centers in the brain. The effect on the mind is similar.

#### *How Revelation comes to the Human mind*

Divine revelation is knowledge given to man by Allah from outside (as opposed to being generated within the human mind), and its purpose is to guide man towards the goal of his creation. Because it comes from the spiritual dimension, it is conveyed directly to the inner sensory centers of the human mind, and is felt by the mind through these internal perceptual faculties. When this revelation is received by the internal auditory center it is in the form of an auditory perception, and an appropriate graceful and attractive voice is heard. When such revelation is received by the internal visual center, it is in the form of a vision or the Divine message is visualized in written form. Such visions consist of sublime spiritual secrets and knowledge of the unseen and are called *ru'ya* (i.e. dream), its higher form being *kashf* (i.e. vision). When received by the inner sensory faculty responsible for taste, it appears as if one tastes an extraordinary delectable fruit or food providing strength to the mind and body of the recipient. When the center for perception of odor is stimulated by such phenomenon, a wonderful fragrance is perceived which sometime in itself carries amazing knowledge of the unseen. For example in the Holy Qur'an we find this statement of Prophet Jacob when the caravan left Egypt with Joseph's shirt:

And when the caravan left, their father said:  
Surely I scent Joseph, if you call me not a dotard.  
(12:94).

The Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him was expressing a similar experience when he said in reference to *Owais Qarni*: "I smell the fragrance of the Beneficent from the direction of Yemen."

Similarly, when knowledge from Allah, the Most High, comes in the form of revelation to the tactile center in the brain, it feels as if a word or composition touches the mind. Such words are not heard by the ears, or seen by the eyes, but the mind can perceive them through the sensation of touch. This is very similar to a blind person being able to touch an object and tell if it is a table or a chair. In the very same manner the words touch the mind, and it can discern what they are. This is a wonderful and unique feeling, with which the recipients of revelation are quite familiar. This is the manner in which revelation from Allah, the Most High, is ordinarily revealed to the human mind. The inner faculties thus gain knowledge of

the revealed word through hearing, sight, taste, smell and touch in a manner similar to when that knowledge is acquired through the use of the external senses but, in this case, without their intervention.

#### **Conclusion**

And, to conclude, there are three essential points regarding knowledge that is conveyed by means of revelation:

1. **The external senses are temporarily inhibited.** It is essential that when revealed knowledge is being given to the internal sensory centers, the external senses should temporarily be suspended. This is necessary so that the impressions and stimuli of the external environment do not cause confusion by getting mixed up with the stimuli and impressions of the spiritual dimension. In fact because at the time of revelation the mind is fully concentrating on the revealed word, the external senses are temporarily suspended. The connection between the internal centers and the external senses is cut off so that no stimulus from the external environment can affect these internal senses.
2. **Internal sensory centers are the common denominator between the knowledge conveyed through the external sensory organs and through the revealed word.** Because of this commonality of pathway, the recipient of revelation senses revelation in a manner similar to the external sensory stimuli. For example, if only the internal visual faculty is functional and the external sense of vision is suspended as it is during *Ru'ya* (dreams) and *Kashuf* (visions), the internal visual center perceives it as if it was visualizing it through the external eye. This occurs regardless of the fact that at the time of seeing these events through the internal visual faculty, there is no internal eye resembling the external organ. However, because of the common sensory center in the brain, the recipient of such revelation feels that there is an eye within him with which he sees, or an ear with which he hears or a tongue with which he tastes. Based on this analogy his conception of seeing, hearing, smelling or tasting would always be the same, whether the external and internal visual faculties are working together or not. Thus this common inner faculty presents the revealed knowledge to the human mind in a manner similar to that obtained by external sensory organs. At times this inner faculty is so dominant that the recipient of revelation may confuse a revealed event as if he has actually witnessed it in his external environment. For example, Prophet Moses saw the light of a fire when his wife was having labor pains. Although this was a vision being perceived by the

inner visual center of his mind, because of the common sensory pathway, he thought that it was actually the light of a fire he was seeing in his external environment. This confusion was then removed by words that were revealed to him. The Holy Qur'an describes this event as follows:

And has the story of Moses come to thee? When he saw a fire, he said to his people: Stay, I see a fire, haply I may bring to you there-from a live coal or find guidance at the fire. So when he came to it, a voice came: O Moses, Surely I am thy Lord, so take off thy shoes; surely thou art in the sacred valley *Tuwa*. And I have chosen thee so listen to what is revealed." (20: 9-13)

3. **Revelation sometimes comes to different internal sensory centers simultaneously.** For example, the mind sometimes hears and visualizes at the same time. This happens frequently during the course of prophetic revelation, when the revelation is through the agency of the Angel Gabriel. The Prophet (as only prophets are recipients of revelation from Angel Gabriel), in this condition, sees the angel and also hears the revealed word simultaneously. ■

## Lessons on the Quran:

### Sura Al Imran, Section 7

By Fazeel S. Khan, Esq.

[Lahore Ahmadiyya members in various locations gather each week for a Quran study group via skype. The study group commenced with lessons from Sura 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 7 of Sura Al Imran.]

We'll be discussing Section 7 of Sura Al Imran (Chapter 4, "Family of Amran") today. As you'll recall, this Sura started with the lesson that the Quran is a "book of truth", in that it "verifies" true revelations that came before it and it "discriminates" between those true revelations and illegitimate views interpolated in the books in which these previous lessons are contained.

And in this regard, the last few sections dealt with clarifying the truth concerning Hazrat Maryam (Mary) and Hazrat Isa (Jesus), two figures that have conjured much controversy between the Christians and the Jews. We saw that the charge against Hazrat Maryam in bringing forth a child illegitimately was discredited. We also

saw that the charge that Hazrat Isa died the damned death on the cross was false and so too is the corresponding view, in the other extreme, that he died for the sins of humanity. Now, interestingly, although these points are clarified in the Quran, among Muslims new disputes arose concerning these very verses; in particular, in the matter of whether Hazrat Maryam conceived Hazrat Isa miraculously or in the normal manner, and in the matter concerning what happened to Hazrat Isa after surviving the attempts to kill him on the cross.

We have had some very enlightening discussions about these various viewpoints. Something I don't believe we discussed is the use of the titles "Maryam" and "Isa" representing particular spiritual stations, that of "the soul at rest" or "*nafs al Mutamainna*". There is a long, established and authoritative tradition that the story about Hazrat Maryam's pregnancy and the birth of Hazrat Isa in fact is symbolic of the "second" birth of man in general (or his "spiritual" birth). The Holy Prophet himself is reported to have said: "No one shall enter the kingdom of heaven who was not born twice." And Maulana Jalal-ud-Din Rumi explained this concept in one of his poetic verses in the following manner:

The Spirit of God forms a relation with the spirit of man, and from this, just as woman receives sperm from man, the sense of man receives a pearl. The soul of man then becomes pregnant, as did Mary, and from this pregnancy is born a Messiah. This Messiah is not the Messiah who lived in the past, but is a Messiah whose glory is not easy to comprehend. When the Spirit of God makes pregnant the spirit of man, that spirit then makes a whole world pregnant (i.e. they receive spiritual benefit from it). This produces a spiritual revolution and resurrection in the world, which is so grand as to defy description.

And this understanding of the titles of Maryam and Isa and their representing developments in spiritual progress, is the basis of Hazrat Mirza Sahib's *ilham* (which many Muslims out of sheer ignorance ridicule) in which he sees himself as Hazrat Maryam, then becomes pregnant and then becomes Hazrat Isa. Hazrat Mirza Sahib explained this concept in quite some detail. After giving the analogy of Hazrat Assiya (the wife of Pharaoh) as representing the spiritual stage of the "self-accusing spirit" (or *Nafs al Allawwama*), that is one who is in a constant struggle to perfect him or herself, he goes on to explain:

There are other believers who have attained a higher rank. They do not only refrain from evil, but earn virtue. God has compared them to Mary: "She who guarded her chastity, so We breathed into it of Our spirit". Every believer who accom-

plishes himself in piety and purity, is Mary in the sense of *bu-rooz*. And God breathes into him His spirit, which becomes the ‘son of Mary’ ... Hence in reality, this verse refers to the fact that into every believer who reaches this stage, the spirit of God is blown, and he becomes the son of Mary.

Now, certainly the correct understanding of these verses from a factual or historical basis is important. However, from the perspective of understanding the spiritual lesson, we see that the competing views among Muslims about these verses becomes much less important. Based on this perspective, it doesn’t really matter whether Hazrat Maryam conceived naturally or miraculously if the true significance of that verse is to reveal the spiritual life one may attain from perfecting themselves spiritually. That, what was developing in Hazrat Maryam’s womb signifies something that we all are to strive to develop within ourselves, so that we may also produce a new life, a Messiah-like life. And based on this perspective, it doesn’t really matter what happened to Hazrat Isa after surviving the attempts to kill him on the cross, if the spiritual lesson contained in the verse is to reveal how one experiences death in the spiritual sense when they give up their worldly desires and submit to whatever hardship may arise (even being put on the cross) so that they may be elevated to the higher spiritual stage of becoming close to Allah.

So, the point I’m trying to make is that understanding the verses concerning Hazrat Maryam’s pregnancy and Hazrat Isa’s birth and the attempt to crucify Hazrat Isa, through the perspective of a broad principle that isn’t necessarily controversial (in this case, the lesson on stages of spiritual development), we can see an area of commonality uniting differing factions. And I believe this is the main theme and lesson of Section 7, using Muslims, Christians and Jews as an example.

#### Verse 64

The first verse (v.64) of the Section states:

*Say: O People of the Book, come to an equitable word between us and you, that we shall serve none but Allah and that we shall not associate aught with Him, and that some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allah. But if they turn away, then say: Bear witness, we are Muslims.*

In this verse, the Quran illustrates a very important lesson: and that is to focus on commonality in order to achieve unity. And this section goes on to explain how the personality of Hazrat Ibrahim (Abraham) and the faith he represents offers a prime opportunity to do this with Jews and Christians. This “offer” to serve none but Allah and not associate anything with Him, represents the original “faith of Abraham”, that figure who is revered as

the Patriarch of the Israelite and Arab dispensation and the one who established the basic theology upon which the Judaic, Christian and Islamic beliefs are founded.

There is no doubt that in Abraham do these major faiths find a fundamental connection. In fact, the bible is replete with references describing the One, True God as the “God of Abraham”. For instance:

In Genesis 24:12, Abraham’s servant speaks of “the God of my father Abraham”;

In Genesis 26:24, Jehovah, in an apparition to Isaac, speaks of himself as “the God of Abraham”;

In Genesis 31:42, Jacob speaks of God as “the God of my father Abraham”;

In Exodus 3:6, God introduces himself to Moses as “I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham”;

Similar references are found throughout the Bible.

Now, as MMAlI explains in his commentary, this verse really lays down “*the basis of the study of comparative religion.*” And this is because the “doctrine of unity of God” is the foundation of every major religion. Even Hindus today argue that despite their numerous idols, they believe in the “unity of God”. They support this view by explaining that all their material representations of God are simply tools to help them concentrate or mediate upon particular attributes of the One, True God. And when this comparative study is done, it becomes clear that, and I’m quoting from MMAlI’s commentary here, that:

Islam alone is free from all these additions to the basic doctrine, and it preaches Unity in its simplest form and rejects all additions ... There are no idols, no gods, no incarnations of the Divine Being, no sons of God, and finally no *pirs* and priests to be followed blindly.

And as MMAlI notes that many Muslims today – although not in theory, but in practice – also take their religious leaders as being invested with Divine powers and follow them blindly. So, although the verse calls into question the beliefs of the Jews and Christians concerning their departure from the principle belief of Unity of God, the lesson certainly applies to Muslims as well.

#### Verse 65

The next verse states:

*O People of the Book, why do you dispute about Abraham, when the Torah and the Gospel were not revealed till after him? Do you not understand?*

In this verse “Abraham” is mentioned specifically. And attention is drawn to the “dispute” about Abraham among the People of the Book. And what is that dispute?

Well, according to Jewish beliefs, Abraham gave rise to a nation of “Hebrews” (or literally, “people on the other side”, because he was born in Mesopotamia – today’s Iraq – and then moved to the northern Syria/southern Turkey area). And they believe that Abraham made a covenant with God, and through his son Isaac, all of his progeny would inherit that covenant.

According to Christian beliefs, ancestry through Abraham is also important, as the Gospels trace Jesus’ genealogy to Abraham, stating he descended from him “according to the flesh”. And Christians, through the Apostle Paul’s teachings, believe Jesus to be the true “offspring” of Abraham, and that faith in the “true descendant” of Abraham (i.e. Jesus) makes one an heir of Abraham and a member of his family.

And this verse points out that they are disputing about a person to which they had no real knowledge, as their scriptures were revealed after him. And the same point is made in the next verse (v.66).

#### Verse 66

*Behold! You are they who disputed about that of which you had knowledge; why then do you dispute about that of which you have no knowledge? And Allah knows while you know not.*

Again, the implication is that the Christians and Jews were disputing with the Holy Prophet about a person about whom they had no real knowledge. And the point was emphasized by pointing out that as they were enthralled with disputes concerning matters of which they had some knowledge, how erroneous it was for them to dispute with the Prophet about matters they had no knowledge about.

#### Verse 67

And the next verse (v.67) clarifies the matter concerning the status of Abraham for all; it states:

*Abraham was not a Jew nor a Christian, but he was (an) upright (man), a Muslim; and he was not one of the polytheists.*

So, despite the competing claims about Abraham, this verse clarifies that Abraham was not a Jew or a Christian (for he appeared prior to the Torah or the Gospels), but was rather a “Muslim” in the sense that he was one that submitted himself entirely to the will of God. Jews, Christians and Muslims are all in agreement on this point: Abraham is regarded as firmly establish-

ing belief in the One, True God, and that it was Abraham’s comprehension that the True, Supreme, All-Powerful God is One, and that it was to this One True God that man was to submit himself completely, that affords him this special rank among the monotheistic faiths.

Interestingly, the Quran reveals this distinctive status of Hazrat Ibrahim by the use of the unique term “*hanif*” (i.e. “upright”). And this term is repeatedly used to describe Hazrat Ibrahim in the Quran:

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

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

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

Now, of all the descriptive words used to describe prophets in the Quran, only Hazrat Ibrahim is referred to as being “**hanif**” or “**upright**”. The clear meaning is that Prophet Abraham was unwavering in his submission to the One, True God, always inclining to the correct state (the monotheistic as opposed to polytheistic belief). But there may be a secondary meaning as well.

Just as throughout the Quran material illustrations are used to shed light on spiritual matters, the use of the word “upright” may have a deeper meaning. In the physical evolution of our species, the *upright posture* is noted as a distinguishing characteristic that differentiates modern/civilized man from its ape-like predecessors. We’ve all seen charts showing the progression of our species over tens of thousands of years showing the curvature of the back (among other things) dictating how “evolved” man is at a particular point in history. So, it appears that Abraham being referred to as an “upright” man is an indication to a turning point in mankind’s “spiritual evolution”. Just as Adam represents a new type of man, the one from whom modern civilized man progressed, so too it appears that Abraham represents the existence of a unique type of man in the spiritual realm, one from whom later generations would inherit spiritual maturity concerning the upright state of believing in a monotheistic faith. It seems like the Quran is highlighting Abraham’s unique position in the history of man’s spiritual evolution – just as Adam is our father in the physical field, Abraham is our father in the spiritual sphere.

**Verse 68**

The next verse states:

*The nearest of people to Abraham are surely those who follow him and this Prophet and those who believe. And Allah is the Friend of the believers.*

As already mentioned, only in Islam does one find the pure monotheistic belief in God that can represent the “faith of Abraham” or the “God of Abraham”. So, according to Islam, ancestral relations mean nothing in and of themselves. As we discussed in a previous lesson a while ago, verse 2:124 states:

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

So, the Quran explains that it is the following of the faith of Abraham and his practical example, not simply being included in his family tree, is what qualifies one to be an “heir” or “son” of Abraham. And it is reported in the Gospel of John (John 8:33) that Jesus taught the same message; he said:

If ye be the children of Abraham, do the works of Abraham.

This, on its face, seems contrary to the Christian view based on the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans of simply believing in, or having faith in, Jesus entitling one to be Abraham’s heir; Paul wrote:

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

And, this appears to be an illustration of Christians disputing about a matter even after they were given knowledge about it (i.e. after Jesus had clarified the correct position).

**Verses 69, 70, 71**

And the last three verses (verses 69, 70, 71) state:

*A party of the People of the Book desire that they should lead you astray; and they lead not astray but themselves, and they perceive not.*

*O People of the Book, why do you disbelieve in the messages of Allah while you witness (their truth)?*

*O People of the Book, why do you confound the truth with falsehood, and hid the truth while you know?*

So, this Section ends with questioning the People of the Book concerning their deviations from the clear “truth” concerning Prophet Ibrahim and the belief in the “unity” of God. And in the previous Section we left off with the

mention about the *mubaihillah* challenge and how the Christians opted not to participate in it after discussions with the Prophet about areas of controversy. And this Section, by clarifying the truth on some basic matters in such a methodological way, and as a result exposing apparent problems in the theology adopted by People of the Book, I think offers another illustration of why they were not inclined to accept such a challenge. ■

**Who is a “Muslim”?**

**A Fatwa from the late Grand Imam of Al-Azhar**

**By Dr. Muhammed Sayyed Tantawi,  
Sheikh Al-Azhar**

*[This article comprises a response from Muhammad Sayyed Tantawi (the late Grand Imam of the prestigious Al Azhar Al Shareef) to an inquiry concerning “Who is a Muslim”. The particular question asked, was “Can a Muslim who recites the Kalima (profession of faith) be called a kafir (unbeliever)?” This question, appearing quite simple, has unnecessarily caused exhausting debate among Islamic scholars. And because the answer to this question has not been firmly established among Muslims, the practice of takfir (denouncing persons as non-Muslim) continues to cause havoc, chaos and bloodshed around the world. Among the great reforms introduced by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, was the laying of a foundation to unite Muslims and bring about peace between sunnis-shias and other disputing factions. The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement continued this initiative by promoting the view that anyone that recites the Kalima must be accepted as a Muslim for purposes of civil law and social relations, and as to whether one believes or practices correctly is a matter between them and God. Here, Sheikh Tantawi also explains that it is the Kalima that initiates one into the fold of Islam, and warns about the serious implications of engaging in the practice of takfir. He also explains that a Muslim is one who does not deny the “fundamentals of the religion”, and clarifies that the “fundamentals” are the basic pillars of the faith – such as salat (prayers), zakat (obligatory charity), saum (fasting in the month of Ramadan), hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) – and does not reflect differences of opinion or understanding on ancillary matters. With the atrocities being committed to minority Muslim groups in various parts of the world (and the more subtle forms of discrimination and bigotry engaged in in others), this article presents a timely and much needed reminder of the authoritative answer to this basic question of “Who is a Muslim”.]*

Muslim scholars agree that whoever recites the *Kalima* (testifies that there is not god but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah) and does not deny any of the fundamentals of religion, enters into the fold of Islam and may not be called *kafir* (infidel).

Where a Muslim fails to observe one of the commands of Allah, the Exalted, but admits his failure and turns to Allah in repentance, his accounts will be with Allah, the Exalted, either to punish him or to forgive him according to His wish.

In his Book entitled *Riyadh Al-Saliheen* (Gardens of the Righteous), *Iman Nawawi*, may Allah have mercy upon him, included a number of Prophetic traditions (Hadith) in the Chapter called “*Making Judgment of People Keeping in View their Evident Actions and Leaving their Hidden Actions to Allah (swt)*”.

Some of these traditions are reported in *Al-Sahihayn* (The Two Collections of Authentic Traditions). *Al-Miqdad Bin Al-Aswad* (May Allah be pleased with him) reported: I said:

“Tell me, O Messenger of Allah, if I meet an infidel, and we fight together, and he cuts off one of my hands with his sword, then hides from me behind a tree and (then) says he has submitted himself to Allah. Shall I kill him after he has said it?” He (PBUH) replied, “Do not kill him.” I submitted, “But O Messenger of Allah, he cut off one of my hands and only then he said it.” Messenger of Allah (PBUH) then replied, “Do not kill him, for if you do so, he will be in the position in which you were before you killed him (i.e., he will be considered a Muslim and thus his life will be inviolable), and you will be in the position in which he was before he made his testimony (i.e., your life will not be inviolable, for his heirs can ask for Qisas, but you will not be considered a *kafir*)”.

*Usamah Bin Zaid* (May Allah be pleased with them) reported:

“Messenger of Allah (PBUH) sent us to Huraqat, a tribe of Juhainah. We attacked that tribe early in the morning and defeated them, (then) a man from the Ansar and I caught hold of a man (of the defeated tribe). When we overcame him, he said: ‘*La ilaha illallah* (There is no true god except Allah).’ At that moment, the Ansari spared him, but I attacked him with my spear and killed him. By the time we went back to *Al-Madinah*, news had already reached Messenger of Allah (PBUH). Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said, “Did you kill him in spite of his professing *La ilaha illallah*?” I said, “O Messenger of Allah! He said it out of fear of our arms.” He (PBUH) said, “Why did you not cut

his heart open to find out whether he had done so sincerely or not?” He continued repeating it until I wished that I had embraced Islam only that day.” [*Al-Bukhari and Muslim*].

Some commentators reported the above-mentioned tradition when explaining the reason for revelation of the following Qur’anic verse: “O you who believe, when you go forth (to fight) in Allah’s way, make investigation, and say not to any one who offers you salutation, Thou art not a believer ...” (*Al-Nisa’* (Women): 94).

Explaining the above Qur’anic verse, author of *Tafsir Al-Manar* (Al-Manar Commentary), may Allah have mercy upon him, commented, saying:

“This is incomparable with the strive by people, who are not guided by the Book of Allah in their faith nor by its injunctions in their deeds, to charge as *kafir Ahl Al-Qibla* (Those who face the Qiblah in their prayers) who do not follow their vain desires, even *Ahl Al-‘Ilm Al-Sahih* (the religious learned men), and those who call to the Book of Allah and to the Sunnah of His Messenger! Let this be an example.”

Some Holy Prophetic traditions reported in *Al-Sahihayn* and other Collections of *Hadith* explicitly state that Allah, the Exalted, forgives all sins except for *shirk* (polytheism). *‘Ubada Bin As-Samit* (May Allah be pleased with him) narrated: the Prophet said while a group of his companions were around him:

“I take your pledge that you will not worship anything besides Allah, will not steal, will not commit illegal sexual intercourse or infanticide, will not slander others by forging false statements and spreading it, and will not disobey me in anything good. And whoever among you fulfills all these (obligations of the pledge), his reward is with Allah. And whoever indulges in any one of them (except the ascription of partners to Allah) and gets the punishment in this world, that punishment will be expiation for that sin. Whoever commits something of such sins and Allah screens him, it will be up to Allah, Who will either punish or forgive him according to His wish.” *‘Ubada Bin As-Samit* added: “So we swore allegiance for these.”

**The true believer, sincere Muslim and sensible man is one who avoids entertaining ill suspicions of others, restrains his tongue from ascribing *kufir* to a man who professed the *Kalima* and does not deny any of the fundamentals of religion such as prayers, *Zakat* (obligatory charity), fasting the month of Ramadan and pilgrimage to the house for those who can afford the journey.**

Islamic *Shari'a* decisively prohibits accusing a Muslim of *kufir*. *Ibn 'Umar* (May Allah be pleased with them) said: The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said:

“When a person calls his brother (in Islam) a disbeliever, one of them will certainly deserve the title. If the one who was called *kafir* is so, as the one who made *takfir* upon him asserted, the disbelief (of that person) is confirmed, but if it is untrue, then it will revert to him” [*Al-Bukhari* and *Muslim*].

*Abu Dharr Al-Ghafary* (May Allah be pleased with him) said: I heard the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) saying:

“If somebody accuses another of disbelief or calls him the enemy of Allah, such an accusation will revert to him (the accuser) if the accused is innocent.” [*Al-Bukhari* and *Muslim*].

*Ibn Mas'ud* (may Allah be pleased with him) reported: Allah's Apostle said:

“Abusing a Muslim is *fusuq* (i.e., an evil-doing), and killing him is *kufir* (disbelief).” [*Al-Bukhari* and *Muslim*].

Pronouncing *takfir* upon a Muslim is one of the gravest sins, since *takfir* has grave consequences; causing separation between the man and his wife if he is married and not to treat the Muslim accused of *kufir* like other Muslims, whether in his life or after his death.

**Only people who lost their minds, whose visions were blurred, and who were dominated by ignorance and conceit can declare others as *kafir* or *fasiq* without careful consideration.**

Let those who unjustifiably think badly of others beware of such abominable behavior. Let them remember the saying of the Messenger of Allah (PBUH): “The believer is not given to cursing, slandering or obscene and foul speech”.

*And Allah Guides Whom He Wills  
to the Straight Path.*

\* \* \*

**Editor's Note:** Sheikh Tantawi (may Almighty Allah be pleased with him), at the request of Mrs. Samina Malik, Vice-President of AAAIL(USA), wrote a foreword to the Arabic Translation of Maulana Muhammad Ali's well-known treatise, *Religion of Islam*, reproduced below:

*I have read the book titled “Religion of Islam” by Allama Maulana Muhammad Ali, may Allah grant him His mercy. In this valuable book I have seen devotion, truthfulness of faith and useful knowledge. I pray to Allah, the*

***Honourable, the Majestic, to consider this great book as a part of his good deeds. Peace and Blessing of Allah be upon Prophet Muhammad and upon his family and companions.***

The Sheikh of Al- Azhar  
Muhammed Tantawi  
July 18. 2006

Sheikh Tantawi had a great appreciation for Maulana Muhammad Ali's “Religion of Islam” and would refer to it on a wide array of subjects. Probably most significant, is his reference to this “valuable” book in response to certain remarks made by Pope Benedict contained in his widely circulated book “A Peaceful Dialogue with the Pope”. Sheikh Tantawi prefaces his discussion on the vital issue of the true meaning of “jihad” by writing:

***... The western writers were mistaken when they interpreted the word Jihad in Islam to be war and fighting only. Seventy years ago Maulana Muhammad Ali explained Jihad in his valuable book The Religion of Islam stating on page 413:***

May Almighty Allah bless Sheikh Tantawi's soul for his devotion to faith, his sacrifices in the way of truth, and his courage to stand for what is right. Ameen. ■

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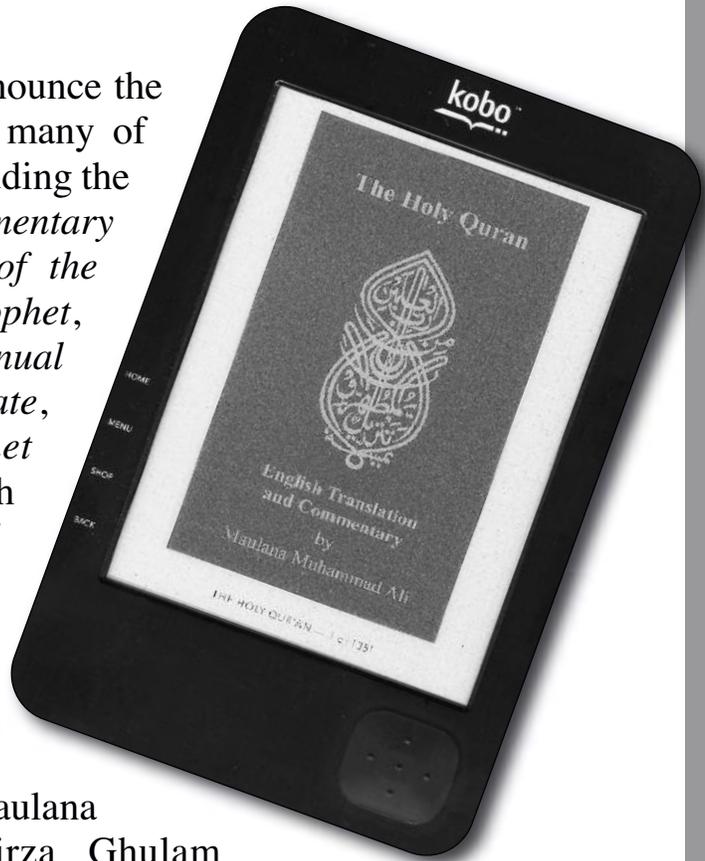
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