

“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 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:

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

Achievements:

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

History:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Introduction to Common Ground

An interfaith initiative building bridges
between Islam and Buddhism

By His Royal Highness
Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad

[In 2010, His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi worked with His Highness the Dalai Lama to commence an interfaith initiative titled “Common Ground”. Like the “A Common Word” initiative (which focussed on commonality between Islam and Christianity) and the “Amman Message” initiative (which addressed unity among Muslims of differing schools of thought and traditions), the “Common Ground” initiative sought to build bridges between followers of Islam and Buddhism. The project is based on the book “Common Ground between Islam and Buddhism” by Reza Shah-Kazemi. Prince Ghazi writes an introduction to this book, which is reproduced here.]

The Religions of the World and World Peace

As of the year 2010 CE, 1431 AH, at least 80% of the world’s population of 6.7 billion humans belong to four of the world’s many religions. Four out of five people on earth are either Christian (32%), Muslim (23%), Hindu (14%) or Buddhist (12%). Since religion (from the Latin ‘*re-ligio*’, meaning to ‘re-tie’ [man to Heaven]) is arguably the most powerful force in shaping people’s attitudes and behaviour — in theory if not in practice — it follows logically that if there is to be peace and harmony in the world there must be peace and harmony between religions as such, and in particular between the world’s four largest religions.

On October 13th 2007, 138 of the world’s leading Muslim scholars and intellectuals (including such figures as the Grand Muftis of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Oman, Bosnia, Russia, and Istanbul) sent an Open Letter to the religious leaders of Christianity. It was addressed to the leaders of the Christian churches and denominations of the entire world, starting with His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI. In essence, the Open Letter proposed, based on verses from the Holy Qur’ān and the Holy Bible, that Islam and Christianity share, at their core, the twin ‘golden’ commandments of the paramount importance of loving God and loving one’s neighbour. Based on this joint common ground, it called for peace and harmony between Christians and Muslims worldwide.

That Open Letter led to a historical global peace movement between Muslims and Christians specifically

(as can be seen on www.acommonword.com), and whilst it has not reduced wars as such between Muslims and Christians or ended mutual hatred and prejudice, it has done a lot of good, by the Grace of God, and has noticeably changed the tone between Muslim and Christian religious leaders and somewhat deepened true understanding of each other’s religions in significant ways. The *A Common Word* initiative was certainly not alone on the world’s stage in attempting to make things better between people of faith (one thinks in particular of the *Alliance of Civilizations*, H. M. King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia’s Interfaith Initiative and President Obama’s Cairo 2009 speech), but we think it nevertheless significant that, for example, according to the October 2009 Pew Global Report the percentage of Americans harbouring negative opinions about Islam was 53% when only a few years earlier it was 59%. It is thus possible to ameliorate tensions between two religious communities (even though conflicts and wars rage and indeed have increased in number over that same period of time) when religious leaders and intellectuals reach out to each other with the right religious message.

It was with all these things in mind that, after detailed discussions with H.H. the 14th Dalai Lama, we conceived of the present initiative. We commissioned one of the Royal Academy’s Fellows, Dr. Reza Shah-Kazemi — a respected specialist in Islamic mysticism and a leading author in comparative religion — to write an essay on the topic, which we then asked him to expand into this treatise. We hope and pray that this book will be blessed with the same kind of global effect between Muslims and Buddhists that *A Common Word Between Us and You* did between Muslims and Christians.

Why Do We Need ‘Common Ground’?

The specific intention and goal of the commission was to identify a spiritual ‘Common Ground’ (authentically based on the religious sacred texts of Islam and Buddhism) between Muslims and Buddhists that will enable both communities to love and respect each other not merely as human beings in general, but also *as Muslims and Buddhists in particular*. In other words, we hoped to find out and understand what in our two great religions — despite all of the many irreconcilable and unbridgeable doctrinal, theological, juridical and other differences that we do have between us and that we cannot and must not deny — we have in common that will enable us to practise more loving mercy and respect towards each other more *because* we are Muslims and Buddhists, and not simply because we are all human beings. We believe that, despite the dangers of syncretism, finding religious Common Ground is

fruitful, because Muslims at least will never be able to be whole-heartedly enthusiastic about any ethic that does not even mention God or refer back to Him. For God says in the Holy Qur'ān:

But he who turneth away from remembrance of Me, his will be a narrow life, and I shall bring him blind to the assembly on the Day of Resurrection. (The Holy Qur'ān, *Ta Ha*, 20:124)

And also:

Restrain thyself along with those who cry unto their Lord at morn and evening, seeking His Countenance; and let not thine eyes overlook them, desiring the pomp of the life of the world; and obey not him whose heart We have made heedless of Our remembrance, who followeth his own lust and whose case hath been abandoned.

(The Holy Qur'ān, *Al-Kahf*, 18:28)

This explains why we do not simply propose a version of the Second 'Golden' Commandment ('Love thy Neighbour') — versions of which are indeed to be found in the same texts of Islam and Buddhism (just as they are to be found in the sacred texts of Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Confucianism and Taoism amongst other religions): without the First 'Golden' Commandment ('Love thy God'), the Second Commandment on its own inherently risks being spiritually devoid of truth, and thus risks descending into a superficial sentimentalism without true virtue and goodness; it risks being a secular ethic taking its stance on moods which we can conjure up to ourselves on occasion, requiring nothing from the soul, risking nothing, changing nothing, deceiving all.

On the other hand, one of the greatest ironies of many religious practitioners is that despite the fact that their religions call for mercy and respect between people, they disparage others (and deny them that mercy and respect) if those others do not undertake the same paths of loving mercy as them. Thus love of their own religions makes them *less* lovingly merciful to other people rather making them *more* merciful to other people! This seems to me as a Muslim to be particularly ironic, because in all four traditional *Sunni* Juridical Schools of Thought (*Madhahib*), as well as in traditional *Shi'a* thought and *Ibadhi* thought — that is to say, in all the traditional juridical schools of thought in Islam as such) — a person's choice of religion is *not* grounds for hostility against them (if they are not first hostile to Muslims). Rather, Muslims are required to behave with mercy and justice to all, believers and non-believers alike. God says in the Holy Qur'ān:

Tell those who believe to forgive those who hope not for the days of God; in order that He may

requite folk what they used to earn / Whoso doeth right, it is for his soul, and whoso doeth wrong, it is against it. And afterward unto your Lord ye will be brought back. (The Holy Qur'ān, *Al-Jathiyah*, 45:14–15)

The same is clear in the following passage from the Holy Qur'ān which starts by citing a prayer of earlier believers:

'Our Lord! Make us not a trial for those who disbelieve, and forgive us, our Lord! Lo! Thou, only Thou, are the Mighty, the Wise'. / Verily ye have in them a goodly pattern for everyone who looketh to God and the Last Day. And whosoever may turn away, lo! still God, He is the Absolute, the Owner of Praise. / It may be that God will ordain love between you and those of them with whom ye are at enmity. God is Mighty, and God is Forgiving, Merciful. / God forbiddeth you not those who warred not against you on account of religion and drove you not out from your homes, that ye should show them kindness and deal justly with them. Lo! God loveth the just dealers. (The Holy Qur'ān, *Al-Mumtahinah*, 60:5–8)

Thus Muslims must on principle show loving mercy and respect to all those who are not waging war on them or driving them from their homes (these thus being the conditions for just, defensive war in Islam). Muslims must not make their mercy conditional upon other people's mercy, but it is nevertheless psychologically almost inevitable that people will better appreciate their fellows more when they know their fellows are also trying to show mercy and respect to all. At least that was one of our chief assumptions in commissioning this book.

The Common Ground

Turning to the book itself, we think it not amiss to say that it has proved to be, by the grace of God, in general a stunning piece of scholarship and a display of depth of understanding and grandness of soul on behalf of the author. That is not to say that every Muslim — or every Buddhist — will accept, or even understand, everything that the author says, but nevertheless it can fairly be said that the book is generally normative from the Islamic point of view (especially in that it is deliberately based on the Holy Qur'ān, the *Hadith* and the insights of the great scholar and mystic Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali) and that it examines all the major schools of Buddhist thought (as I understand them). Moreover, the book shows beyond any reasonable doubt some very important similarities and parallels between Islam and Buddhism, and in particular the following:

1. The belief in the Ultimate Truth (*Al-Haqq*) who is also Absolutely One, and who is Absolute Reality,

and the Source of Grace and Guidance to human beings.

2. The belief that each soul is accountable to a principle of justice in the Hereafter, and that this principle is rooted in the very nature of Absolute Reality.
3. The belief in the categorical moral imperative of exercising compassion and mercy to all, if not in the central cosmogonic and eschatological functions of mercy (by this we mean the idea that the world was created through Mercy, and that through Mercy we are saved and delivered).
4. The belief that human beings are capable of supra-rational knowledge, the source both of salvation in the Hereafter and enlightenment in the here-below.
5. The belief in the possibility of a sanctified state for human beings, and the conviction that all should aspire to this state of sanctity.
6. The belief in the efficacy and necessity of spiritual *practice*: whether this take the form of fervent prayer, contemplative meditation, or methodic invocation.
7. The belief in the necessity of detachment from the world, from the ego and its passional desires.

As regards the Buddha's not mentioning of God as Creator, this is definitely an absolute difference between Muslims and Buddhists but if it is understood that the One is God, and that the Buddha's silence on the One as Creator is not a denial as such, then it is possible to say that the points above certainly make for substantial 'Common Ground' between Islam and Buddhism, despite the many unbridgeable differences between them. Certainly, these points can be taken as constituting or '*establishing*' the core of religion — and not being '*divided*' therein, and this is precisely what God says in the Holy Qur'ān is the essential message of the most important messengers of God:

He hath ordained for you that religion which He commended unto Noah, and that which We inspire in thee (Muhammad), and that which We commended unto Abraham and Moses and Jesus, saying: Establish the religion, and be not divided therein. Dreadful for the idolaters is that unto which thou callest them. God chooseth for Himself whom He will, and guideth unto Himself him who turneth (toward Him). (The Holy Qur'ān, Al-Shura, 42:13)

One might also say that these points also make up the substance of the Two Greatest Commandments: the

belief in the One Absolute Truth and striving for detachment from the world, the ego and the body through spiritual practices and striving for sanctity (and hence supra-rational knowledge) might be considered an inverse way of achieving the First Commandment, and the categorical imperative of compassion and mercy is clearly the Second Commandment in different words, if not the First Commandment as well (with the immortality of the soul being indicated in both Commandments by the naming of the whole '*heart*'). And God knows best.

People of the Scripture (*Ahl Al-Kitab*)

All of the above leads us to conclude as Muslims that the Buddha, whose basic guidance one in ten people on earth have been in principle following for the last 2500 years, was, in all likelihood — and God knows best — one of God's great Messengers, even if many Muslims will not accept everything in the Pali Canon as being authentically attributable to the Buddha. For if the Buddha is not mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān by name, nevertheless it is clear that God says that every people had their own '*warners*' and that there were Messengers not mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān:

Lo! We have sent thee with the Truth, a bearer of glad tidings and a warner; and there is not a nation but a warner hath passed among them. (The Holy Qur'ān, Al-Fatir, 35:24)

Verily We sent messengers before thee, among them those of whom We have told thee, and some of whom We have not told thee; and it was not given to any messenger that he should bring a portent save by God's leave, but when God's commandment cometh (the cause) is judged aright, and the followers of vanity will then be lost. (The Holy Qur'ān, Al-Ghafir, 40:78)

It seems to us then that the Umayyads and the Abbasids were entirely correct in regarding Buddhists as if they were '*Ahl Al-Kitab*' ('*Fellow People of a Revealed Scripture*'). This is in fact how millions of ordinary Muslim believers have unspokenly regarded their pious Buddhists neighbours for hundreds of years, despite what their scholars will tell them about doctrinal difference between the two faiths.

On a more personal note, may I say that I had read Zen Buddhist texts as a younger man when studying in the West (such as some of the writings of D.T. Suzuki and such as Eugen Herrigel's seminal *Zen in the Art of Archery*). I had greatly appreciated them, without for all that being fully able to situate Buddhism in the context of my own faith, Islam. More recently, I had noticed in myself an effect when meeting with H. H. the Dalai Lama. It was simply this: I performed the five daily

prayers with greater concentration, and during the rest of the day I was better able to monitor my own thoughts, and censor and control my own impulses more easily. I did not have any particular urge to go out and learn more about Buddhism, as one might expect, but I nevertheless realised that there was something positive taking place. I asked my friend Shaykh Hamza Yusuf Hanson (who I knew had read a lot about Buddhism) why he thought this happened, and he wisely answered that this was because: ‘Buddhists are heirs to a very powerful spiritual training’. Thus I am personally very gratified to learn of the underlying Common Ground between Islam and Buddhism in an explicit manner. Indeed, as a Muslim I am relieved and delighted — if I may say so — to know that one eighth of the world who is not Muslim practises Buddhism and makes the practice of compassion and mercy the centre of their lives (in theory at least). And I hope that this book will lead to Muslims and Buddhists vying in the

compassion and mercy which is at the core of both their religions. God says in the Holy Qur’ān:

And unto thee have We revealed the Scripture with the truth, confirming whatever Scripture was before it, and a watcher over it. So judge between them by that which God hath revealed, and follow not their desires away from the truth which hath come unto thee. For each We have appointed a law and a way. Had God willed He could have made you one community. But that He may try you by that which He hath given you (He hath made you as ye are). So vie one with another in good works. Unto God ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differ. (The Holy Qur’ān, Al-Ma’idah, 5:48)

Earlier Common Ground?

It would be amiss not to mention that although this book may represent one of the first — if not the first — major attempt at a scholarly spiritual comparison between Buddhism as such and Islam as such in our modern age, there have been some very brilliant and serious intellectual and spiritual exchanges in the past between Islam and the ‘Three (Great) Teachings’ of China (Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism). This is evinced in particular by the works of indigenous Chinese Muslims (the ‘*Han Kitab*’) during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and in particular the two figures *Wang Daiyu* (ca. 1570–1660 CE) and *Liu Zhi* (ca. 1670–1724 CE). This work has been recently brought to light and translated into English (ironically, it is more or less unknown in Arabic and in modern Chinese) by Professors William Chittick, Sachiko Murata and Tu Weiming. Currently this team of scholars has produced the two following seminal books: (1) *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light: Wang Tai-yü’s ‘Great Learning of the Pure and Real’ and Liu Chih’s ‘Displaying the Concealment of the Real Realm’* (State University of New York Press, 2000); (2) *The Sage Learning of Liu Zhi: Islamic Thought in Confucian Terms* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Asia Centre, 2009). They are also working on Wang Daiyu’s *The Real Commentary on the True Teaching* (first published in 1642 CE). These works represent a critical resource for mutual understanding between China and Islam, and scholars interested in delving further into spiritual comparisons between Islam and Buddhism (as well as Confucianism and Taoism) could not do better than to start here. We hope that these treasures will be translated into Arabic and modern Chinese and made widely available. When we make full use of the wisdom of the past, and combine it with the knowledge of today, we are better equipped to face the uncertainties of the future. ■

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Authors from all faiths and denominations are welcome, the subject matter of the paper, though, must be substantively related to Islam.

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A Message of Peace

A theological basis to inter-religious peace and reconciliation

By Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad

[An essay titled "Message of Peace" ("Paigham Sulh", in Urdu) was written by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam) in the last few days of his life in May 1908. It is an appeal for peace and reconciliation among people of different faith traditions. Although it addresses Hindus and Muslims of India in particular, the principles and lessons contained therein are applicable to relations between Muslims and people of all religions. Hazrat Mirza Sahib explains that the Holy Quran teaches that prophets and religious scriptures from God appeared among every people on earth, and that this acceptance of the divine origin of all religions must be a source of tolerance and respect for followers of other faiths by Muslims. Applying this principle of the Quran, Hazrat Mirza Sahib posits that Krishna and Buddha must have been prophets of God, and even the more contemporary Guru Nanak must have been a saint with true connections with the Divine. This article comprises pertinent portions of the essay that focus on this message of peace and goodwill being established through the understanding that God is the Creator, Nourisher and Sustainer of all mankind, not just a select group of people.]

Introduction

My God almighty! My Guide beloved! Guide us into the path by which Thy truthful and sincere servants find Thee, and save us from the ways of those who seek to gratify their base passions, and satisfy their feelings of revenge or hatred or their greed for things of the world!

And now Friends! all of us whether Hindus or Muslims, notwithstanding hundreds of differences, are one in believing in God as the Creator and Master of the world. Moreover, our cause is common not only because we are all human beings, but also because, as we are inhabitants of one and the same land, we are related as neighbours to one another. It is our duty, therefore, to live as true and sincere friends, and sympathise with one another in difficulties both temporal and spiritual, as though we are limbs of one body.

Broad sympathy

My dear countrymen, that religion is no religion which does not inculcate broad sympathy, nor does that man deserve to be called man who does not have a sympathetic soul within him. Our God has not withheld His

bounty from any people. The powers and faculties which He bestowed on the ancient peoples of India, have also been bestowed on the Arabs, the Persians, the Syrians, the Chinese, the Japanese, the Europeans and the Americans. For all of them, the earth of God serves as a floor, and for all of them His sun, moon, and stars give light, and also perform other functions. All of them derive benefit from the air, water, fire, earth and other things created by God, and all of them use the produce of the earth, its corn and its herbs, its flowers and its fruits. These liberal ways of God teach us that we also should do good to all mankind, and should not be narrow-minded, nor limit our sympathy.

Friends, know it for certain that if either one of us two nations should fail to honour the divine example, and its conduct is contrary to God's pure example, then that nation shall soon be destroyed, and not only itself but will invite destruction upon its unborn generations as well. Ever since the world came into existence, the righteous ones of all lands have proclaimed that man survives by cultivating the fine attributes of God, and that both the physical and spiritual life of man depend on his conformity to all the Divine morals from which all peace is to be obtained.

God of all the worlds

The Holy Quran opens with the very verse which teaches this broad doctrine:

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

The 'worlds' include all the different peoples, different ages, and different countries. Opening the Holy Quran with this verse, which embodies such breadth of view, is a reply to those nations who limit, each to itself, the universal bounty and providence of God, and regard other peoples as though they were not a creation of God, or as though, having once been created, they have since been completely forsaken and forgotten by Him. Jews and Christians, for instance, believe to this day that all the prophets and messengers that have appeared in the world have come only among the Israelites. Towards other peoples, God has been so unfavourably disposed that, finding them in error and ignorance, He has not cared or moved for them. Even Jesus, as the Gospels say, declared that he had been sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. If we suppose for the sake of argument that Jesus did claim Divinity, is it not then amazing that he should have understood his message in such narrow terms? Was Jesus God only of the Israelites? Was he not God also of other peoples, that He should have said that he had nothing to do with the reform and guidance of other peoples?

Narrow Doctrines limiting God's providence

In short, Jews and Christians hold that all the prophets and messengers of God were raised from out of the Hebrew race, and that the books of God were all revealed to members of that chosen race. And Christians further hold that Divine revelation ended with Jesus, and after him the seal was set upon revelation from God. Beliefs similar to these are entertained by the Arya Samaj. Just as Jews and Christians regard the gifts of prophecy and revelation as the special privilege of the house of Israel, and consider other peoples unworthy of them, so the Arya Samaj, to the misfortune of the human race, believe that Divine revelation never went beyond the confines of India. It is from this land, they hold, that the four rishis are raised, again and again. It is only the Vedas which are revealed time after time, and Vedic Sanskrit is the only language employed by God for the expression of His will.

Thus these nations do not regard God as "Lord of all the worlds". If they did regard Him so, there would be no reason why God, the Lord of all the worlds, and not the Lord of the Israelites or the Aryas alone, should have devoted Himself for all time to a single people, in a way so unfair and unjust!

It is to refute such erroneous doctrines that Almighty God has opened the Holy Quran with the verse: "Praise be to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds". In many places in the Holy Book, He has clearly declared this belief to be an error that prophets have been raised from among only one nation, or been sent only to one country. On the contrary, God has not neglected any people or country. In the Holy Quran it is explained by various examples that just as Almighty God has been providing for the physical needs of the people of every country, so also has He been providing for the spiritual sustenance of every land and nation. In one place, for instance, the Holy Quran says:

"There is not a people but a warner was raised among them." (35:24)

It needs no argument, therefore, to say that the True and Perfect God in whom we must all believe is the Lord of all the worlds. His care is not limited to any particular people or any particular age. Rather, He is the Lord of all peoples, all ages, and all lands. He is the fountain-head of all grace, the source of all power, physical and spiritual. He nourishes all His creation; and on Him depends everything that exists. His grace is universal and is spread over all peoples, all countries and all ages. And it was so, in order that no people might complain and say that God had poured down His blessings upon others but not upon them, nor that others had from Him books to guide them, but not they, nor

that in other times He revealed Himself through revelation, signs and miracles, but in their time He became hidden. By making His bounty universal and eternal, God removed all such objections, and displayed wide sympathy for mankind, so that not a people, nor an age was excluded from His physical and spiritual favours.

Message of peace

Divine bounty being so broad, it behoves us to imitate it. It is to invite you to do so, friends and countrymen, that I address you this short appeal which I have called a Message of Peace. In doing so I pray with a most sincere heart that Almighty God may inspire you with truth, and convince you of the sincerity that lies within my heart, that you may not ascribe this friendly invitation to any ulterior motive or selfish design on my part. Friends! the life hereafter remains obscure to most people, and the secret of that final realm is revealed only to those who are consecrated to higher things. But the good or evil that pertains to this life can be seen by every mind possessing foresight.

We all know that unity can remove evils and difficulties which it is impossible to remove otherwise. It does not become any of us, therefore, to deny ourselves the blessings of unity. Hindus and Muslims are two communities about whom it is impossible to imagine that either of them can, at any time, turn the other out of the country. On the contrary, the two communities are now inextricably bound together. If one is visited by any general affliction, the other must suffer along with it as well. If one should seek, out of scorn and pride, to bring the other into contempt, then it also cannot escape being brought into similar contempt. If one does not sympathise with the other, then it shall itself suffer the loss also. If someone belonging to one of the communities does anything to harm the other, he behaves like one who cuts off the branch upon which he himself sits. Friends! you are now an enlightened people, and it is time you cleared your hearts of all hatred, and advanced in mutual goodwill and friendliness. It is time that men of your intelligence gave up unkindness and took to charity. The problems of this life resemble a journey through the desert undertaken in the burning heat of the sun. To mitigate the heat of the journey, and to quench the thirst on the way, you need the cool and refreshing water of union and goodwill which saves your life.

I invite you to peace at a critical time when peace is urgently needed. Disaster after disaster has come into the world. We have had earthquakes and famines, and the plague has not yet left us. Almighty God has even told me that if the world does not repent of its evil ways and does not forsake them all, disasters yet more terrible will visit the earth, and one disaster will not have left when another will have appeared; and at length man out

of sheer helplessness, will begin to ask what is going to happen. And many, under the strain of suffering, will lose the balance of their minds. Beware, therefore, my fellow countrymen, and take care before that time arrives. Let Hindu and Muslim communities make peace between them. If one of them is doing to the other any wrong which prevents this peace, let it at once give up the wrong, or else it shall be responsible for all the ill-feeling between the two.

Religious differences

It may be asked, How can there be peace when religious differences are making the gulf wider and wider every-day? But I say in reply that a genuine religious difference should be inspired only by considerations of reason, justice and observed facts. Why has man been endowed with reason if he is not to see that what he believes or does is in accordance with reason, justice and the proclamations of experienced fact? Minor differences cannot be a barrier to peace. Only those differences are a bar to peace which lead one party to vilify and denounce the honoured Founder and the holy Book of another. And with regard to this, all lovers of unity will be glad to learn that nearly everything that Islam teaches is to be met with in one or another of the Vedic schools. For instance, though the new Arya Samaj movement maintains as a fundamental doctrine that, after the Vedas, the door of all revelation has been sealed, yet the great Avatars who have appeared since in the Hindu faith, and are followed by millions in this country, have broken this seal by their claim to revelation. Among these Avatars is the great Sri Krishna who is deeply revered in this country, particularly in the province of Bengal. Sri Krishna claimed to be the recipient of revelation. His followers indeed exalt him to the status of God Incarnate, but there can be no doubt at all that he was a prophet of his time and an Avatar, and that he was favoured by God with His word.

Guru Nanak

Similarly in the latter days, the Hindu community had had Baba Nanak, the universally respected and honoured saint of this country, whose followers known as Sikhs number at least two millions. Baba Nanak openly claimed to be the recipient of Divine revelation, evidence of this being in the Granths, as well as in the various Janam Sakhis. In one of his Janam Sakhis he says that he had it revealed to him by God that the religion of Islam is true. It was because of this that he went on pilgrimage to Makka, and adopted all the tenets of Islam. It is a proven fact that miracles and signs were witnessed at this hands, and there can be no doubt that he was one of those chosen and righteous servants of God whom God favours with the gift of His love. He was

raised among the Hindus particularly to bear witness to the fact that Islam is a Divine religion. His sacred relics at Dera Baba Nanak bear the clearest testimony to his profession of the Islamic Kalima, "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His Prophet", and those at Guru Har Sahai in the Ferozepore District, include a copy of the Holy Quran. Who can then doubt that Nanak, with his pure heart, pure nature, and sincere exertions in the way of God, had divined the secret which remained closed to the Pundits? By his claim to being a recipient of Divine revelation, and by the signs from God which he showed, Guru Nanak completely refuted the doctrine which holds that there is to be no revelation after the Vedas, nor any signs of God.

Nanak undoubtedly came as a blessing to the Hindus. He was, as it were, the last Avatar of the Hindu religion who strove hard to rid Hindus of the hatred which they entertained towards Islam. But, to the great misfortune of this country, Hindus did not benefit much from the teaching of Baba Nanak. On the other hand, the Pundits persecuted him for no other reason than that he proclaimed the truth of Islam wherever he went. He had come to establish peace between Hinduism and Islam, but his voice fell on deaf ears. Had his teaching been heeded, Hindus and Muslims would today be one. How much it grieves me to think that a great soul came into the world, and passed away, but alas, ignorant men took nothing from his light. Nonetheless, he showed that the door to Divine revelation can never be closed, and that signs of God are manifested at all times at the hands of His chosen servants. He also proclaimed that enmity to Islam was enmity to the light that comes from heaven.

My own experience

My own experience in the matter is the same, that revelation and experience of God have not been intercepted in our time; on the contrary, God speaks even now, as He spoke in the past, and He listens as He listened in days of yore, and none of His eternal attributes has or shall ever become lapsed. For nearly thirty years, I have been favoured with the word of God. He has manifested hundreds of His signs at my hands, and these have been witnessed by thousands of men, and published in books and newspapers. There is not a community that has not witnessed one sign or another. In the face of this strong and cumulative testimony, how can we accept the doctrine which the Arya Samaj unjustly attribute to the Vedas, that the door of all Divine revelation was closed with the revelation of the Vedas, and that mankind has since been left to rely on stories of the past. And it is on the basis of this doctrine that the Arya Samaj treat the books of other religions as fabrications of man, God forbid! And this, in spite of the fact that other books can furnish stronger proof of their truth than can the Vedas.

They have the hand of God behind them, and have heavenly signs in their support. Then how can it be that these books are not from God, while the Vedas are? As the existence of God is a matter of the deepest subtlety, reason also requires that to prove His existence merely one book is not sufficient. Rather, He should send prophets in different countries with His word and revelation, so that man, who is weak and prone to doubt, not be deprived of accepting Him.

Hindus, Jews and others limit revelation

It is impossible to think that God, Who is the Lord of the whole world, Who causes His sun to shine upon all people from East to West, and Who sends down His rain upon every tract of land, according to need, that this same God should, in matters spiritual, become so narrow-minded and parsimonious as to limit His favours for ever to one people, one country, and one language. I fail to understand what logic or philosophy there is in this doctrine, that while God does not hate to hear and understand the prayers of men in their different languages, He hates to reveal His word in any language but Vedic Sanskrit. This is a mystery which no one has been able to solve. As for myself, I regard the Vedas free from any such teaching, which is not only repugnant to reason, but which also casts the slur of favouritism and partiality on the Holy Person of God. The truth is that when a long time passes after the revelation of a book, its followers out of foolishness or design, consciously or unconsciously, begin to add their own interpretations to it. As these additions are made by people holding a diversity of views, one religion multiplies into hundreds of different creeds.

It is curious that, just as the Aryas believe that revelation has been limited to certain tribes in Arya Varta, and just as they say that revelation had had but one medium of expression, viz., Vedic Sanskrit, the language of God, the Jews believe the same about their own tribe and their own books. They too believe that Hebrew is the language of God, and His revelation was ever limited to the Israelites and their land. Anyone who claims to be a prophet of God, but does not belong to their tribe or speak their language, is considered by them to be a false prophet. Striking as this resemblance is, there are other religions holding the same belief about themselves, such as the Zoroastrians who regard their religion millions of years older than the Vedas. It seems that the idea of limiting Divine revelation to one's own language, country or nation is based upon sheer ignorance and prejudice. In earlier times, a people or country did not know about other peoples and other countries in the world. It was but natural, therefore, that when a book was given to them or when a prophet appeared among them, they thought that they were the

sole recipients of Divine revelation and that whatever guidance God had meant to give to man, had been given to them, and had been laid down in their book, given to their nation and land, all others being deprived of it.

This belief has been the source of many evils. In fact, it is the seed which developed into the mutual hatred and rancour between various nations. For a long time one people remained ignorant of another, and one country was so much of a terra incognita for another that the learned men of India thought that beyond the Himalayas there was no human habitation. When the veil was lifted, and the peoples of the world came to know about one another, the false beliefs relating to the appearance of prophets, and the revelation of sacred books, had already taken root in the minds of men. Every people believed that their country alone was the seat of the manifestation of the glory of God. As barbarous passions ruled supreme, and those who dissented from established beliefs were dealt with by the sword, no one dared to bring about peace and union between contending religions by cooling down the emotions of self-glorification.

Buddha

Gautama Buddha tried to do this. He did not believe the Vedas to be the first and the last revelation of God, nor did he subscribe to the doctrine that Divine revelation was limited to any one country, people or language — that this language and this country and these Brahmans had been chosen in the Divine law for revelation. On account of this dissent, Gautama was severely persecuted; he was called atheistic and godless, just as those inquirers of Europe and America who do not believe in the divinity of Jesus, and are unable to accept that God can ever be put on the cross, are called atheists by churchmen. It was this kind of atheist that Buddha was called, and as is the practice of malicious opponents, false allegations were spread against him to incite hatred against him. At last he was expelled from his homeland India, and to this day Hindus look down upon the success which his teaching attained. But, as Jesus said, a prophet is not without honour save in his own country. Buddha attained marvellous success in his mission after he had gone to other countries. At present one-third of the human race is said to follow the Buddhist faith, the centres of its following being China and Japan, while it has spread as far as Russia and America.

Adherents of religions attack others' faiths

To revert to the original subject, when the followers of one religion were ignorant of religions prevailing in other countries, every community naturally clung to its own book and its own creed as the sole repositories of

truth. When, therefore, the inhabitants of different countries learnt of one another's existence, and one people came to know the creed of another, each found it difficult to approve of the alien creed. Fancy had invested every religion with certain exaggerated distinctions and beauties, and it was no easy task to divest it of these. Consequently, the adherents of every religion gave themselves up to the task of refuting rival religions. The followers of Zoroaster, for instance, argued that there was no religion comparable to theirs, that prophethood was confined to the Zoroastrian dispensation, and that their scriptures were the oldest of all, so much so that even the Vedas paled into insignificance when compared with theirs in antiquity. The Hebrews also were not far behind in making claims for their religion. They fixed Palestine as the land where the throne of God had been placed, never to be removed to anywhere else. Only the elect of the Jewish race were eligible for the sacred office of prophethood. They were even forbidden to preach to other peoples. Revelation was held to be a gift which could be bestowed only on a member of their own race, and if there appeared any claimant among others, he could only be an impostor.

Exactly the same kind of views became established among the inhabitants of Arya Varta. According to them, Parameshwara is only a Raja of their country, a Raja who knows nothing about other countries of the world. The belief is cherished, without a semblance of reason, that Parameshwara has taken a liking to the climate of Arya Varta, and has never even thought of visiting other countries to inquire into the condition of those who had been left to themselves ever since He created them.

Friends, ponder for God's sake, and say whether such beliefs are acceptable to reason, whether there is anything in human conscience which responds to them. I cannot see how a rational being can believe, on the one hand, that God is the Lord of the whole universe, and yet say, on the other, that He has withdrawn His foster-ship and care from the greater part of the world, and that His love and mercy is confined to one people and one country. Is there anything corresponding to this in the distribution by God of His physical bounties? If not, why should His spiritual favours be distributed with such partiality? By using sense and reason, we can discover the good or evil of anything from the results it leads to. I need hardly tell you how terrible are the consequences of insulting and reviling those holy prophets who count millions of human beings of all ranks among their devoted servants and followers. There is no community but has more or less tasted the fruit of such vilification. Friends, long experience and many trials have now proved that to speak disrespectfully of the holy leaders of other peoples, and to hurl abuses at them, is a

poison which undermines both body and soul. It brings double ruin in its wake.

A country cannot have peace when different communities inhabiting it attack and abuse the religious leaders of one another, and two communities cannot live in harmony with each other when one or each of them speaks insultingly of the spiritual teachers of the other. Every man must have his feelings stirred when he hears his prophet or founder insulted. Particularly Muslims are a people who, without calling their Holy Prophet as God or son of God, believe him to be greater than all righteous men that were ever born of woman. So it is not at all possible to make peace with a true Muslim, unless the Holy Prophet is always spoken of in respectful terms.

Muslim attitude

We Muslims, on our part, never speak disrespectfully of the prophets of other communities. On the other hand, our belief is that spiritual leaders who ever lived on this earth among various nations, who have been accepted by many millions of men, who have won the affection and respect of a large portion of humanity, and have been held in esteem for a very long time, were one and all true prophets of God, these circumstances alone being a sufficient evidence of their truth. If they had not been sent by God, they would not have found acceptance with so many millions of men. God never grants to others the honour which He gives to His chosen ones. If an impostor sits in the seat of the elect of God, he is soon brought to naught.

It is on this principle that we regard the Vedas as from God, and believe the Rishis to have been holy and sacred. It is true that the teachings contained in the Vedas have failed to promote the worship of the One God, nor were they suited to do so. Idolaters, fire-worshippers, sun-worshippers, Ganges-worshippers, polytheists, followers of Jainism, and professors of the Shakat Mat, in short all sects of Hinduism that are to be found in India, base their respective creeds on the Vedas, the Vedas apparently being capable of all these divergent interpretations. Still our own firm belief, according to the Quranic teaching, is that the Vedas are not a fabrication of man, for a human fabrication does not have the power to draw millions of men to itself and to establish a system that can endure for ages.

Unjustified attacks on Islam

I do not mean to lay any unjust charge at the door of any particular community, nor do I intend to offend anybody. But with great pain and a deep sigh I feel constrained to say that great injustice is being done to Islam and the Holy Quran. Islam is a holy and peaceful religion which

never attacked the leader of any community, and the Quran is an honourable book which laid the foundation of peace among nations by accepting the prophets of all nations — a distinction which the Holy Quran alone possesses among the scriptures of the world. Regarding the prophets of the world, the Quran says:

“O believers, say, We believe in all the prophets of the world and make no distinction between them by accepting some and rejecting others.” (2:136)

If there exists any other revealed book with such a peaceful teaching, let it be named. The Quran does not restrict the universal providence of God to any particular race. It accepts all the prophets of the house of Israel, such as Jacob, Isaac, Moses, David and Jesus, and does not call any prophet, may he belong to Persia, India or any other country, a liar or an impostor. On the other hand, it plainly declares that there have been prophets among all peoples and in all lands, and thus lays the foundation of peace among mankind. It is painful, therefore, to find that this Prophet of Peace should be reviled and treated with contempt by every other community.

Grave warning

My dear countrymen, I have not said this to offend you or to injure your feelings. I wish to tell you from the very best of motives that those who have made it a practice to abuse and revile the Prophets of other communities, as if this immoral conduct formed part of their religion, are not only sinners in the sight of God, for their transgressions and for making unfounded attacks, but they are guilty also of sowing the seed of discord and enmity between communities. Tell me, if a person abuses another’s father or calumniates his mother, does he not really attack the honour of his own parents? And if the person whose parents he has abused pays him back in the same coin, may we not hold the person who abused first to be the cause of the abuse, and regard him as the enemy of his own parents’ honour? Mark how God inculcates respect and regard for the honour of others in the Holy Quran. He says:

“Do not abuse the idols of the idolaters; for if you do so, they will abuse your God in return, not knowing Who God is.” (6:108)

Despite the Divine teaching that idols have no worth at all, nonetheless God enjoins upon Muslims to abstain from abusing the idols, and to preach gently, lest idol-worshippers become outraged and begin to revile God, and Muslims themselves become the cause of this abuse. Compare with this the conduct of those who abuse the great Prophet of Islam, who speak of him in defamatory terms, and make wild and savage attacks on his honour and character. Our Holy Prophet is he, on the

mention of whose name, great monarchs of Islam step down from their thrones, bow to his commands, and are proud to count themselves among the humblest of his servants. Is not this honour from God? To treat with contempt one who is honoured by God is to fight with God. Our Holy Prophet, Hazrat Muhammad Mustafa (peace and the blessings of God upon him!), is that chosen Prophet of God, to demonstrate whose truth and greatness, God has shown wonderful signs to the world. Is it not the hand of God that has made two hundred million Muslims² prostrate themselves at his door? Every prophet had some proof of the truth of his teachings, but the proofs which the world has witnessed of the truth of the Holy Prophet, which continue to appear till today, have no parallel in any other prophet. ■

Faith and Nation

Being an American Muslim

By Fazeel S. Khan, Esq.

[This article is transcript of a sermon delivered in Cincinnati, Ohio, where the Editor was requested to deliver the sermon for two church congregations during Sunday worship on the topic “Faith and Nation: Being an American Muslim”. The two churches organized the event so that its congregants could learn more about Islam and, for some of them, have their first personal meeting with a Muslim. The sermon aimed at showing the compatibility between Islamic principles and commonly accepted American values.]

Introduction

I begin in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. I greet you all with the Islamic salutation, “assalamu aleikum” (may peace be upon you). It is an absolute pleasure to be with you all today. I thank you for this gracious invitation. It really is an honor to have an opportunity to speak to you about my faith, Islam.

The issue of being an American Muslim – reconciling devotion to faith with loyalty to nation – is a topic that is as popular today as it is misunderstood. At the heart of this issue is the question: Is Islam inherently incompatible with the civil and democratic ideals upon which this country was founded? Now, in order to assess this question, a basic understanding of what the religion of Islam entails is required. What is the *essence* of this faith? So, let’s start there.

Overview of Islam

The word “Islam” is derived from the Arabic root word “silm”, meaning “peace”. So the religion is neither

named after its founder nor the place from which it originated, as is the case with other faiths, but rather is titled after the objective to which it aspires. The attainment of peace – within the individual, amongst people, and between man and God – is the goal Islam prescribes as the very purpose of life. “Peace”, therefore, is the very essence of the faith.

This notion of “peace” is further illustrated in the Islamic conception of “God”. God is referred to in the holy scripture of Islam – the Quran – as “Allah”. “Allah” is normally simply translated as “God” in English, but is literally defined as: “that Being possessing all the perfect attributes”. And in the very first Chapter of the Quran, the *four* principle attributes of God are introduced.

The first is that God is *Rabb-ul-al-amin*, normally translated as “Lord of all the worlds”, and signifies that God is not only the Creator, but also the Provider and Nourisher and Sustainer for all creation. It means that everything is dependent on God and it is through God’s love for His creation that everything continues to exist and progress.

The second is that God is *Rahman*, normally translated as “Beneficent”, and signifies that God has so much love for His creation that He provides everything needed for its development, even though it may be unmerited. Whether it is the sun, air, soil, water, God provides for His creation without man having done anything first to deserve it. And just as God provides for our physical/material welfare, so too does He provide for our spiritual development through the raising of prophets and revealing of scriptures throughout the ages.

The third is that God is *Raheem*, normally translated as “Merciful”, but really means that when one makes use of what God provides, God rewards that doing of good abundantly. For instance, when one makes use of the sun, soil, water and seeds by cultivating a field, he/she is rewarded with crops, which becomes a source for his/her physical development. Likewise, when one makes use of the guidance provided by God as contained in scriptures and through the teachings of the prophets and messengers of God, man is rewarded with the spiritual sustenance of peace and contentment by becoming close to God.

And the fourth is that God is *Malik*, which means He is the “True Master of Judgment” in that punishment is always for the purpose of reformation of the individual and never on account of anger for wrongdoing. As an example, it is impossible to imagine a mother allowing a knife to be placed on her infant child? But what if the knife were in the hands of a doctor who intends to operate on the child to cure it of sickness and disease? See,

in the same way, what man may sometimes view as punishment, is merely an opportunity to recognize our wrongdoing so that we may be cured of our spiritual ailments and be guided to the right path.

The consistent theme therefore, is that God is a loving, nurturing force that provides for all and rewards those who make benefit of what He provides and judges out of mercy for the purpose of guiding those who are going astray to the right path.

And the Quran tells us that man intrinsically recognizes these attributes because the human “soul” is nothing other than the “spirit of God” breathed into each one of us. The *spirit of God* within man means that the divine attributes (such as Rabb, Rahman, Raheem and Malik) exist within each of us. And it is through the doing of good works that these attributes may be developed. Just as with our physical bodies, we have muscles, and they don’t necessarily grow or develop without exercising them. So too must our spiritual qualities be exercised in order for them to develop. Salvation, therefore, is being in a spiritual state in which one attains closeness to God by having developed the divine attributes within one’s self through the doing of good works. And the Holy Quran refers to the person who has achieved this state of total peace as the “soul at rest”. This, my friends, is the essence of Islam.

Negative perceptions

Today, however, rather than being viewed as a spiritual faith, based on peace, the doing of good to others, and being accountable for one’s actions, Islam is viewed as a violent and intolerant faith that is antagonistic to the democratic ideals entrenched in the very fabric of this nation. Recent polls show:

- Nearly half (49%) of Americans openly state they view Islam negatively.
- More than a quarter (26%) admit to having prejudice against Muslims.
- That although Muslims make up about 2% of the American workforce, 25% of charges of discrimination with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission were based on bias towards Muslims.
- 2/3 of Americans (66%) opposed the efforts of Muslims to build a community center (which happened to also include a prayer area) two blocks away from Ground Zero because it was considered too close.

And despite all this negativity and hysteria, we were able to get a Muslim elected as President of the United States of ... I’m joking, of course!

Based on reality or extremist propaganda?

Now, certainly, there is some basis to these negative views. Not only have extremists of the Muslim faith engaged in terrorist attacks in various places, and claim to be engaged in a “jihad” against everyone who does not follow their ways (including other Muslims), they also openly reject western-styled democracies. Indeed, this ideology espoused by these extremists is contrary to what we understand to be “American” values. But it must be understood that it is equally contrary to “Islamic” values. If we take a look at the fundamentals of a democratic system of governance – that is, a system in which the notions of “majority rule” and “protection of individual rights” are established, we see that both of these principles find explicit support in Islam.

The substance of the principle of *majority rule* is reflected in the Quran by it specifically addressing the believers as “*those whose affairs are decided by counsel among themselves*” (42:38). And this principle was put into practice by the Holy Prophet Muhammad himself. Recorded history bears witness to him not only engaging in consultative processes with regard to administrative matters and state affairs, but also accepting the majority view despite his personal opinion at times being to the contrary. Similarly, the basis of a *majority rule* system is further espoused in Islamic tradition by the Qur’an commanding Muslims to “*make over (positions of) trust (in government or affairs of the state) to those worthy of them*” (4:58). This verse plainly calls for an electoral system whereby *the people* determine who they want as their representatives. Again, this principle was practically demonstrated in the early history of Islam by the Muslims electing the first four Caliphs (or heads of state after Muhammad). And this was done either by agreement of all parties, by nomination after consultation with leading representatives of the community, or by appointment by an elective council.

Similarly, the fundamental elements of the *individual rights* principle are unequivocally upheld in Islamic tradition. The Qur’an champions the equality of all mankind by stating: “*All men are a single nation*” (2:213). It also features what some believe to be the magna carta of religious tolerance by declaring: “*There is no compulsion in matters of religion*” (2:256). The equality between the sexes is also a recurring theme throughout the Quran, both men *and* women being expressly referred to, side by side, in various verses, to illustrate that one is no more important than the other. Even the economic independence of the sexes is advanced – similar to the call for “equal pay for equal work” – as it states: “*For men is the benefit of what they earn. And for women the benefit of what they earn*” (4:32). And undisputed history bears testimony to the

distinguished civil liberties enjoyed by all people, of different ethnicities or religions, under early Muslim rule, the protected status of Jews in Spain being an illustrious example. And the list of these comparable values goes on and on. Clearly there is much in common with the constitutional foundations of this country, and entrenched Islamic principles.

Founding fathers and Islam

And these Islamic principles were not entirely foreign to the Founding Fathers of this great nation when the foundations of plurality and religious freedoms for this country were being established. In 1765, eleven years before drafting of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson purchased a copy of the Quran. This marked only the beginning of his lifelong interest in Islam, and he would go on to acquire numerous books on Middle Eastern languages, history and travel, taking extensive notes on Islam as it relates to English common law. And in 1776, when it was questioned whether the term “Almighty God” in the preamble of the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom (the basis of the later First Amendment to the Constitution) should be replaced with the words “Jesus Christ”, Thomas Jefferson explained that the general term “Almighty God” was used because the law was intended “to comprehend, within the mantle of its protection, the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and the Mahomedan (the term used for Muslim) ...”

Conclusion

And, yet, because of the sensational acts of Islamic militants today, who amount to a fraction of 1% of the 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, the entire religion of Islam is viewed with suspicion and even contempt. Now, this does not mean that there isn’t an “ideological” aspect to this problem of Islamic extremism that we see causing chaos in many parts of the world today. Certainly, extremism breeds in environments of poverty, lack of education and opportunities, and conditions of desperation, where there is no hope for progress. *But* there is no doubt that a perverted interpretation of Islam is being used by some people to address these socio-economic and political grievances through violence. And stripping the extremists of the garb of Islam that they wear to achieve their political goals can only be done by Muslims. It is their responsibility.

And this is what the Islamic society I belong to, the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement, has been doing, not since 9-11, but for the past over 100 years. We publish books – and in particular a translation of the Holy Quran with commentary that addresses many of the ideologies extremists promote and explains them in their proper context. Our literature is available in the largest retail outlets around the world and many universities use

them as text books. But what we also do is have this literature translated in foreign languages and we try to get them into the hands of native populations so that people can learn about their religion for themselves, in their own language, and not have to rely on what is unfortunately sometimes the case, a politically motivated cleric telling them what their religions is all about.

I end this short address by asking that you all pray for us in this endeavor. I thank you for your attention. May God bless all of us here today, may He bless America, and may He bless all of His children throughout the world. Amen. ■

Lessons on the Quran

Surah Al-An'am, Section 13

By Lubna Ahmad

[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 Mrs. Lubna Ahmad. It deals with Section 13 of Sura Al-An'am.]

Introduction

The theme of Chapter 6, titled *Al-An'am* (The Cattle), is to establish the concept of Divine Unity in its purist form, the understanding of which is to be the basis for the practical life of a Muslim. It emphasizes the need to eradicate superstitions and idolatrous practices. The Chapter begins by drawing our attention to the characteristics of Almighty Allah, as the Creator and Originator of the Universe. And these lessons reveal our very own physical existence testifies to the truth of the Oneness of God; that is, the different stages in human development and the congruity in the laws of nature around us, can only be the work of One Supreme God.

The Chapter continues with presenting an account of the blessings, both physical and spiritual, given to us through the attribute of Divine Mercy. The fate of the rejecters and opposers of Truth, both as individuals and nations in the past, is given as proof for the importance of accepting the message of Truth delivered through divine revelation. We are told repeatedly to take responsibility for our actions, good or bad. There will be no intercession as we are directly held accountable for our deeds in this world and the Hereafter. No convictions, arguments, social connections or titles will be of any avail.

We are also told that the messengers of God are only bearers of good news and warners. Their duty is simply to convey the message. All the prophets of God before the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) brought this same universal message of the Unity of God. And they were all given three things. The first was the *Kitab* (the Book), or Divine Revelation. The second was *Hukum*, or authority directly from God to judge their people. The third was *Nubuwwat*, or the gift of prophecy to strengthen the faith. And by rejecting the messages of the previous messengers (as contained in scriptures), we are told, nations lost their own moral credibility. They took their own leaders as their gods or associated sons and daughters to God. The significance of following the Holy Prophet Muhammad as a role model, it is then explained, lies in the fact that he is the representative of all previous prophets. And the concept of *Tauheed* (Unity of God), the very basis of the divine message from the beginning, is reintroduced as necessary to be established in our daily lives to as to achieve spiritual growth and nearness to God.

Section 12, titled by Maulana Muhammad Ali as "Gradual Progress", gives us the good news of the ultimate triumph of the truth of the concept of Unity of God. People who submit to the divine message, we are told, will be relieved from spiritual darkness and granted spiritual light. A parallel is drawn between the physical and the spiritual worlds to illustrate this good news. Islam has been likened to grain. Allah brings forth the germination of a seed from the darkness of the soil, into a tall tree. He will similarly bring about the revival of Islam from the depths of darkness of the night, into the splendor of daylight. The creation of the sun for daylight, the moon for calculation, night for rest, and the stars to give direction at night are all signs from Allah for us to ponder upon. Divine revelation, we are further told, is like the water from the clouds. It nourishes and unravels the hidden spiritual beauty of the soul, which is a gift from Allah, the Source of all goodness. Man drinking at the fountain of spiritual water is thus able to live a life in which spiritual progression is achieved. The fruits and vegetation that result from this process come in the form of spiritual contentment, awareness and nearness to God.

Similarly, in Holy Quran 6:99 and 55:11 the good deeds of a believer are likened to a date palm tree, every part of which serves a purpose. The tree trunk is used for making houses, the leaves for making baskets, the bark for making clothes, and the fruit to eat and make sugar. Similarly, the life of a believer in this world is useful from all aspects. In the physical world, he plants flowers in a garden, cultivates crops, and plants fruit trees. In the spiritual world, he utilizes heavenly waters

to nurture the growth of his soul, through good actions of all kinds.

The section under discussion today continues the good news of the eventual establishment of the message of Truth, the Unity of God, and negates all sorts of associations with Allah, as He is *Subhan*, or free from faults. He is above the human need for procreation, and has Sublime Divine attributes.

Chapter 6, Verse 101

Wonderful Originator of the heavens and the earth! How could He have a son when He has no consort? And He created everything, and He is the Knower of all things.

This verse picks up the message from the previous section, regarding the worldly blessings around us, a gift from Allah. As He is the Creator of everything around us and the sole possessor of all of the attributes of perfection, He could not have associates like a son or a wife. A son or daughter will need to have common qualities with God, such as the ability to create and have knowledge of the unseen. Only Allah has knowledge of everything. Chapter 112, titled *Al-Ikhlās* (The Unity), clearly conveys this message:

*Say: He, Allah, is One
Allah is He on Whom all depend.
He begets not, nor is He begotten;
And none is like Him.*

Chapter 6, Verses 102,103

That is Allah, your Lord. There is no god but He; the Creator of all things; therefore serve Him, and He has charge of all things.

Vision comprehends Him not, and He comprehends (all) vision; and He is the Subtle, the Aware.

In these verses, God is identified as Allah and *Ra'b* (or Lord). Allah is the proper name of God in Arabic. It does not originate from a root word. Allah is “the One Who possesses all the perfect attributes and is capable of dispensing those attributes to His Creation”. *Rab* (or Lord) is “the One Who nourishes a thing from the lowest stage to the highest stage of perfection. He Creates, Measures, Guides and Sustains His creation”. He is in complete control and the universality of the laws of nature are a proof of this. It is therefore important that we submit to Him and follow His spiritual guidance as presented in the Holy Quran. Allah alone should be our *Ilaha*, or object of adoration. Our devotion and sincerity of worship should be directed to Him alone.

We, as physical beings, cannot see our Creator with our physical eye. We are limited to knowing God

through our spiritual senses. As a result, we are unable to have complete knowledge of Him, other than the evidence of His presence everywhere around us. We may be provided with some other spiritual faculties to be able to perceive Him in the life Hereafter. On the other hand, Allah is *Al-Lateef*, the Subtle, Who has the knowledge of the minutest details of everything. Based on this attribute, He is able to create with gentleness and measure. He is able to see everything and He is *Al-Khabir*, the Aware of the past, present and future of all.

Chapter 6, Verse 104

Clear proofs have indeed come to you from your Lord; so whoever sees, it is for his own good; and whoever is blind, it is to his own harm. And I am not a keeper over you.

The evidence of the existence of the One and Only God, Allah, is very distinct. And, there is no doubt about its truth, which has been presented by Allah Himself in the Quran. Whoever is able to accept this, will benefit from it and earn the closeness of his Creator. On the other hand, the one who rejects this knowledge, will be at a loss and spiritually distant from Allah. The Holy Prophet Muhammad is asked to convey this message that he is not responsible for the protection of such people who defy the Unity of God. *Hafiz*, or protection can only be sought through Allah Himself.

Chapter 6, Verses 105, 106, 107

And thus do We repeat the messages, and that they may say, Thou hast studied; and that We may make it clear to a people who know.

Follow that which is revealed to thee from thy Lord — there is no god but He; and turn away from the polytheists.

And if Allah had pleased, they would not have set up others (with Him). And We have not appointed thee a keeper over them, and thou art not placed in charge of them.

In these verses, it is explained why the message of and the evidence for the Unity of God has been repeated. It is to reinforce the teachings to the Holy Prophet, and to make him more knowledgeable in the eyes of the people. It is also to make the message clearer to the people. Evidence of different types has been afforded, but it all leads to one conclusion, the Oneness of God.

We are once again asked to follow the guidance given to us from Allah, our Lord, as He not only creates us but helps us grow through different stages of physical and spiritual development. We are reminded that there is no god but Allah and we should not associate partners with Him. We are asked to uphold the monotheistic doc-

trine and give up association with the *mushriqeen* or polytheists if they try to harm our belief in any way.

Allah, being the Creator, could have made the polytheists believe in Him if He so willed. However, in such a situation, man would have been preprogrammed and would have been denied his/her freedom of will, which is necessarily for spiritual growth. Man, then, would have been no different from other animals, relying on mere instincts rather than contemplative choice. Following divine guidance and choosing to make the right decisions at the right time enables a person to nurture his or her spirituality.

And, once again, the Holy Prophet is reminded that he is only a messenger to his people, and he is not their protector or accountable for them. This once again shows that messengers are not intercessors in the way some hold them to be.

Chapter 6, Verse 108

And abuse not those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest, exceeding the limits, they abuse Allah through ignorance. Thus to every people have We made their deeds fair-seeming; then to their Lord is their return so He will inform them of what they did.

Muslims are addressed here and commanded not to disrespect those who do not follow their beliefs, whether it be verbally, physically or even through writing. It may be that such people are ignorant and they do not know the truth about Allah, and they abuse Him out of ignorance. Certainly, this does not mean that one is not to be steadfast to their beliefs, but what is meant is that one's intent should not be to abuse others. For example, when Muslims eventually took control of Makkah, they cleared the *Kabah* of all of the idols to re-establish and uphold the doctrine of Unity of God, as the *Kabah* had been a symbol of divine unity from time immemorial. However, no idols were touched in people's private homes, as this was a matter of their private faith and Muslims had no right to abuse idol worshippers. We are also told that it is human nature to consider oneself as holding the correct belief and as acting in the most correct manner. The reality is that it is only on the Day of Judgment that everyone will be made aware of their deeds, good or bad.

Chapter 6, Verse 109

And they swear their strongest oaths by Allah that if a sign come to them they would certainly believe in it. Say: Signs are with Allah. And what should make you know that when they come they believe not?

Here we are told that the unbelievers swear that they would have accepted the Truth if they had been given a sign proving it. They reminded, however, that the evidence in the form of clear arguments had already been provided to establish true faith. A sign or miracle would only be to support the evidence, and by itself would be meaningless. The demand was, in fact, to show that Allah could overthrow them. Allah alone shows his signs at the appropriate time when needed. The first sign was shown to the Quraish when their power was overthrown in the Battle of Badr. They still did not believe in the Power of Allah.

Chapter 6, Verse 110

And We turn their hearts and their sights, even as they did not believe in it the first time; and We leave them in their inordinacy, blindly wandering on.

The hearts and minds of such people are turned away from the Truth. They close their minds and try not to understand the Truth rationally. They come up with various opposing views, and their stubbornness and rejection remains unchanged as before. Under such condition, Allah just leaves them drifting in their inordinacy.

Conclusion

The message of the Holy Quran is unique. It encourages human beings to serve Allah, the One Supreme God, and His creation. The "good news" is that the belief in the Unity of God will ultimately prevail, but it is a slow process that will bring life to the spiritually dead. Rain water that seeps through the soil consistently and slowly tends to bring more growth, as opposed to the quick rain that does not give enough time to the roots to absorb and retain it. A spiritual wayfarer can only benefit through gentle yet frequent rain for the fruits to become apparent.

The quality of deeds and the success of a believer depend, on four main things. First of all, the believer must be constantly vigilant of his duties and responsibilities and plant the seed of goodness, on a timely basis. This requires both patience and persistence. Second, while planting the seed of good actions, he must have faith in Allah. Third, the action of goodness must have a spirit of sincerity and humility. It should be void of showmanship. It should aim to seek the pleasure of Allah, his Creator. Fourth, the believer should prove to be useful in all areas and aspects of his life. The ultimate goal is to have complete submission to Allah and complete devotion in service to humanity. The prime objective of Islam is to create sympathy and love for mankind. It aims not to create differences, but to bring people together, as all human beings are created by Allah, the One Supreme God. May Allah help us achieve these goals. ■

The Influence of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad on Others

In the words of Maulana Muhammad Ali

From the book
“Jamaat-i-Qadian aur har Musalam
kay li’y lahma fikriyya”

[The following quotes are from an Urdu booklet written by Maulana Muhammad Ali in 1949, a few years prior to his death. The title of the booklet is translated into English as “A Moment’s Reflection for the Qadian Jamaat and every Muslim.” In certain passages, Maulana Muhammad Ali traces the factors which led him to devote his life to the service of Islam, and recognizes Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as the cause and inspiration for his achievements. These statements require those who are admirers of Maulana Muhammad Ali’s prominent role in producing premier Islamic literature in contemporary times to acknowledge the status of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as the source from which these noble contributions flourished.]

“All I can say about myself is that if Almighty God had not guided me towards this work, I would, like my fellow-students, have become at best a successful lawyer or judge. But the man who directed me to this work, then set me on this path, and guided me correctly is the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian. At a time when I had gone into a worldly path, he not only pulled me out of the mire of this world but also created within me a light of faith that has stayed with me throughout this struggle. ***I declare it openly that if the Imam and Mujaddid of this age had not guided me, I was not capable of doing this work. I received a spark of the light which filled his breast.***”

“The nineteenth century of the Christian era had drawn to a close. In exactly the year 1900, when I was on my way to Gurdaspur to start my law practice, with all arrangements completed, the premises rented, and my belongings and books moved there, my Guide took me by the hand and said: You have other work to do, I want to start an English periodical for the propagation of Islam to the West, you will edit it. What great fortune that, on hearing this voice, I did not hesitate for a

moment as to whether I should start this work or the work for which I had prepared myself.”

“This periodical was issued on 1 January 1902 under the title *The Review of Religions*. In 1909 I began the English translation of the Holy Quran. When I look back today, after half a century, I fall before God in gratitude that He gave me such long respite and enabled me to do so much work.”

“In reality, this is not my work. It is the work of the one who took my hand and set me on this road. ***And not only myself, but whoever went to him he put a spark of the fire of the love of God in the heart of that disciple.*** Just like me, the late Khawaja Kamal-ud-Din too, by sitting at the feet of the Imam of the age, was blessed with opening the first Islamic mission to Europe at Woking, shedding such light on the teachings of Islam and the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad that the entire attitude of Europeans towards Islam changed. Not only this, that *Mujaddid* produced thousands of people whose hearts ached with the urge to spread Islam, and who gave their lives and wealth to spread the Divine faith in the world.”

“To those people who harbour ill-feeling against the honoured *Mujaddid*, or who fail to give him the respect and love due to such a servant of the faith, I say: ***Has there ever been in the world a liar and imposter who filled the hearts of his followers with such an urge for the propagation of Islam***, and to whom Almighty Allah gave so much help as to continue fulfilling his dreams and aspirations long after his death? In the beginning we did not have the longing that Islam should spread in the world. It was the yearning of the Imam of the age who set us on this work, and set us on it so firmly that the longing which was in his heart was disseminated to thousands of other hearts. . . .”

“Whatever work of the propagation of Islam we have done up to today, whether it is little or much, it is all the outcome of his inner urge which Allah had strengthened with the power of His own Will. And Allah caused the foundations of the propagation of Islam in English-speaking countries to be laid by the hands of a man who himself was a complete stranger to the English language.” ■

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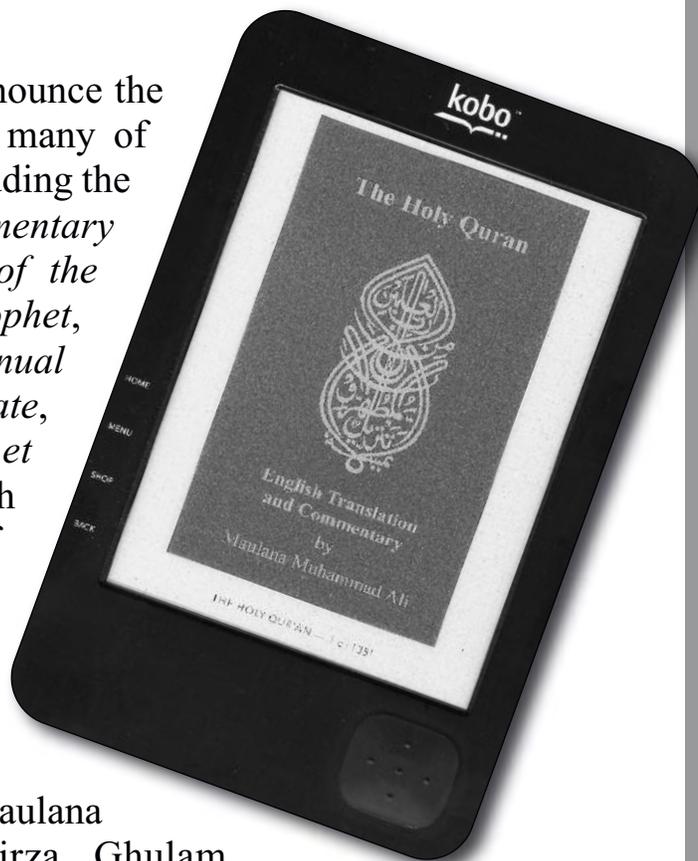
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