

“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**

April – June 2015

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

Vol. 92

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Published on the World-Wide Web at: www.muslim.org

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.

ISSN: 1060-4596

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The main objective of the A.A.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.

Islamic Pluralism —

The need for Diversity in Attaining the Goal of Unity

By Fazeel S. Khan

[In March of 2015, the Muslims Students Association (MSA) at Otterbein College held its annual event to introduce Islam to faculty, staff and students. The theme this year was based on the importance of diversity, and comprised of a keynote address, a panel discussion and a wonderful meal. The Editor was requested to be the keynote speaker again this year, and this article comprises the presentation given. In this article, the interchange between the goal of unity and the need for diversity is addressed using the Islamic concepts of God, humanity and the Holy Prophet Muhammad as examples.]

Today, I would like to share with you some thoughts on *Islamic Pluralism*, and the interchange between its goal of *unity* and the need for *diversity* from a religious perspective.

Introduction

For Muslims, Islam is viewed as a religion based on the premise of *unity*. It is not a religion for only one group of people, or for one nation, but rather is understood as a universal faith for all mankind. The word “Islam” itself suggests this. The word “Islam” is derived from the Arabic root word *silm*, which means “peace”. So, the religion is not named after an individual founder or a particular place from which it originated, as is the case with most 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. Striving for *peace*, therefore, is the very essence of the faith. And this is reflected in these verses in the Quran:

“O you who believe, enter into complete peace.” (2:208)

“And God invites to the abode of peace.” (10:25)

And the manner in which this unifying purpose of attaining peace is to be achieved, reflects the importance and integral function of *diversity*.

Spiritual Development – Nourishing Divine Attributes

And what do I mean by that? Well, how this peace is to be achieved, according to Islam, is based on the notion of spiritual development. The Quran states that the human soul is the *Spirit of God* that is breathed into every human:

“Then He (God) made him (i.e. man) complete and breathed into him of His spirit ...” (32:9)

The *Spirit of God* within man means that the divine attributes of God exist within each of us. And it is through the doing of good works that these attributes may be developed. And this is what spiritual development is according to Islam – it is the struggle to emulate the divine attributes of God in our daily lives – or, put another way, to be more God-like in our actions with others.

Concept of God (Allah) in Islam

Now, in order to do this, we obviously need to understand what God is. According to Islam, there is only One God, Who has no associate or companion. And, this monotheistic belief in the *unity of God* is the very foundation of the Islamic faith. And the name of God given in the Quran is *Allah*. Allah, normally translated simply as “God”, is literally defined as: “that Being that exists by Himself (meaning, He is One), and Who is the possessor of all the perfect attributes”. In this definition itself, we see the connection between *unity* and *diversity*. Although God is One, the attributes or qualities by which God is manifested, and understood, are numerous. As the Quran states:

“By whatever (name) you call on Him (God), He has the best names.” (17:110)

In fact, the Quran provides 99 diverse attributes (or names) of God. These attributes help us discern the nature of God and, because our soul is the essence of God within us, help us understand how to develop ourselves spiritually.

[A short video is shown presenting a compilation of the 99 names (or attributes) of God as relayed in the Quran]

And, again, these attributes of God – being Merciful, Compassionate, Forgiving, Just, etc. – are all inherent within us. And the purpose of understanding the nature of God is so that one may try to develop these same qualities within ourselves by applying them in daily life situations. As an illustration, just as with our physical bodies, we have muscles, and they don’t necessarily grow or develop without exercising them. So too it is understood that our spiritual qualities must also be exercised in order for them to develop.

The Diverse Composition of Mankind

Now, just as God is One, but understood through a lens of diverse attributes, the same can be said of Islam’s understanding of mankind. The Quran upholds the unity of mankind by stating: “*Mankind is a single nation*”. So there is no concept of a chosen people or of any one group of people being superior in any way according to Islam. And although all people are equal before God, we are told that there is much diversity in mankind in terms of color, geographic origins, languages, etc, as reflected in the following verses:

*“O mankind, surely We have created you from a male and a female, and made you **tribes and families** that you may **know each other.**” (49:13)*

*“**And of His (i.e. God’s) signs** is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the **diversity of your tongues (languages) and colors.**” (30:22)*

So, the *diversity in mankind* is not something that is supposed to divide us, but rather something that is supposed to be cherished. It provides the opportunity, as the Quran states, to “*know one another*”. As a practical matter, it offers the prospect to **learn** from one another and see how the development of divine attributes may be achieved under different circumstances. See, because each individual is limited in his/her experiences, usually being confined to the norms of a group of people from a particular region, learning about others allows one to appreciate things about which he/she may not have any personal knowledge or familiarity. As the Quran states:

“And if God had pleased He would have made you a single people, but that He might try you in what He gave you. So vie one with another in good deeds. To God you will all return, so He will inform you of that wherein you differed.” (5:48)

So, the diversity in the make-up of our world and life experiences is only to facilitate an appreciation of all of God’s attributes, even those that may be manifested outside of our personal encounters, so that we may try to emulate them to the best of our abilities.

Muhammad and the Institution of Prophethood

And this nexus between *unity* and *diversity* is further reflected in Muslims’ understanding of the status and role of Prophet Muhammad. See, the institution of prophethood according to Islam is based on the understanding that prophets were sent to all people on earth. So, all people were equally blessed with God’s favors and guidance, as reflected in these verses:

“There is not a people but a warner has gone among them” (35:24)

“For every nation there is a messenger” (10:47)

And these prophets had two primary functions: 1) to deliver a divine message to the people to which they were sent, and 2) to serve as a role models as to how to live a life in accordance with that divine message. And the Quran stresses the universality of the institution of prophethood, as we see in this verse:

*“We believe in God and (in) that which has been revealed to us, and (in) that which was revealed to **Abraham, and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob** and the tribes, and (in) that which was given to **Moses and Jesus**, and (in) that which was given to the prophets from their Lord, **we do not make any dis-***

***tinction between any of them** and to Him (God) do we submit.” (2:136)*

In addition to the biblical prophets mentioned here, the Quran makes specific mention of Hud and Salih of Arabia, Luqman of Ethiopia, a contemporary of Moses (generally known as Khidzr) of Sudan, and Dhu-l-Qarnain of Persia. In one tradition the Holy Prophet Muhammad is reported as saying that there have been 124,000 prophets in all.

Now, what distinguishes Prophet Muhammad from all of the other prophets is that Prophet Muhammad is referred to in the Quran as “*khatam-an-nabiyeen*”, which means the “seal” or “last” of the prophets. So Muslims believe Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet, to whom was revealed the final message for mankind, a universal message for all people and not any specific nation.

*“Say: O Mankind, surely I am the Messenger of God to **you all.**” (7:158)*

*“And We have not sent thee but as a bearer of good news and as a warner to **all mankind.**” (34:28)*

And just as a prophet serves as a role model in addition to delivering a divine message, Prophet Muhammad is understood as the “last” prophet because of the diversity of his life experiences and the comprehensive practical examples he provided as to how to live a righteous life in various roles. As the Quran states:

*“Certainly you have in the Messenger of God (i.e. Muhammad) an **excellent exemplar.**” (33:21)*

See, from an orphan to a king of a great empire, Prophet Muhammad passed through all phases of life. And his life was so multi-faceted, that he was able to provide a model for people in many different roles.

- If he had not been a laborer, he could not have revealed the value and integrity in working with one’s own hands and earning an honest living;
- If he had not married, he would have left people unguided in practically half of their daily interactions, and could not have shown how to be a kind and affectionate spouse and a loving parent;
- If he had not served among the ranks of a military, he could not have been an exemplar for a soldier laying down his (or her) life in the cause of truth, justice and freedom;
- If he was not the head of a state military, he could not have served as an example for a responsible general or commander in chief;
- If he had not formed rules and regulations for his

community, he could not have been regarded as an example for a trusted legislator;

- If he had not been in the position to decide disputes among people, he could not have served as a model for an impartial judge;

- If he had not had life-long friends, he could not have shown the beauty in true and trusted companionship;

- And if he had not been persecuted by tyrants, and then overcome his persecuting enemies, and forgiven them without enforcing any punishment against them, he could not have practically illustrated the *lessons* on compassion, mercy and forgiveness that are contained in all revealed scriptures.

See, it is due to the diversity of Prophet Muhammad's life experiences that Muslims understand why he is the final prophet (and, accordingly, an excellent exemplar for mankind).

Practical Effect

And it was with the understanding of this message of diversity –

- diversity of **divine attributes of God** that must be developed through daily interactions;

- diversity **among the human race** that must be appreciated so as to learn from experiences of others;

- and diversity in the **practical examples offered through Prophet Muhammad's life** –

that Islam was able to spread and be accepted by people throughout the world. And wherever it went, it employed this philosophy to contribute to the development of civilization in diverse ways.

I'd like to read to you a passage from a talk given by Carly Fiorina. Ms. Fiorina is the former CEO of the technology giant Hewlett Packard, and more recently has been involved in the political field. While giving an talk on leadership at a conference during her tenure at Hewlett Packard, she stated the following:

There was once a civilization that was the greatest in the world.

It was able to create a continental super-state that stretched from ocean to ocean, and from northern climes to tropics and deserts. Within its dominion lived hundreds of millions of people, of different creeds and ethnic origins.

One of its languages became the universal language of much of the world, the bridge between the peoples of a hundred lands. Its armies were made up of people of many nationalities, and its military protection allowed a degree of peace and prosperity

that had never been known. The reach of this civilization's commerce extended from Latin America to China, and everywhere in between.

And this civilization was driven more than anything, by invention. Its architects designed buildings that defied gravity. Its mathematicians created the algebra and algorithms that would enable the building of computers, and the creation of encryption. Its doctors examined the human body, and found new cures for disease. Its astronomers looked into the heavens, named the stars, and paved the way for space travel and exploration.

Its writers created thousands of stories. Stories of courage, romance and magic. Its poets wrote of love, when others before them were too steeped in fear to think of such things.

When other nations were afraid of ideas, this civilization thrived on them, and kept them alive. When censors threatened to wipe out knowledge from past civilizations, this civilization kept the knowledge alive, and passed it on to others.

While modern Western civilization shares many of these traits, the civilization I'm talking about was the Islamic world from the year 800 to 1600, which included the Ottoman Empire and the courts of Baghdad, Damascus and Cairo, and enlightened rulers like Suleiman the Magnificent.

Although we are often unaware of our indebtedness to this other civilization, its gifts are very much a part of our heritage.

The technology industry would not exist without the contributions of Arab mathematicians. Sufi poet-philosophers like Rumi challenged our notions of self and truth. Leaders like Suleiman contributed to our notions of tolerance and civic leadership.

And perhaps we can learn a lesson from his example: It was leadership based on meritocracy, not inheritance. It was leadership that harnessed the full capabilities of a very diverse population—that included Christian, Islamic, and Jewish traditions.

This kind of enlightened leadership — leadership that nurtured culture, sustainability, diversity and courage — led to 800 years of invention and prosperity.

Unfortunately, today, this legacy of Muslim contributions to civilization is normally overshadowed by the recent rise in extremism in some parts of the Muslim world. And despite militants making up a tiny fraction of the 1.5 billion Muslims on earth, a wide brush of negativity is used to paint "all" Muslims as being funda-

mentalists in their interpretations of their religion and radical in the way they practice it. Polls from the Washington Post show that: nearly half (49%) of Americans have a negative view of Islam; more than a quarter (26%) admit to having some level of prejudice against Muslims; recently, the EEOC reported that although Muslims make up about 2% of the American workforce, 25% of the charges of discrimination were based on bias towards Muslims. And despite all this negativity and hysteria about Islam and Muslims, we were still able to get a Muslim elected as president of the United States of ... [laughter]

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions. ■

Speech at the Summit on Countering Violent Extremism

By President Barack Obama

[In February 2015, the White House hosted a Summit on Countering Violent Extremism to highlight domestic and international efforts to prevent violent extremists from radicalizing, recruiting, or inspiring others to commit acts of violence. This article is a transcript of one of the speeches given by President Obama at the Summit. In this speech, President Obama identifies the root causes of the type of extremism being advanced by groups like the so-called “Islamic State”. Among his insightful thoughts on how to counter violent extremism is the resolution of sectarian conflicts and, relatedly, the idea that the ideologies upon which extremists base their cause must be rebutted and exposed as being illegitimate. These sentiments resonate with the objective of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement to eradicate extremist and other unfounded beliefs that lead to a misunderstanding of the spiritual foundation of the Islamic faith. In particular, the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society (the U.S. branch of the international Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement) has been engaged in the work of having the Movement’s literature translated into Arabic, certified by Al-Azhar Islamic Research Academy, and distributed in collaboration with local entities throughout the Arab world specifically for the purpose of countering violent and extremist ideologies that are causing much chaos in the world today.]

Mr. Secretary General, distinguished guests, we are joined by representatives from governments, because we all have a responsibility to ensure the security, the prosperity and the human rights of our citizens. And we’re joined by leaders of civil society, including many faith leaders, because civil society — reflecting the views and the voices of citizens — is vital to the

success of any country. I thank all of you and I welcome all of you.

We come together from more than 60 countries from every continent. We speak different languages, born of different races and ethnic groups, belong to different religions. We are here today because we are united against the scourge of violent extremism and terrorism.

As we speak, ISIL is terrorizing the people of Syria and Iraq and engaging in unspeakable cruelty. The wanton murder of children, the enslavement and rape of women, threatening religious minorities with genocide, beheading hostages. ISIL-linked terrorists murdered Egyptians in the Sinai Peninsula, and their slaughter of Egyptian Christians in Libya has shocked the world. Beyond the region, we’ve seen deadly attacks in Ottawa, Sydney, Paris, and now Copenhagen.

Elsewhere, Israelis have endured the tragedy of terrorism for decades. Pakistan’s Taliban has mounted a long campaign of violence against the Pakistani people that now tragically includes the massacre of more than 100 schoolchildren and their teachers. From Somalia, al-Shabaab terrorists have launched attacks across East Africa. In Nigeria and neighboring countries, Boko Haram kills and kidnaps men, women and children.

At the United Nations in September, I called on the international community to come together and eradicate violent extremism. And I challenged countries to come to the General Assembly this fall with concrete steps we can take together. And I’m grateful for all of you for answering this call.

Yesterday at the White House, we welcomed community groups from the United States, and some from your countries, to focus on how we can empower communities to protect their families and friends and neighbors from violent ideologies and recruitment. And over the coming months, many of your countries will host summits to build on the work here and to prepare for the General Assembly. Today, I want to suggest some areas where I believe we can focus on as governments.

First, we must remain unwavering in our fight against terrorist organizations. And in Afghanistan, our coalition is focused on training and assisting Afghan forces, and we’ll continue to conduct counterterrorism missions against the remnants of al Qaeda in the tribal regions. When necessary, the United States will continue to take action against al Qaeda affiliates in places like Yemen and Somalia. We will continue to work with partners to help them build up their security forces so that they can prevent ungoverned spaces where terrorists find safe haven, and so they can push back against groups like al-Shabaab and Boko Haram.

In Iraq and Syria, our coalition of some 60 nations, including Arab nations, will not relent in our mission to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL. And as a result of a separate ministerial here yesterday, many of our governments will be deepening our cooperation against foreign terrorist fighters by sharing more information and making it harder for fighters to travel to and from Syria and Iraq.

Related to this, and as I said at the United Nations last fall, nations need to break the cycles of conflict — especially sectarian conflict — that have become magnets for violent extremism. In Syria, Assad’s war against his own people and deliberate stoking of sectarian tensions helped to fuel the rise of ISIL. And in Iraq, with the failure of the previous government to govern in an inclusive manner, it helped to pave the way for ISIL’s gains there.

The Syrian civil war will only end when there is an inclusive political transition and a government that serves Syrians of all ethnicities and religions. And across the region, the terror campaigns between Sunnis and Shia will only end when major powers address their differences through dialogue, and not through proxy wars. So countering violent extremism begins with political, civic and religious leaders rejecting sectarian strife.

Second, we have to confront the warped ideologies espoused by terrorists like al Qaeda and ISIL, especially their attempt to use Islam to justify their violence. I discussed this at length yesterday. These terrorists are desperate for legitimacy. And all of us have a responsibility to refute the notion that groups like ISIL somehow represent Islam, because that is a falsehood that embraces the terrorist narrative.

At the same time, we must acknowledge that groups like al Qaeda and ISIL are deliberately targeting their propaganda to Muslim communities, particularly Muslim youth. And Muslim communities, including scholars and clerics, therefore have a responsibility to push back, not just on twisted interpretations of Islam, but also on the lie that we are somehow engaged in a clash of civilizations; that America and the West are somehow at war with Islam or seek to suppress Muslims; or that we are the cause of every ill in the Middle East.

That narrative sometimes extends far beyond terrorist organizations. That narrative becomes the foundation upon which terrorists build their ideology and by which they try to justify their violence. And that hurts all of us, including Islam, and especially Muslims, who are the ones most likely to be killed.

Obviously, there is a complicated history between the Middle East, the West. And none of us I think

should be immune from criticism in terms of specific policies, but the notion that the West is at war with Islam is an ugly lie. And all of us, regardless of our faith, have a responsibility to reject it.

At the same time, former extremists have the opportunity to speak out, speak the truth about terrorist groups, and oftentimes they can be powerful messengers in debunking these terrorist ideologies. One said, “This wasn’t what we came for, to kill other Muslims.” Those voices have to be amplified.

And governments have a role to play. At minimum, as a basic first step, countries have a responsibility to cut off funding that fuels hatred and corrupts young minds and endangers us all. We need to do more to help lift up voices of tolerance and peace, especially online.

That’s why the United States is joining, for example, with the UAE to create a new digital communications hub to work with religious and civil society and community leaders to counter terrorist propaganda. Within the U.S. government, our efforts will be led by our new coordinator of counterterrorism communications — and I’m grateful that my envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Rashad Hussain, has agreed to serve in this new role. So the United States will do more to help counter hateful ideologies, and today I urge your nations to join us in this urgent work.

Third, we must address the grievances that terrorists exploit, including economic grievances. As I said yesterday, poverty alone does not cause a person to become a terrorist, any more than poverty alone causes someone to become a criminal. There are millions, billions of people who are poor and are law-abiding and peaceful and tolerant, and are trying to advance their lives and the opportunities for their families.

But when people — especially young people — feel entirely trapped in impoverished communities, where there is no order and no path for advancement, where there are no educational opportunities, where there are no ways to support families, and no escape from injustice and the humiliations of corruption — that feeds instability and disorder, and makes those communities ripe for extremist recruitment. And we have seen that across the Middle East and we’ve seen it across North Africa. So if we’re serious about countering violent extremism, we have to get serious about confronting these economic grievances.

Here, at this summit, the United States will make new commitments to help young people, including in Muslim communities, to forge new collaborations in entrepreneurship and science and technology. All our nations can reaffirm our commitment to broad-based development that creates growth and jobs, not just for the few at the top, but for the many. We can step up

our efforts against corruption, so a person can go about their day and an entrepreneur can start a business without having to pay a bribe.

And as we go forward, let's commit to expanding education, including for girls. Expanding opportunity, including for women. Nations will not truly succeed without the contributions of their women. This requires, by the way, wealthier countries to do more. But it also requires countries that are emerging and developing to create structures of governance and transparency so that any assistance provided actually works and reaches people. It's a two-way street.

Fourth, we have to address the political grievances that terrorists exploit. Again, there is not a single perfect causal link, but the link is undeniable. When people are oppressed, and human rights are denied — particularly along sectarian lines or ethnic lines — when dissent is silenced, it feeds violent extremism. It creates an environment that is ripe for terrorists to exploit. When peaceful, democratic change is impossible, it feeds into the terrorist propaganda that violence is the only answer available.

And so we must recognize that lasting stability and real security require democracy. That means free elections where people can choose their own future, and independent judiciaries that uphold the rule of law, and police and security forces that respect human rights, and free speech and freedom for civil society groups. And it means freedom of religion — because when people are free to practice their faith as they choose, it helps hold diverse societies together.

And finally, we have to ensure that our diverse societies truly welcome and respect people of all faiths and backgrounds, and leaders set the tone on this issue.

Groups like al Qaeda and ISIL peddle the lie that some of our countries are hostile to Muslims. Meanwhile, we've also seen, most recently in Europe, a rise in inexcusable acts of anti-Semitism, or in some cases, anti-Muslim sentiment or anti-immigrant sentiment. When people spew hatred towards others — because of their faith or because they're immigrants — it feeds into terrorist narratives. If entire communities feel they can never become a full part of the society in which they reside, it feeds a cycle of fear and resentment and a sense of injustice upon which extremists prey. And we can't allow cycles of suspicions to tear at the fabric of our countries.

So we all recognize the need for more dialogues across countries and cultures; those efforts are indeed important. But what's most needed today, perhaps, are more dialogues within countries — not just across faiths, but also within faiths.

Violent extremists and terrorists thrive when people

of different religions or sects pull away from each other and are able to isolate each other and label them as "they" as opposed to "us;" something separate and apart. So we need to build and bolster bridges of communication and trust.

Terrorists traffic in lies and stereotypes about others — other religions, other ethnic groups. So let's share the truth of our faiths with each other. Terrorists prey upon young impressionable minds. So let's bring our youth together to promote understanding and cooperation. That's what the United States will do with our virtual exchange program — named after Ambassador Chris Stevens — to connect 1 million young people from America and the Middle East and North Africa for dialogue. Young people are taught to hate. It doesn't come naturally to them. We, adults, teach them.

I'd like to close by speaking very directly to a painful truth that's part of the challenge that brings us here today. In some of our countries, including the United States, Muslim communities are still small, relative to the entire population, and as a result, many people in our countries don't always know personally of somebody who is Muslim. So the image they get of Muslims or Islam is in the news. And given the existing news cycle, that can give a very distorted impression. A lot of the bad, like terrorists who claim to speak for Islam, that's absorbed by the general population. Not enough of the good — the more than 1 billion people around the world who do represent Islam, and are doctors and lawyers and teachers, and neighbors and friends.

So we have to remember these Muslim men and women — the young Palestinian working to build understanding and trust with Israelis, but also trying to give voice to her people's aspirations. The Muslim clerics working for peace with Christian pastors and priests in Nigeria and the Central African Republic to put an end to the cycle of hate. Civil society leaders in Indonesia, one of the world's largest democracies. Parliamentarians in Tunisia working to build one of the world's newest democracies.

Business leaders in India, with one of the world's largest Muslim populations. Entrepreneurs unleashing new innovations in places like Malaysia. Health workers fighting to save lives from polio and from Ebola in West Africa. And volunteers who go to disaster zones after a tsunami or after an earthquake to ease suffering and help families rebuild. Muslims who have risked their lives as human shields to protect Coptic churches in Egypt and to protect Christians attending mass in Pakistan and who have tried to protect synagogues in Syria.

The world hears a lot about the terrorists who attacked Charlie Hebdo in Paris, but the world has to

also remember the Paris police officer, a Muslim, who died trying to stop them. The world knows about the attack on the Jews at the kosher supermarket in Paris; we need to recall the worker at that market, a Muslim, who hid Jewish customers and saved their lives. And when he was asked why he did it, he said, “We are brothers. It’s not a question of Jews or Christians or Muslims. We’re all in the same boat, and we have to help each other to get out of this crisis.”

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for being here today. We come from different countries and different cultures and different faiths, but it is useful for us to take our wisdom from that humble worker who engaged in heroic acts under the most severe of circumstances.

We are all in the same boat. We have to help each other. In this work, you will have a strong partner in me and the United States of America.

Thank you very much. ■

The Spiritual Practices of Ramadan

By Christina Butler, Ph.D.

[Each year the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society, along with other local Muslims and Islamic organizations, sponsors an interfaith iftar (breaking of the fast during Ramadan) hosted by the Council on American Islamic Relations (Columbus Chapter). The iftar is an opportunity for non-Muslims to learn about Ramadan, observe Muslims breaking their fast and praying, and enjoy a meal with their Muslims neighbors. This year, the speaker at the event was Dr. Christina Butler. Dr. Butler was the past Director of the Martin de Porres Center (a place for spirituality, interfaith dialogue and the arts, sponsored by the Dominican Sisters of Peace) and is the current President of the Interfaith Association of Central Ohio. She also serves with the Editor on the board of directors for the Horizon Prison Initiative. This article is a transcript of Dr. Butler’s talk at the iftar, which comprises personal reflections on her family background that inspires her to build bridges of understanding between people. And, Dr. Butler goes on to relate how the spiritual practices of Ramadan, in particular striving to develop qualities like compassion, is integral to the ultimate goal of transforming societies for the better.]

What an honor it is to be invited to share my thoughts with you at this Ramadan celebration, in friendship and admiration! Your invitation blesses me with an opportunity to reflect deeply on the meaning of this holy season of Ramadan. In the usual way that Allah works in and

through our lives to bring us to new understanding about something important, I heard the request to speak tonight about the importance of interfaith relations as a call to share an unknown—and painful—piece of my family heritage. And then I will say a little bit about Ramadan’s spiritual practices as a way to deepen compassion.

I am proud to identify myself as the daughter and granddaughter of Christian immigrants who came to the U.S. from the country of Lebanon in the early 1900’s. During my childhood I heard mostly humorous stories about the escapades of my father’s father, Elias, and his younger brother in the small mountain village of Souk El Gharb, a part of the Ottoman Empire at that time. Their father had died, leaving their mother, Mani, alone to raise them as best she could. In our way of speaking, these two boys were a handful, notorious for their mischief and known widely in that area as *ibn Mani* (sons of Mani). When ripe fruit disappeared from trees overnight or when market stalls were plundered of vegetables, the culprits were assumed to be *ibn Mani*.

At age 18 my grandfather married 15 year old Sarah, my grandmother, and within a year they were expecting the birth of my father. As foolhardy young men will do in any time and in any place, my grandfather became part of a gang, a “Christian gang,” that frequently engaged with a rival “Muslim gang.” As I heard the story, gun shots were fired, a Christian youth was killed, a Muslim youth was killed in retaliation, and my grandfather was smuggled out of Lebanon under cover of night on a merchant ship bound for France, the escape engineered by his uncle who was a doctor.

The intention was for him to find his way to the U.S., get settled and send for his young wife and soon to be born child. Meanwhile, World War I started, passenger travel was suspended, leaving my father and grandmother left to fend for themselves until the war ended. In that poverty-stricken mountain village during the war, there was often literally no food to eat.

I heard these stories from my father many times. He didn’t know and I don’t know if my grandfather was holding the gun that fateful day. It doesn’t matter now, but what does matter to me—conscious of the tragic events that brought my family to this country—is that I do all in my power within my own community to bring people of different faith traditions together, to embrace our common values, respect our differences and work together on problems that affect all of us. In other words, to prevent further tragedy and injustice. CAIR and the Interfaith Association of Central Ohio share this important mission.

Turning more directly to the spiritual practices of Ramadan, I have come to realize that Ramadan has both individual and communal aspects. Individual commit-

ment to prayer, fasting, self-denial, and charitable giving are intended to deepen each person's love for Allah and each person's responsiveness to the needs of all human beings. These nightly iftars, communal celebrations with family and friends, serve to bind the community of believers together, to offer support to one another during times of weakness, to give witness to the general community, and in the words of Jesus (peace be upon him) speaking to his followers—"Let them see how you love one another." Those of us from non-Muslim Faith traditions who look at you, really look at you, and know you, can see your love very clearly, all year 'round—and you inspire us, in turn, to be our best selves in living out the beliefs of our own faiths and world views.

Reflecting on the spiritual practices of Ramadan takes me quite naturally to a consideration of compassion, key to both Muslim and Christian spirituality. I learned from reading Tariq Jalil's book, *Islam Plain and Simple*, that Muhammad (peace be upon him) was adamant about compassion and generosity as major attributes for any Muslim, expressing strongly in one of the Hadith (or teachings) from his life: "none of you [truly] believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself." Christians often cite the same belief in a brief statement called "The Golden Rule": "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." All of our spiritual leaders make it clear that we have to dethrone ourselves from the center of the universe (Karen Armstrong's language) in order to live with regard for others.

From my study of compassion, the basic idea to emerge is that compassion is a covenant between equals. A "covenant" is a trust, a solemn and sacred agreement between human beings as equals, not an interaction between the wounded and a healer or between the needy and a wealthy provider. We are all needy and wounded, we are all healers and providers, for one another.

In order to fully embrace compassion as a covenant between equals, lots of boundaries that separate people have to be shattered, broken through, completely demolished. That is exactly why Jesus (peace be upon him) was considered such a revolutionary in his time, shattering boundaries at every turn with his teaching—to love enemies as well as friends, to touch and lovingly care for those deemed unclean, to redefine family as beyond biological connection and ethnic descent to include all of us as God's children, to show no deference to power and no condescension to the poor, and to respect women equally with men—perhaps Jesus' most scandalous behavior in the culture of his time and still a revolutionary idea in many societies today. (From Beatrice Bruteau, *The Holy Thursday Revolution*).

In my understanding, Ramadan is a time set aside annually to review one's behavior and lifestyle in terms of the definition of compassion, renewing the commitment to create a culture of compassion with and for those around us. Fethullah Gulen, one of Turkey's most influential and renowned Muslim scholars, has written an essay entitled "A Portrait of the Man of the Heart," describing such a person this way:

"The person of the heart is dedicated to his spiritual life. He [or she] is determined to keep far away from all material and spiritual imperfection...he vigorously struggles against hatred, animosity, greed, jealousy, selfishness, and lust. He is a monument of modesty and humility, and he always seeks the truth. He is quick to communicate what he knows about the world, yet is patient and prudent. Rather than proclaim his own ideas loudly, he puts them into practice, making himself an example to others. He hastens to his purpose, which is to aid others in their approach to God. *His heart burns like a furnace with compassion for his people.*"

My wish for all of us during Ramadan and in the year ahead is that we continuously fuel the furnace of compassion within our hearts so we can radiate the warmth of love and care to the world around us. I am convinced that this is the way to transform our broken world in the name of Allah, the **most** Merciful and the **most** Compassionate. ■

Enlightening Islamic Perspectives on Gender Issues

By Hans Drost

[The author, Mr. Hans Drost, is from the Netherlands and has been an ardent student of Islam for over 40 years. He has particularly studied the literary works of Maulana Muhammad Ali and has assisted in various projects in which these works were translated from English to Dutch. In this article, Mr. Drost addresses certain perspectives on gender issues and, in doing so, provides valuable insight on different modes of interpretation of Quranic text.]

Introduction

We have been haunted for ages by the interpretation of the words 'Wadribu Hunna'. The conventional and traditional translation is 'beat them', fuelling the assumption that men are allowed to beat their wives. However, this is contrary to the fact that the qur'anic revelations forbid violence. The only exception is in cases of self defence but only so long as the threat exists. As soon as the persecution stops then all violence must stop.

Throughout the ages Muslim scholars have used this incorrect interpretation and sadly have been quoted ever since. This interpretation of the words '*Wadribu Hunna*' is the outcome of an archaic patriarchal society. Although Muslim scholars have made valuable contributions to the scientific advancement of society, in terms of social relationships they were mostly guided by dynastic and political interests that favoured a patriarchal hierarchy. When we study Q Nisā' 4:34 in line with the Qur'ān as a literary and coherent Text, then the interpretation is: "*and resolve their situation by (honourable) divorce.*"

A second disastrous assumption that some societies have accepted over the last five centuries is the mistaken belief that men are entitled to marry females as young as nine years old. This eyebrow-raising view is based on the misconstrued teachings by Muslim historians pertaining to the marriage of the prophet Muhammad to A'isha, who is alleged to have been nine years old at the time. A well-researched study by G. N. Muslim M.A. revealed the undisputed historical fact that A'isha was not nine but 19 or 20 years old. Some present day Islamic reformers estimate her age to have been between 18 and 22 years.

Categorization

Four categories or approaches¹ that are specifically related to the exegesis of the Text of the Qur'ān may be distinguished within Islamic studies, namely the *traditionalists*, the *neotraditionalists*, the *progressives* and the *reformists*. In view of the approach of Maulana Muhammad Ali (1874–1951) towards understanding the Qur'ān, I would like to add the *literary textualists* as a fifth category. A *literary textualist* regards the Qur'ān as a Text that is consistent and explains all things, including guidance, mercy and good news.² When regarding the Text in all parts and verses as a literary entity, it inevitably results in the above described view. A *literary textualist* can study the Qur'anic text in light of the revelations by focussing on when and how they were revealed and what related issue was resolved.

The important point is that we must not blindly accept the established views, but use our own judgment and *think and rethink* in Qur'anic terms. This implies keeping a balance between existing views, rules and laws on one hand and the necessary adjustments as times change and society evolves on the other hand. If this compels us to re-evaluate (past) opinions, incorrectly interpreted, then we should do so.

Five examples analysed within the literary textualist sense

I will briefly deal with four examples and elaborate on the fifth one, Q Nisā' 4:34. The general lesson we can learn from Maulana Muhammad Ali's works, is by examining his way of thinking as well as his supposi-

tion that the Qur'ān provides us with minimum as well as maximum requirements.

Inheritance

At the time of the revelations³ concerning inheritance, women's rights were usually regarded lower than slaves. They were part and parcel of their husband's possessions. When the husband died the wife was treated as chattel and passed on to the brother or other family members of her husband. A fundamental change by the Qur'anic revelations is the introduction of the rule that women must have a share of the inheritance. Therefore they are no longer part of the inheritance, but owners of the inheritance. By owning assets and properties, women like men, are thereby empowered.

Taking the above into consideration, the Qur'anic revelations provide for a minimum part of the inheritance to go to the women of the family. Verses Q Nisā' 4:11/12 are not restrictions in the matter of inheritance, but are minimum requirements in dealing with the inheritance. There is no law or revelation against increasing any part of the inheritance.

Therefore, in present day societies that are egalitarian and provide for equal opportunity, there is no bias towards women and no problem allowing for an equal share of the inheritance.

Regretfully, not all present day societies support equal opportunity. We should not make the mistake by looking back in time and assume that the Qur'anic verses limit the inheritance for women. We know that prior to the Qur'anic revelation women were excluded, after the revelation the inheritance for women was to be at least one third.

Bearing witness

My approach regarding this subject is identical to the one about inheritance. Before the Qur'anic revelations women were part of their husband's possessions. They had no say in affairs, let alone testify in court. Discussions were held about women's affairs, they themselves did not attend the meetings.

Verse Q Baqarah 2:282⁴ addresses the bearing of witness in cases of legal contracts. This requires either two male witnesses or two female witnesses plus one male witness. Paternalistic societies interpret the above revelation by comparing the worth of one man to that of two women. Prior to the revelation women were not allowed to express their opinion. Because, intellectually, they were not considered capable of taking part in society. Also in this case the Qur'anic revelation fundamentally changed this and allowed women to testify just like men.

My understanding of verse Q Baqarah 2:282 is such that if a female witness is to appear in the witness stand, she may be accompanied by a female friend for support. Generally speaking, women feel more at ease when

accompanied by a female friend or a family member. Particularly in the case of giving evidence women may feel more confident with a female at their side. My conjecture is that the qur'anic revelation actually supports this supposition. So also in this case the qur'anic revelation is empowering women to take part in this process just like men. We must not hold on to the mistaken belief that the qur'anic revelations limit or restrict women. Instead we must commence from the time of the revelations which dictate that women have equal rights and duties.

Marrying four women

In dealing with this topic I refer to the following three verses: Q Nisā' 4:3/127 and Q Al-Nūr 24:32. Qur'anic revelations indicate boundaries and limits which we have to abide by throughout our life. In certain situations the revelations allow for exceptions of the rules and regulations. Prior to the qur'anic revelations, widows and orphans had neither rights nor social status. The only way for a woman to acquire social status was to get married.

Verse Q Nisā' 4:3 deals with one of those exceptions. Studying this verse together with Q Nisā' 4:127, it shows that these two verses allow widows (who were in no way protected by law) to marry a man who was already married. In this way a widow acquired social status and protection and was regarded as a full member of society. But only in that situation could a man marry a maximum of three widows (besides his first wife), however only if he was able to treat all wives equally and justly.

The context of Q Al-Nūr 24:32 is given in paragraph Q Al-Nūr 24:27–34. As a whole, chapter 24 is a Medinah revelation and this paragraph begins as follows, "*O you who believe ...*" and thereby addresses the situation in modern societies. When we study these verses, we find that a religious man is allowed to only marry one woman (the single person mentioned in verse 24:32 is someone who is not married, divorced or widowed). Notwithstanding the above mentioned exception regarding widows, this verse refutes the belief that a man is allowed to marry up to four women.

Restrictions for women

Throughout the middle ages, the average working men and women were deliberately kept educationally illiterate, politically ignorant and religiously controlled. A strategy actively maintained by the political and clerical authorities of the time was to keep especially women powerless. In the West this was accomplished partly by gender bias, social norms and the infamous witch hunts that targeted many more women than men. In the East it was achieved by secluding females through limiting legal options in law and social seclusion through the use of the veil and/or burka. Even Muslim scholars did not care to address the gender issue for fear of retribution by

society at large. If they had promoted equality for women as prescribed in the qur'anic revelations, this issue could have been rectified long ago.

Another way of controlling females was to marry them off at a very young age. Throughout the history of Islām there has been an ongoing campaign by its opponents to ridicule the prophet Muhammad. One method to deride him was by claiming that he only married old women (widows). To protect his image and to counter this claim, Muslim scholars declared that he married A'isha when she was nine years old. Therefore a virgin pre-eminent. This was accomplished by conveniently leaving out the number 1 of the cypher 19. To understand the ease by which this was done lies in the style of Arabic writing which is from right to left. Therefore, to record the number 19, the 9 is written first and then the 1. By leaving out the second digit 1 it is very easy to change the number 19 to the number 9.

In Arabic the pronunciation of the number 19 is the same as in English. It is pronounced as nine-teen and by leaving out the "teen" the number is easily changed. Therefore the Muslim scholars thought to have the perfect proof that not all of the prophet's wives were old. However, in some countries, this produced the disastrous effect of legitimizing the marriageable age of females to as young as nine years old. In their zealous effort to protect the prophet from an inconsequential slur, the scholars failed to observe the qur'anic revelations regarding lying. Quote: '*a lie will never cover up the truth, even if it takes a thousand years or more*'.

The exegesis of Q. 4:34

Continuing in the same line as above, I would like to refer to the six verses of the Qur'ān which clearly indicate the equal status of men and women: Q Nisā' 4:1/32; Q Aḥzāb 33:35/ 73 and Q Ḥadīd 57:12/18. In these verses God addresses men and women in equal terms. The essence is stated in Q Nisā' 4:1: "*...and keep your duty to Allāh, by Whom you demand one of another (your rights) ...*". Thereby, it is explicitly made clear that men and women are spiritually equal.

As stated in the above example about bearing witness, the understanding is that men and women have equal rights and equal duties. However, there is one exception. In Q Nisā' 4:34 which states: "*...with what Allāh has made some of them to excel others...*". In qur'anic terms this does not mean that a man is a woman's superior. It means that men have an additional duty and, to balance this inequity, women have an additional right.⁵ This pertains particularly to the protection of the family, especially in times of hardship, natural disasters and/or war.

The traditional interpretation of Q Nisā' 4:34 is that:

1. Men are superior to women.

2. Women should unconditionally be obedient to their husbands.
3. The husband is allowed to beat his wife.

However, when I apply the intention and the tenor or purpose of the Qur'ān, then I conclude that the following is the actual interpretation and meaning of these three points:

1. Men have one duty more than women.
2. Women should be obedient to God.
3. Conflict within a marriage should be dealt with by taking specific steps in sequential order by which the goal is to resolve the matter (possibly by divorce).

I dealt with point one in the above paragraph. Maulana Muhammad Ali explains point two – in his footnote 4:34b as follows: “*Obedience here signifies obedience to Allāh. This significance of the word is made clear by a comparison with 33:31, 33:35, and 66:5.*” The word *Qānitāt* is used in the Qur'ānic verses to indicate the obedience to God. See also Q Baqarah 2:238.

Now I focus on point three. A historian made the following remark about the conventional and traditional interpretation of this point, namely that husbands are allowed to beat their wives. He quoted: “*It is one of the worst catastrophes that has befallen our Islamic civilization as well as the spread of our religion and of our spiritual values.*” The controversy is about the interpretation of the words ‘*Wadribu Hunna*’. In order to resolve this issue I am using the Qur'ān as a source, inspiration and guidance.

The context of this issue is six fold:

- a) The translation of Q Nisā' 4:34/35 to study the context.
- b) The interpretation of Q Nisā' 4:128 that should be in accordance to Q Nisā' 4:34, because there is no discrepancy within the Qur'ān (see Q Nisā' 4:82).
- c) The use of the word ‘*daraba*’ in the Qur'ān.
- d) The laws about marriage and divorce as laid down in the Qur'ān.
- e) The Nikāh–wedding ceremony.
- f) The adherence to contracts and agreements as indicated in the Qur'ān.

I like to begin my interpretation with the following consideration. Suppose we study the Qur'ān but skip Q Nisā' 4:34 with the intention to expand on this verse below. The essence of the Qur'ān, in dealing with the treatment of women by men and especially of wives by

husbands, is one of respect and mutual duty. Both men and women have equal rights and equal rewards on earth as well as in heaven. There is no room for violence, especially in a marriage.

Maulana Muhammad Ali comments on Q Rūm 30:21 in his explanatory note 30:21a on the important role of marriage in creating a sphere of peace and happiness within the home: “*... marriage serves the purpose of the spiritual advancement of both the man and the woman by referring to the quietness of mind they find in each other.*” Men and women will prosper through spiritual and social peace.

The following three verses are always recited at a *Nikāh* wedding ceremony: Q ‘Imrān 3:103; Q Nisā' 4:1 and Q Aḥzāb 33:70/71. In these verses the fulfilment of one's duties towards God and fellow human beings is emphasized. The *Nikāh* wedding ceremony is in principle a contract in which husband and wife pledge to fulfill their promises and obligations. Traditionally, when a woman marries, her father hands her to her husband at the altar. This ancient custom has been instrumental in the misunderstanding that the father gives his daughter to the groom as his “property”. In fact, the father simply hands over the duty to protect her, nothing more.

Promises and contracts are regarded in the highest order in the Qur'ān. See Q Baqarah 2:177 and Q Barā' at 9:1–16. Muhammad Ali's excerpt at the beginning of chapter 9, including his respective explanatory notes, also adhere to this directive. Chapter 9 was revealed at Medina and contains the characteristics and guidelines for building a state.

Verse Q Nisā' 4:34

Applying the above to Q Nisā' 4:34, I conclude that this verse adds the possibility of annulment of the marriage contract in cases of irreconcilable differences. The problem with the *Nikāh* contract is that in most cases this contract is not properly drawn up. The goal of this contract is to write down all items that are not dealt with or left open in the civil marriage contract. One of the items that should be included is the names of two arbitrators, one from each family, who will function as intermediaries in case of problems between the couple. By applying analogy or *qiyās* with respect to Q Nisā' 4:35 in case of divorce, it is my opinion that these two arbitrators should be mentioned in the *Nikāh* contract. They will be the ones to play a role in the required steps of resolving marital conflicts. “*Fa'idhu Hunna*” as mentioned in Q Nisā' 4:34 is the first step.

Interestingly, there are three steps mentioned in this verse. An important feature in the listing of these steps is the use of the prefixes ‘*fa*’ and ‘*wa*’. The first step uses the prefix ‘*fa*’, indicating an obligation or a logical choice. The next two steps use the prefix ‘*wa*’ which

entails a sequence. As mentioned above, the first step is “*Fa'idhu Hunna*”, which is translated as “*admonish them*”. An important question here is, *who* should admonish the wife? By using *qiyās* I conclude that the two arbitrators should admonish her. The arbitrators must work toward harmony. They should point out to the wife that by leaving her husband she can lose all rights. The words “*Fa'idhu Hunna*” appear 25 times in the Qur’ān. The common denominator in its meaning is: *admonishing in order to achieve a goal, that is a guidance and a blessing for the believer and to speak effective words to their soul*. The first arbitration is aimed at discussing the conflict with both partners. Q Nisā’ 4:34 gives the wife the *right* to participate in the discussions. Prior to this revelation she was talked *about* without being present. If reconciliation is still not possible then the second step must be “*Wahjuru Hunna*”, arranging for a legal separation. Also in this case the arbitrators should counsel both partners and advise them of the consequences of a separation.

Wadribu Hunna

If there is still no progress towards reconciliation then the third step must be undertaken, also under the guidance of the arbitrators, namely “*Wadribu Hunna*”. This is derived from the root *daraba* and this appears 58 times in the Qur’ān. Its common meaning is: *to resolve a situation, to clarify it and to reach a solution*. Maulana Muhammad Ali describes in his annotations 2:60a, 2:273b and 38:44a the various translations of *daraba* dependent upon the context. His translation of “*Wadribu Hunna*” is “*chastise them*”. Thereby he seems to stand midway between the *traditional* and the *reformist* points of view. But his wording is well chosen, because the 19th century meaning of *to chastise* is not the present day interpretation of the word punishment. It is more in line with ‘*make a separation between them by a wall*’ (compare Q Ḥadīd 57:13).⁶

Conclusion

The translation of *daraba* in Q Nisā’ 4:34 must be in line with Q Nisā’ 4:128. When there are serious conflicts between marital partners, they must always work towards reconciliation. If this is not possible, after the prescribed interventions in accordance with Q Nisā’ 4:34, then divorce is the permitted solution. The Nikāh contract is annulled and the procedure for divorce followed in accordance with Q Nisā’ 4:35; Q Baqarah 2:222–242; Q Nisā’ 4:130–134 and Q Ṭalāq 65:1–7. The proper interpretation of the words “*Wadribu Hunna*” in Q Nisā’ 4:34 is that it provides for the honourable treatment of the wife during the marriage, during the time of divorce as well as after the divorce. Incorporating all of the above in the translation of Q Nisā’ 4:34, then this verse reads as follows:⁷

“Men are the maintainers of women, with what

Allāh has made some of them to excel others and with what they spend out of their wealth. So the good women are obedient, guarding the unseen as Allāh has guarded. And (as to) those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them, and leave them alone in the beds and resolve their situation by (honourable) divorce. So if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Surely, Allāh is ever Exalted, Great.”

Therefore, once the above mentioned three steps have been taken and it has been decided to resolve the situation by divorce then Q Nisā’ 4:35 is the first verse to consult, because this verse begins with the prefix ‘*wa*’ and is as such a continuation of Q Nisā’ 4:34.

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Footnotes

1. Chaudhry, Ayesha S., pages 169–172 of “*Qur’an in Conversation*” by Michael Birkel, 2014, Baylor University Press.
2. See Q Yūnus 10:37; Q Naḥl 16:89; Q Banī Isrā’īl 17:89 and explanatory notes 16:89b and 17:89a in “*The Holy Qur’ān*” by Maulana Muhammad Ali, reprint 2002, AAAIL Inc. USA.
3. See Q Nisā’ 4:7/11/12/176 and Q Aḥzāb 33:6; see also Muhammad Ali’s explanatory notes on the position of women at that time 4:7a/176a and 33:6b.
4. See also Muhammad Ali’s explanatory notes 2:282a–d.
5. See also Q An’ām 6:165; Q Barā’at 9:20; Q Aḥqāf 46:19; Q Ḥujūrāt 49:13; Q Ḥadīd 57:10 and Q Baqarah 2:228.
6. See ‘*Dictionary and Glossary of the Kor-ān*’, page 88, by John Penrice, 1873, London.
7. This translation is taken from Muhammad Ali’s The Holy Qur’ān, where I changed his words “*chastise them*” into “*resolve their situation by (honourable) divorce*”. His explanatory notes apply, while two notes should be added, i.e. my footnote 5 and the text: “When there is still no progress towards reconciliation then the third step must be undertaken,

also under the guidance of the arbitrators, namely “*Wadribu Hunna*”. This is derived from the root *daraba* and this appears 58 times in the Qur’ān. Its common meaning is: *to resolve a situation, to clarify it and to reach a solution.*”

Freedom of Opinion in Islam

By Sadar-ud-Dean Sahukhan, Esq.

[The theme of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society’s annual symposium this year – held in Columbus, Ohio – was titled “The True Portrait of Prophet Muhammad”. With the recent controversies concerning the Charlie Hebdo cartoons of Prophet Muhammad and the subsequent “Draw Muhammad” contests emerging in the United States, this particular theme provided an opportunity to dispel the misinformation about Prophet Muhammad upon which many of these depictions are based, and practically demonstrate Prophet Muhammad’s lessons on responding to abuse and ridicule with peaceful dialogue. This article was presented by Sadar-ud-Dean Sahukhan, who resides in Australia, is a Senior Prosecutor by way of profession, a leader in the local interfaith community, and a very active member of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement. Mr. Sahukhan addresses the issue of freedom of opinion according to Islam. Contrary to popular notions of Islam restricting the views that people may form, and in fact prescribing punishment for expressing certain opinions, Mr. Sahukhan shows, citing the most authoritative of sources, that freedom of opinion is a sacred right in Islam and that those who carry out violent attacks against people voicing their opinions, however seemingly blasphemous, are acting in direct contravention of entrenched Islamic principles.]

Religion is a very sensitive issue and therefore ought to be treated with the sensitivity it deserves. This indispensable consideration should not be left out of the equation when dealing with issues such as freedom of opinion and freedom of speech. Conflict only arises when these considerations are neglected and the objective is to malign and hurt others, as opposed to simply holding or expressing one’s views. In particular, blasphemy is a sensitive issue. Blasphemy is generally defined as the exhibition of irreverent behavior or language towards God, religion or anything held sacred. And for Muslims, who revere Prophet Muhammad as a divinely appointed messenger of God and a guide for humanity, indecent, disrespectful depictions or statements or derogatory comments against him generally fall within this category.

Like any religion, Islam regards blasphemy as offensive and sinful. But, contrary to the commonly held view in the contemporary world, Islam prescribes no punishment for blasphemy. Such invectives are only to

be condemned for causing hurt feelings of others and disturbance between members of society. It is rather ironic that the term Islam means peace but the actions of some Muslims are contrary to the meaning and basic principles of Islam when dealing with what they consider blasphemous statements against Prophet Muhammad. I make this comment particularly in response to a number of violent reactions in recent days by some Muslims to disrespectful depictions of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The deadly attacks, as a response to such depictions and statements, by some Muslims, go against the teachings of the primary text of Islam and the recorded examples of how Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) lived his life. Sadly the actions of these individuals also portray Islam as a violent, intolerant and, to a great extent as an inhumane religion.

If religion was to be judged by the actions of individuals, there would probably be no religion that could not be described as violent, intolerant and inhumane. Religion has to be gauged by their respective scripture and other authoritative foundations, not by the actions of individuals, irrespective of the religion the perpetrators follow or believe in. In the case of Islam, this foundation consists of the Holy Qur’an (what Muslims accept as a divinely revealed scripture) together with the *Sunnah* (practices) and *Ahadith* (sayings) of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Certain misguided Muslims attribute their personal ideologies and teachings to Islam, when the reality is that those ideologies are not consistent with the religion itself. And, unfortunately the media simply echoes the claims of the individuals who carry out their atrocities under the banner of Islam, without considering the fact that such acts are not representative of the Quran’s teachings and the recorded sayings and examples of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). This leads me to set out the broad principles of peace and tolerance in Islam.

Concepts of “peace” and “tolerance” in Islam

So, what does Islam teach about peace and tolerance? As mentioned, the word Islam is derived from the root word meaning “peace”. And war is only permitted under the limited circumstances of self-defence, with the caveat that even when war is justified to defend one’s self, one must “not to be the aggressor”. There will always be disagreements amongst followers of different faith groups as each are entitled to have the freedom to express their opinions when it comes to religious matters. Mutual agreement on theological issues may not be possible, but mutual understanding, tolerance and respect for one another’s religions is what is desired in Islam.

How are people of a different faith tradition to be treated? Should they be punished or killed unless they convert? Should they be forced to believe exactly as others do? Certainly not, according to Islam. The Holy

Qur'an is very explicit on these issues. The command that "there is no compulsion in religion..." (2:256) means nothing short of saying that one is free to choose a religion of his or her choice with no repercussions. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was commanded to only deliver the message, not to impose his views on anyone. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was commanded to say "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" (6:104). The Quran explicitly sets out that "Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does good, they have their reward with their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve" (2:62). "Fear" here is the fear of the hereafter. The Quran also states "Surely those who believe and those who are Jews and the Sabians and the Christians — whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does good — they shall have no fear nor shall they grieve" (5:69).

In Islam, it is understood that there is only one God to which people of all faiths believe in. And as for those who question Muslims' belief in this One God, the Quran prescribes: "Say: Do you dispute with us about God, and He is our Lord and your Lord, and for us are our deeds and for you your deeds..." (2:139). Also "And everyone has a goal to which he turns (himself), so vie with one another in good works" (2:148). So, according to the Quran, no one can claim superiority over another simply on the basis of their belief; rather, it is one's deeds that determine one's closeness to the Divine. In his last sermon Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) clarified, "You are all equal. Nobody has superiority over other except by piety and good action". Excellence of conduct is the mark of superiority. The test for righteousness in Islam is set out in 2:177 of the Holy Quran, which states:

"It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West (that is, follow any particular ideologies) but righteous is the one who believes in Allah, and the Last Day, and the angels and the Book and the prophets, and gives away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask and to set slaves free and keeps up prayer and pays the poor rate; and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in the time of conflict. These are they who are truthful; and these are they who keep their duty".

The essence of religion, we are here told, is faith in God and benevolence towards men.

Moreover, the Qur'an does not condemn other revealed religions as false, but shows each new prophet

as confirming, continuing and adding to the message of his predecessors. As the Quran states: "We make no distinction between any of His messengers" (2:285). Thus the Quran repeatedly points out that Muslims must respect previous faith traditions. All religions are based on teachings of their respective prophets who were all sent by the one and the same God.

As I previously mentioned, fighting in Islam is only permitted in self defence, as a last resort, to stop persecution. But the Quran is clear that this struggle for peace and freedom is not limited to safeguarding Muslims' right to practice their religion only, but rather to protect the rights of all people to practice their respective faiths. Muslims are actually mandated by the Quran to protect all places of worship. As the Quran states "Those who are driven from their homes without a just cause except that they say: Our Lord is God. And if God did not repel some people by others, cloisters, and churches, and synagogues, and mosques in which God's name is much remembered, would have been pulled down. (22:40). Early Muslims closely followed these directions, and every commander of an army had express orders to respect all houses of worship, and even the cloisters of monks, along with their inhabitants.

These broad concepts of tolerance and respect extends to the entire human race irrespective of any opinion they may have. What triggers the violent reaction to any derogatory comments against Islam, is uncontrolled "anger". It is not religious behaviour, but misguided irreligious convictions. The Quran explains that controlling anger and forgiving the wrongdoing of others is what leads to one's spiritual development (the very purpose of religion): "And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord... and those who restrain (their) anger and pardon men. And Allah loves the doers of good (to others)" (3:133-4); "And those... and whenever they are angry they forgive" (42:37); and "And whoever is patient and forgives — that surely is an affair of great resolution: (42:43). Obviously those Muslims who engage in violence in response to insults against Islam or the Prophet Muhammad neglect these moral foundations to their religion.

Appropriate response to abuse and ridicule

So what is the appropriate manner in which to respond to insults against Islam? The Qur'an specifically provides guidance for such situations. In the case of abusive and hurtful language, the Qur'an acknowledges that "You will certainly hear much abuse from the followers of previous books and from the idol worshipping people" and then continues "And if you are patient and keep your duty, this is surely a matter of great resolution." (3:186). The Quran goes on to state "Bear patiently what they say" (20:130); "And bear patiently what they say and forsake them with a becoming withdrawal" (73:10); and "... disregard their hurtful talk." (33:48).

These are the broad principles of peace and tolerance that Islam advances. There is no basis whatsoever to the misguided view that one is authorized to punish another for slandering Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

Thus, the general perception that Islam provides a death sentence for those who commit blasphemy or leave the religion of Islam is untrue. There is no such law. The Holy Qur'an mentions many blasphemous utterances by opponents of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) without sanctioning any physical punishment, let alone death, for the perpetrators. Rather, the Quran explains that punishment for blasphemy rests with God and God alone and it is up to Him whether He punishes such persons. The authority to punish blasphemers has not been delegated to anyone, and therefore no one has the right or privilege to usurp that power or authority. Those who carry out any form of punishment for blasphemy do so, not only without any religious justification, but contrary to the teachings of Islam.

The Quran itself provides examples of Prophet Muhammad being ill-treated by people and being shown much disrespect. The Holy Prophet (pbuh) was repeatedly mocked by people. He was mocked at by being called "*a madman*" (15:7) and it was claimed that "*there is madness in him*" (23:71). They also degraded him as "*a victim of deception*" (17:48) and defamed him as a liar. He was also called a "*poet*" and accused of being "*a fabricator*" by the disbelievers (16:102). Not only did they make personal attacks on the Holy Prophet (pbuh), they also insulted the Holy Qur'an, calling it a book of "*confused dreams*." Indeed, the Holy Qur'an itself points to the fact that they saw its instructions as "*mere stories of the ancients*" (16:25).

But the Quran instructs the Holy Prophet to bear such abuse patiently because "We (God) will, surely, suffice thee against those who mock" (15:96). It is therefore in God's sole realm to deal with those who commit blasphemy. But today we see people wanting to usurp the authority of God. Their reactions are the product of their own decisions or manner of dealing with situations, and no justification for them can be found in the authoritative sources of Islam. Understandably, Muslims do not appreciate anyone mocking Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) but there is simply no religious basis for a Muslim to react violently to insults made against the Prophet (pbuh), or for that matter, insults directed at God or anything sacred in Islam? Muslims religiously maintain belief in Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as a universal guide and perfect role model. In the Quran Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is described as a perfect exemplar and we are told "If you love God, follow Prophet Muhammad".

Examples from the life of Prophet Muhammad

I'd like to relay some examples from Prophet

Muhammad's life as to how he responded to abuse and insult, and, therefore, what example Muslims are to follow:

- Suhayl ibn Amr was a prominent orator among the opponents of the Holy Prophet Muhammad at Makka. He used to employ his oratory skills making speeches against the Holy Prophet. He was captured by the Muslims at the battle of Badr and brought before the Holy Prophet. Umar ibn al-Khattab suggested he should be punished before being released: "O Prophet of God, let me pull out Suhayl's front teeth so that he would never be able to exercise his oratory against you." The Holy Prophet replied without hesitation: "Certainly not. I will not physically harm anyone, for God would physically harm me even though I am His Prophet." The Holy Prophet also made this prediction about Suhayl: "Perhaps one day he will say something which will make you happy." Some six years later when Makkah was conquered, the Holy Prophet, declared a pardon for all his former enemies including Suhayl. Deeply moved by this compassionate treatment, Suhayl embraced Islam. Two years later when the Holy Prophet died and the Muslims were plunged into confusion and uncertainty, then just as in Madinah when Abu Bakr made a speech that restored their faith and composure, in Makka Suhayl made a similar speech that reinforced the confidence of the Muslims of that city too that Islam would continue to exist despite the Holy Prophet's death.
- Once when the Holy Prophet divided some wealth among his followers, a man accused him to his face of being unfair and insulted him by telling him: "Fear God, O Muhammad." After the man had left, a Muslim was so hurt by his gesture that he asked the Prophet's permission to punish him. The Holy Prophet refused to allow it and actually tried to find some good in the man by saying: "Perhaps he says his prayers." That Muslim replied:
- "There are many people who pray, but what they say with their tongues is not what is in their hearts." The Holy Prophet replied: "I have not been commanded by God to look inside people's hearts or open their insides".
- Once some opponents of the Holy Prophet who belonged to a certain Jewish tribe accosted the Holy Prophet Muhammad by distorting the greeting "as-salamu alaikum" ("peace be upon you") by saying "as-samu alaikum", which means "death be upon you". His wife Hazrat Aisha retorted to these curses with: "And upon you be death and curse". The Holy Prophet told her: "Be

calm, Aisha. You should be kind and lenient, and beware of using harsh and bad language.”

- Once there were four men who spread an accusation of immoral conduct against the Holy Prophet’s wife Hazrat Aisha. Their allegation was ultimately proved to be false. One of the false accusers, named Mistah, who was poor, used to receive financial assistance from Aisha’s father, Abu Bakr. After this incident, Abu Bakr swore never again to help Mistah. The following verse was revealed to the Holy Prophet on this occasion: “Let not the possessors of grace and means among you swear against giving to the near relatives and the poor and those who had to flee in Allah’s way. Pardon and overlook. Do you not love that God should forgive you?” (24:22). Hearing this revelation to the Holy Prophet, Abu Bakr exclaimed: “Indeed, I certainly love that God should forgive me.” He then resumed providing assistance to Mistah as before. This allegation was not made against just an ordinary Muslim woman, but the wife of the Holy Prophet, striking at the holy household at the centre of the religion of Islam, which was required to be a model of purity for all Muslims.

In incidents number one and two above, the Holy Prophet Muhammad protected from any harm those who had insulted and abused him. In number 2, he did not even want to think ill of his slanderer. In incident number 4, the Holy Prophet Muhammad received revelation from God asking Muslims not only to pardon a man who had slandered his wife with an accusation of immoral conduct but also to continue providing financial help to him. One would be hard pressed to find such illustrious examples of forgiveness under such circumstances.

When the Holy Prophet was at Taif attempting to guide the Muslims he was stoned, assaulted and mocked. Bleeding from head to toe, battered and exhausted, he was faced with a choice. Should he or shouldn’t he seek punishment for the people of Taif who had just humiliated him by having their children chase him out of town while throwing stones at him? And all for simply sharing his message and seeking help for his people. He could have asked that this valley of cruel people be destroyed. But he didn’t. Instead he prayed for their salvation.

This is how the Holy Prophet, who is described in the Quran as a “mercy to mankind” (Quran 21:107), dealt with those who opposed him. In fact, the Prophet made supplications for his opponents on a regular basis: “O God! Guide my people, for they know not,” he would pray, as he and his followers were tortured, humiliated, scorned and mocked.

Some may argue that it is easy to be merciful and for-

giving when one is in a position of weakness. But in a position of power or when the opportunity presents itself, humans are known for abusing their authority and punishing their enemies brutally. Here, too, the Prophet demonstrated exemplary behavior. The most well-known example of this is during the peaceful takeover of Mecca by the Muslims. At a time when he could have easily retaliated against his worst enemies for the years of persecution he and his followers faced, Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, showed remarkable restraint by forgiving all who agreed to refrain from hostilities. This is even more significant given the culture of vicious tribal rivalry and guilt by association practiced at the time.

Unfortunately, these lessons are neglected by the extremists today who claim to be defending the Prophet’s honor.

Conclusion

To conclude, in Islam, individual opinions and beliefs are to be protected, in particular in the religious context. People are to be free to form their own opinions and believe what they want. And, as has been shown, curtailing the expression of one’s opinions and beliefs is not permitted, even if it may be offensive to others. However, Islam (as is the case with all religions) endeavors to provide guidance to people on how to develop spiritually and how to develop peaceful, civilized societies. Accordingly, it provides guidance on the particular issue of how Muslims are to conduct themselves. And it teaches that conduct that is aimed at hurting others feelings by insult and abuse is wrong – it impedes the spiritual qualities of compassion and mercy that one is to try to develop and causes disruption in society. As the Holy Qur’an states:

“God likes not the uttering of unseemly speech in public, except on the part of one who is being wronged ...” (4:148).

And even in the case of discussions on religious matters, the Quran explains that good manners is to be the guiding principle by stating:

“Call to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the best manner...” (16:25).

So, although one has a right to express their opinions, even if it is offensive, Muslims are taught to refrain from hurtful speech as it is not the moral thing to do. This is the Islam as taught by the Holy Qur’an and as practiced by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) – care must be given to not be insulting when expressing one’s opinions, and patience and tolerance must be shown in the face of abuse from others.

Thank you very much. ■

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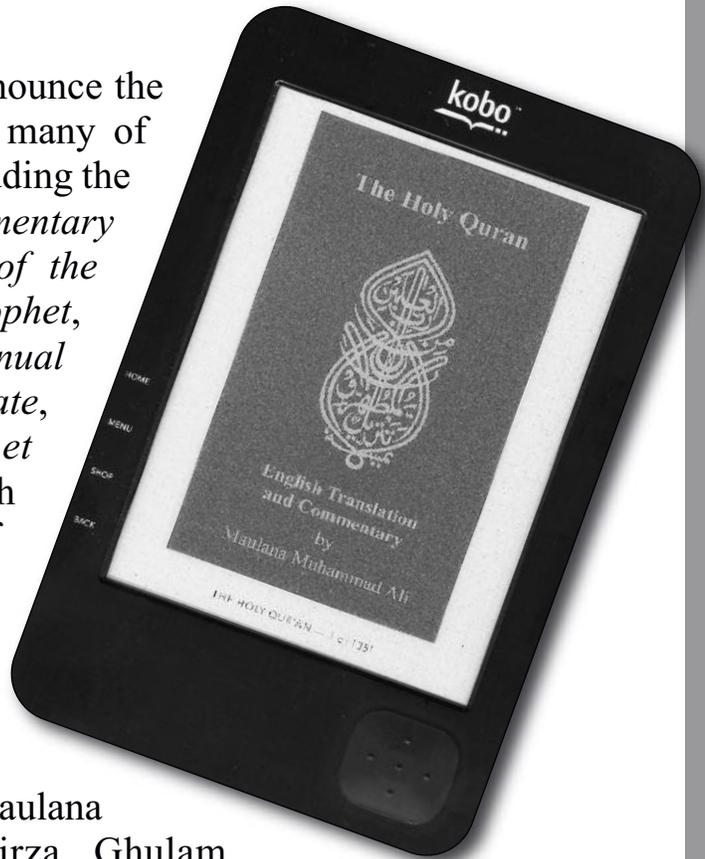
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