

“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 one hundred years

January - December 2022

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. 99

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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.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 Special Issue

By the Editor

The Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society continued its over 30-year tradition of hosting an annual symposium by offering a special virtual course in 2022. The program focused on demystifying scriptural narratives that are often associated with fanciful stories, myths and legends. And this was done by presenting interpretations of various stories from the Holy Quran as explained by Maulana Muhammad Ali.

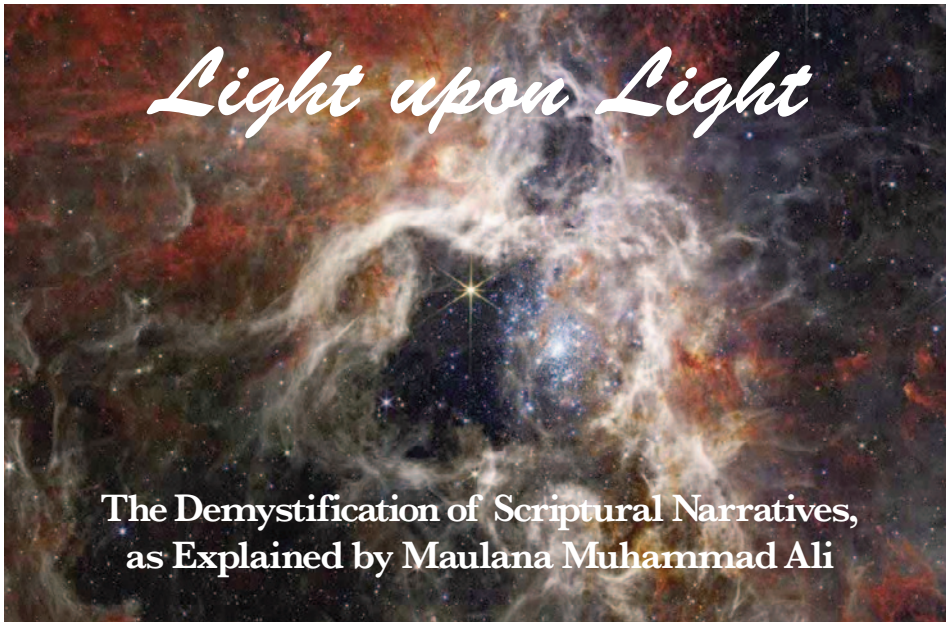
The interpretations presented by Maulana Muhammad Ali are based on the Islamic spiritual tradition of illuminating the transcendental meaning of verses rather than a simple reading of the literal words. They offer a spiritual lesson that can then be practically applied to innumerable daily life circumstances, bringing the narratives to life in a pragmatic way instead of remaining mere tales of yore. And, by doing so, they unveil the true spirituality of the faith and serve as a foundation from which the Holy Quran in its entirety may be appreciated.

Such an approach to understanding scripture seems particularly important in contemporary times, when religious adherence is in decline and literal accounts of stories from scripture are often cited as a primary reason. The historical veracity, the scientific plausibility and even the morality of the lesson from the scriptural narratives are called into question, causing religion (the concept itself, regardless of which faith tradition) to be

viewed as irrational and inconsistent with the knowledge and experience of the modern world. Hence the need, and oftentimes yearning, for an interpretation and understanding of scripture that both resonates with intellect and fosters spiritual growth.

This special issue of The Light and Islamic Review consists of papers compiled from the symposium presentations that address: the story of Adam (and of creation); the story of Moses (and interaction with Al Khidr); the story of Jesus (his birth, childhood and wonders); the story of Solomon (his relation with wind, jinn, birds and the ant); the story of the Prophet Muhammad's Isra and Miraj; the story of Gog and Magog; and, the depictions of heaven (paradise) and hell (punishment). In addition, we include a report that was presented on the practical work being done by the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society in spreading the literary works by Maulana Muhammad Ali around the world.

We hope the information presented here will afford lessons that will be appreciated by persons of all faiths and no faith alike, and will provide a valuable lens through which the Quran may be read and the conception of religion understood. The video recordings of the presentations from the symposium are available on the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society's YouTube page at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1HCLwAW4-4>. ■



*Light upon Light*

**The Demystification of Scriptural Narratives,  
as Explained by Maulana Muhammad Ali**

Saturday,  
December 10, 2022,  
12:00 pm (EST) to 3:00 pm (EST)

Presented by  
Lahore Ahmadiyya  
Islamic Society

Live on YouTube at:  
[https://www.youtube.com/  
watch?v=K1HCLwAW4-4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1HCLwAW4-4)

## Introduction to 2022 Annual Symposium “Light upon Light”

By Fazeel S. Khan, Esq.

[Fazeel S. Khan is the Editor of *The Light and Islamic Review*. He is the Secretary of the board of directors of the USA branch of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement. By profession, he is an attorney and an arbitrator.]

I begin in the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. My dear elders, brothers and sisters, and children: *assalamu aleikum* (“may peace be upon you”). It is my pleasure to welcome each one of you to the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society’s 2022 “virtual” annual symposium.

Due to uncertainties earlier in the year about health and safety concerns related to the coronavirus pandemic, we felt it advisable to plan for a virtual event again this year. We are very grateful to still have the opportunity and resources to offer an informative program for you all in this format, and we very much look forward to the in-person gathering again next year (God willing).

As most of you are aware, the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society – which is the US branch of the international Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement – has been holding an annual conference for over 30 years. Over the past dozen years or so, we have included a symposium in our annual conference tailored to addressing a topic concerning Islam that is relevant to current events. And the objective is to provide an educational forum to dispel misinformation about the Islamic faith, and also effectuate an appreciation for the valuable lessons to society that is available from Islam’s teachings. And we are absolutely thrilled with the participation from local friends each year, many of whom are clergy, academics and community leaders.

The other purpose for our symposiums is to offer our own members information and resources that they are then able to utilize in their own engagements with others in their respective locales. And, just as a reminder, we have made available the recordings of presentations from symposiums over the past several years on our YouTube page and have published the corresponding papers in issues of *The Light and Islamic Review*, and we encourage everyone to make use of these resources and share them with others.

### The Subject of “Scriptural Interpretation”

As for the subject that we will be addressing today, we intend to delve into the complex yet profound realm of scriptural interpretation. The program will focus on demystifying scriptural narratives that are often associ-

ated with fanciful stories, myths and legends (that are commonly used to discredit scripture). It is quite common nowadays for the historical veracity, the scientific plausibility and even the morality of the lesson from scriptural narratives to be called into question, causing religion (the concept itself, regardless of which faith tradition) to be viewed as irrational and inconsistent with the knowledge and experience of the modern world.

Our focus today will be on responding to this perception of scripture (and religion itself) by presenting interpretations of various stories from the Holy Quran as explained by Maulana Muhammad Ali. The interpretations presented by Maulana Muhammad Ali are based on the Islamic spiritual tradition of illuminating the transcendental meanings of verses rather than a simple reading of the literal words. They offer a spiritual lesson that can then be practically applied to daily life circumstances, so that the narratives come to life in a pragmatic way instead of remaining mere tales of yore. And, by doing so, they unveil the true spirituality of the faith, and serve as a foundation from which the Holy Quran in its entirety may be appreciated.

This approach to scriptural interpretation acknowledges the Quran’s prescription to read scripture with the understanding that some verses are “decisive” and to be taken literally and others are “allegorical” and, therefore, to be viewed as illustrative of an underlying lesson (that is intended to support the decisive verses, not detract from it). This approach also furthers the repeated instruction in the Quran for the reader to “ponder” and “reflect” upon the meaning and significance of the verses (thereby evidencing that the reading of scripture is to be a *contemplative exercise*, in which deeper reflections are to be sought rather than merely reading the text in a rudimentary fashion).

### The “Verse of the Light”

A popular verse of the Holy Quran that has been written extensively on by Muslim theologians and saintly personalities throughout history is verse 35 of chapter 24, often referred to as “The Verse of the Light”. This verse states:

Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth. A likeness of His light is as a pillar on which is a lamp — the lamp is in a glass, the glass is as it were a brightly shining star — lit from a blessed olive-tree, neither eastern nor western, the oil whereof gives light, though fire touch it not — **light upon light**. Allah guides to His light whom

He pleases. And Allah sets forth parables for men,  
and Allah is Knower of all things -

In this verse, a parable is presented of the “manifestation of Divine Light”. *Nur* (or *Light*) is literally defined as “that which manifests hidden things,” and Allah (or God) is referred to as that Being Who manifests all that is in the heavens and the earth with His Divine light. This signifies that God not only brought the heavens and the earth into existence, but He also unveils all its concealed mysteries, in terms of material (or scientific) facts as well as divine (or spiritual) realities through an ongoing process of enlightenment.

Some have interpreted the reference to “Light upon Light” as depicting Islam’s relation to the previous faith traditions, in that all religions come from the same “Light” source and Islam is only the final manifestation of that Divine Light, one that belongs neither to the East nor the West (but is universal in scope). Others have suggested that the “Light upon Light” may also refer to the Holy Prophet Muhammad, in that his life was always one of purity and devoted service to the underprivileged around him even from a young age. Light, therefore, emanated from him even before the light from on High came to him in the form of Divine revelation, so that when he attained the station of prophethood and was chosen as the messenger of God for all humanity, it was a materialization of “Light upon Light.”

The Holy Quran itself – the revelation from God to the Holy Prophet as spiritual guidance for all mankind – is also described as “Light.” In particular, as is shown in the verses displayed, the Quran is repeatedly characterized as a source from which man is brought **out of darkness and into light**. If we are to view the Holy Quran as the “Light” in the “Verse of the Light”, it would indicate:

- That there are many layers to Divine wisdom and guidance;
- That there are deeper significances and underlying meanings to verses, particularly when dealing with parables, allegories and metaphors;
- And that the Light of the Holy Quran is intended to not only enlighten the rational mind, but also to illumine the endearing heart and radiate the soul with the Divine presence.

### The “Rational Faculty”

Hazrat Al Ghazali – the famous Muslim philosopher and theologian of the Islamic Golden Age, who is also considered the *mujaddid* of the 5th century of the Islamic era – explored this topic extensively. In his book, *Mishkat-al Anwar*, he explained that the light of



the material world enables man to see with the physical eye, but the physical eye itself is not responsible for “perception.” Perception (the means by which one interprets or appreciates something), rather, is a function of the human soul. He goes on to state that vision through the physical eye can have many limitations and imperfections that limit one’s ability to perceive reality and, therefore, reality can *only* be appreciated with the endowment of the human heart. This, Al Ghazali calls the “rational faculty”. In other words, Al-Ghazali asserts that a spiritually pure heart is the true mechanism of rationality in man, because unlike simple intellect, it is not limited to the sensory world.

As a visual illustration, I’m sure all of you have seen the fascinating images from the James Webb Space telescope released this year. The James Webb Space telescope’s high resolution and sensitivity allow it to view objects that are too old, or too distant or too faint for the Hubble Space Telescope. And these new images remarkably enable observation of the first stars, the formation of early galaxies and even the atmospheric properties of potentially habitable planets, images that are simply unattainable through the use of other telescopes. Correspondingly, when the deeper spiritual insights from scripture are revealed by saintly personalities (by

way of what Hazrat Al Ghazali terms the “rational faculty”), the verses of the Quran become clearer. It is as if viewing something new, but in reality it is only the lens by which one perceives the verses as having changed. What appeared to be mere stories of old are given new light and new life, by the narratives being appreciated in a purer, more vibrant and more constructive way. And this enhanced perception then serves as a foundation from which new observations may be made and further insights may be gathered.

### Examples from Sainly Personalities

We experience this phenomenon when reading the works of saintly personalities from the Islamic spiritual tradition. For example, Maulana Rumi (whose works have become the most popular books of poetry in the West today) is quite famous for his interpretations of the Holy Quran in a way that provides a spiritual lesson that can then be applied in one’s daily life. One illustration of this is seen in the manner in which he interprets the conception and birth stories related to Hazrat Mariyam and Hazrat Isa.

With regard to the conception narrative, Maulana Rumi forgoes the common belief about an immaculate conception and rather explains that the focus of the story is on “piety”, and the profound implication that every person is able to *conceive the divine light within* by living a selfless life (one in which the ego is suppressed and reliance on God alone is paramount, just as Hazrat Mariyam is described as in the Holy Quran). He writes:

*Before everything you own slips away, be like Mary and say to the material world, “I seek refuge from you with the Merciful One (God). (M III: 3700)*

With regard to the birth narrative, Maulana Rumi explains that at the heart of the story is a lesson on the “trials and tribulations” experienced by a true believer. That, just as Hazrat Mariyam experienced the hardships and distress of labor prior to giving birth to Hazrat Isa, so too is enduring the pain and suffering inherent in this worldly existence necessary for a true believer to give birth to spiritual life. He writes:

*Our body is like Mary,  
Each of us has a Jesus inside.  
If pain and yearning shows up inside us,  
The Jesus of our soul is born.  
If there is no pain, no yearning,  
The Jesus of our soul will return to its origin  
from the same secret passageway from which he came.*

Those who are familiar with the writings of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad know this is also a hallmark of his interpretations of Quranic narratives. His writings

are replete with deep insights into the otherwise hidden gems contained in verses of the Holy Quran, which give new light and meaning to the words of the text. An example is how he applied the story of Prophet Noah (concerning the flood and the ark) to the perilous period of the plague re-awakened in India in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. He expounded on the true significance of the story – being about the hazards of this material world and how following the commandments of God provides protection from all such dangers – and thereby equated sincere adherence to Islamic teachings and the principles of his spiritual fraternity to the Divinely constructed ark of the time.

### Maulana Muhammad Ali’s interpretations

Some regard this spiritual tradition of scriptural interpretation as “mysticism” in the sense of it being something beyond the *literal* meaning of the text and not really supported by authoritative sources. Hence, the value of the literary works by Maulana Muhammad Ali. Maulana Muhammad Ali’s interpretations (as is contained in his translation and commentary of the Holy Quran and other books) serve as a bridge between the domain of traditional orthodoxy and the realm of spiritual light. His commentary is based on the most authoritative of sources – both religious and linguistic – and consistently directs the reader back to the spiritual essence of the faith.

Maulana Muhammad Ali himself explains the guiding principles of his interpretations in his Preface to his translation and commentary of the Holy Quran. He writes:

- “The principle of the greatest importance to which I have adhered in interpreting the Holy Quran is that no word of the Holy Book should be interpreted in such a manner as to contradict the plainer teachings of the Holy Quran, a principle to which the Holy Word has itself called the attention of its reader in 3:7. This rule forms the basis of my interpretation of the Quran, and this is a very sound basis, if we remember that the Holy Quran contains metaphors, parables, and allegories side by side with plain teachings.”
- “The Practice (Sunnah) and Sayings of the Holy Prophet, when contained in reliable reports, are the best commentary of the Holy Word, and I have therefore attached the greatest importance to them. Earlier authorities have also been respected, but reports and comments contradicting the Quran itself cannot but be rejected. I have also kept before me the rule that the meaning to be adopted in any case should be that which suits the context best, and the only other

limitation to which I have subjected myself is that the use of that word in that sense is allowed by the lexicons or by Arabic literature ...”

- “Many of the **stories** generally accepted by the commentators find no place in my commentary, except in cases where there is either sufficient historical evidence or the corroborative testimony of some reliable Saying of the Holy Prophet. Many of these stories were, I believe, incorporated into Islamic literature by the flow of converts from Judaism and Christianity into Islam.”
- “I must add that the present tendency of Muslim theologians to regard the commentaries of the Middle Ages as the final word on the interpretation of the Holy Quran is very injurious and practically shuts out the great treasure of knowledge which an exposition of the Holy Book in the new light reveals.”

Interpreting the word of God requires scholarship no doubt, but it also requires the gift of inner purity (what Hazrat Al-Ghazali termed “the rational faculty”). And this is what is apparent in the literary works of Maulana Muhammad Ali. He has been described as “wielding a scholar’s pen with a saint’s hands.” And this is where lay the secret of his interpretations becoming a real spiritual force and a beacon of light for sincere students of the Quran. And it is these interpretations given by Maulana Muhammad Ali, by way of using common stories from the Holy Quran as illustrations, that will be further explored today.

### Symposium Presentations

As for the Program and your presenters:

- Dr. Noman Malik will be presenting on the **Story of Adam** (and of creation)
- Dr. Ayesha Khan will be presenting on the **Story of Moses** (and interactions with Al Khidr)
- Mr. Ebrahim Mohamed will be presenting on the **Story of Jesus** (his birth, childhood and wonders)
- Dr. Haleema Saeed will be presenting on the **Story of Solomon** (his relation with wind, jinn, birds and the ant)
- Mr. Sadru Dean Sahukhan will be presenting on the **Story of Prophet Muhammad’s Night Journey (Isra and Miraj)**
- Dr. Mohammed Ahmad will be presenting on the **Story of Gog and Magog** (and the relation to the Dajjal)

- Mr. Omar Raja will be presenting on the **Quran’s depictions of Heaven and Hell**
- And we will conclude with a special presentation by Mrs. Samina Malik reviewing some of the **practical work** being done by the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society to spread Maulana Muhammad Ali’s publications throughout the world.

We hope the presentations will afford lessons that will be appreciated by everyone – persons of all faiths and no faith alike – and will provide a valuable lens through which the Quran may be read and the conception of religion understood. We appreciate each one of you joining us today and we really hope you will enjoy the program.

## The Story of Adam

By Dr. Noman Malik

*[Dr. Noman Malik is a Director of the USA branch of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement. He is a retired pathologist by profession.]*

### Introduction

The Holy Quran is unique among scriptures that all narratives, accounts, descriptions and statements contained in it have a single purpose and that is to foster a close relationship with God which ultimately, through God’s Beneficence and Mercy, leads to an eternal existence of peace and happiness with Him in Paradise. These narratives may be actual events or may be allegories, similes or metaphors, and in some cases the allegorical narrative may be mixed with actual events. The Quran itself mentions the use of allegories, metaphors and similes for imparting guidance, and gives the rules for their interpretation. It states in chapter 3 verse 7:

He it is Who has revealed the Book to thee; some of its verses are **decisive** — they are the basis the Book — and others are **allegorical**.

If these allegorical accounts are interpreted in a way that conflict with well-established and validated facts, then the Holy Quran’s claim in chapter 4 verse 82 that “... if it were from any other than Allah, they would have found in it many a **discrepancy**” would not stand, and serious doubts would be raised about its claim of being a Divine source of spiritual guidance. The story of Adam in the Holy Quran is one such example.

Before Maulana Muhammad Ali’s translation and commentary of the Holy Quran published in 1917, and subsequently revised by him in 1951, the account of

Adam was interpreted literally only. The literal account of Adam may have been acceptable in the Middle Ages, but in the 20th century with the great advances in scientific knowledge, these literal interpretations seem absurd and unbelievable, and so cast doubt on the divine origin of Holy Quran thereby seriously reducing its effectiveness as a source of spiritual guidance. Furthermore, this literal interpretation of the account of Adam became heavily intermixed with Biblical and other non-Biblical accounts of the creation of man which had no basis in the Holy Quran and which would contribute greatly to the fantastical elements in the commentaries on the Quranic narrative of Adam. In the present day and age, when Religion is being attacked as source of backwardness and ignorance in society, the presence of these fantastical elements in scriptures provides plentiful ammunition to anti-religious ideologies.

Maulana Muhammad Ali's Holy Quran translation and commentary shows how a metaphorical and allegorical interpretation of the Quranic verses dealing with the story of Adam actually provides valuable insights into man's spiritual nature. The credit for this enlightened approach to the interpretation of the Holy Quran goes to his spiritual mentors, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad and Maulana Hakim Nuruddin, as acknowledged by him in the English Holy Quran preface.

I will attempt to present his interpretation of verses 30-39 in chapter 2 which first introduce the story of Adam supplemented by his interpretations of additional verses elsewhere from the Quran which deal with Adam for further clarification and edification. The allegorical interpretation of these verses by Maulana Muhammad Ali will be contrasted with the literal interpretation before Maulana Muhammad Ali's English Quran translation published in 1917, and to which a large segment of Muslims still subscribes to even today.

### Interpretation of the Allegorical Account of Adam

As the allegorical account of Adam is presented in the form of a dialogue, one must understand at the outset the use of the Arabic word *Qaala* (to say) does not always denote spoken speech, but depending on the context may refer to any verbal action or condition. In other words "the condition speaks for itself." Additionally, one must have a full understanding and significance of Arabic words and terms used to arrive at a correct interpretation of the allegory.

#### God Announces Intention of Creating Man

The account of Adam begins with verse 30 of chapter 2:

And when thy Lord said to the **angels**, I am going to place a **ruler** in the earth, they said: Wilt Thou place in it such as make mischief in it and shed blood? And we celebrate Thy praise and extol Thy holiness.

He said: Surely I know what you know not.

If this exchange is taken as a literal event, then it would imply a verbal conversation between God and the angels with the angels questioning, no matter how respectfully, the wisdom of God's judgement in placing an aggressive being prone to violence as the ruler of the Earth. The interpretation of this verse as a conference between the angels and God clearly demeans the Divine Being and is not acceptable.

In his commentary Maulana Muhammad Ali first discusses the meanings and significance of the words *Angels* (Arabic *Malaika*) and *Ruler* (Arabic *Khalifa*) in this verse in order to arrive at a correct interpretation of this allegory.

### Angels (*Malaika*) are Controlling Forces of Nature

Angels are non-corporeal beings which have two functions: One is that of controlling the forces of nature on the physical side and the other is to act as intermediaries between God and man on the spiritual side. They are completely obedient to God as the Holy Quran says plainly in verse 6 of chapter 66:

They do not disobey Allah in that which He commands them, but (they) do as they are commanded.

The angels referred to in chapter 2, verse 30 are those controlling the forces of nature.

Maulana Muhammad Ali concludes:

It will also be seen, from what has been said above as to the functions of the angelic beings, that Allah's saying to them is really the expression of an intention which is to be brought into execution. It is not a conversation, or a consultation with the angels; it is an expression of the Divine will to those intermediary beings who are entrusted by the Divine Being with the execution of it. It may also be added that by the angels here are meant the angels entrusted with this particular affair, not all the angels of the universe (IJ).

### Man is Ruler (*Khalifa*) on Earth

Citing the well-known dictionaries *Tajul Arus* and Lane's Lexicon as well as the Holy Prophet's companions Abdullah Ibn Masud and Abdullah Ibn Abbas, Maulana Muhammad Ali defines *Khalifa* as primarily a *Successor* or *One who judges among, or rules, the creatures of Allah by His command*. He writes:

What is stated here is an allegorical description of the preference of man above the whole of the creation on this earth, and then of the election of those righteous servants of Allah from among men themselves who lead others into the right path.



One of the significances suggested by the commentators is that the word *khalifah* here refers to *the children of Adam*, i.e., *the whole of mankind*. The correctness of this view is corroborated by the Qur'an itself, which says, referring to the whole of mankind: "and He it is Who has made you successors in the land (or rulers in the earth)" (6:165), ... Hence the reference here seems to be to the whole of mankind.

The allegorical dialogue continues in the second sentence of verse 36:

Wilt Thou place in it such as make **mischief** in it and **shed blood**? And We celebrate Thy praise and extol Thy holiness. He said: Surely I know what you know not.

The questioning by the angels is not spoken speech but refers to the manifestation of aggressive impulses during the early stages of human development which were needed for man to successfully exert control over other creatures. This aggressive aspect with the potential for bloodshed and mischief seemed to run contrary to the praiseworthy truth and order prevailing in Almighty Allah's creation. But Allah Almighty, Who is the knower of the seen and unseen, knows that in addition to the lower impulses, man has latent in him the potential for doing the greatest good as well. As Maulana Muhammad Ali states:

The concluding words of this verse show that God knew that man would abuse the power given to him, but He also knew that he would turn it to good use as well. The whole history of man is briefly written in this one verse. Man is the greatest killer on this earth, but he also turns the gifts of God to the best use. The angels speak of the darker side of the picture of humanity, but to God was known the brighter side as well as the darker side of this picture. Hence the words, "I know what you know not." While giving expression to the darker side of the picture of humanity, these intermediaries declare that this could not be the Divine purpose, for God is free from all imperfections ...

Man's potential for doing great good is due to the fact that his soul is **God's own spirit** which God has blown into him as stated in the Holy Quran in verse 29 of chapter 15:

So when I have made him complete and breathed into him of my spirit...

Since the soul of man is the spirit of God, it possesses the seeds of divine attributes among which are intelligence and the intellectual ability to acquire knowledge.

### Teaching of the Names to Adam, Submission of the Angels to Adam and Iblis' Refusal

Verses 31 through 34 state:

And He **taught** Adam all the **names**, then presented them to the angels; He said: Tell Me the names of those if you are right. They said: Glory be to Thee! we have no knowledge but that which Thou hast taught us. Surely Thou art the Knowing, the Wise. He said: O Adam, inform them of their names. So when he informed them of their names, He said: Did I not say to you that I know what is unseen in the heavens and the earth? And I know what you manifest and what you hide. And when We said to the angels be **submissive** (*sajdah*) to Adam, they submitted, but Iblis (did not). He **refused** and was **proud**, and he was one of the **disbelievers**. (2:31-34)

If verses 31-34 are interpreted literally it would mean that Allah, the Most High, sets Adam (a single person) down before Him and makes him memorize the names of things around him which range from the most complex to the most common items, such as the names of pots and pans. God then presents those things to the angels (again personalized) and asks them to tell their names. The angels reply that they know only what God has taught them but are incapable of learning anything else. God then asks Adam to inform the angels of the name of the things, which he does. God then declares that He is all knowing and all seeing. He then commands the angels to prostrate physically before Adam which they do, but Iblis does not.

There is much discussion about the names which were taught to Adam in some of the commentaries, but no clear lesson for spiritual guidance is evident. Discussing the above verses in this allegorical dialogue, Maulana Muhammad Ali makes clear that Adam here refers to the whole of humanity and not to a single person. He states:

Adam is generally taken to be the proper name for the first man, but neither here nor anywhere else in the Holy Qur'an is it affirmed that Adam was the first man or that there was no creation before him. On the other hand, great Muslim theologians have held that there were many Adams — thousands of Adams — before the great ancestor of mankind known by this name (Ruhul Maani). As the previous verse shows, the whole of humanity is spoken of here because the shedding of blood could not be the work of one man; the reference is to the shedding of the blood of man by man. Adam, therefore, though it may also be the name of a particular man, stands for man generally.

### Teaching of Adam Defined

Secondly, quoting Imam Razi, Maulana Muhammad Ali discusses what is meant by “teaching of the names of things:”

“He taught him the attributes of things and their descriptions and their characteristics, for the attributes of a thing are indicative of its nature” (Razi). Teaching Adam the names therefore signifies the vast capability of man and the superiority of his knowledge to that of the angels. Or, the reference may be to the **faculty of speech**, which is the real source of the excellence of man above the whole of creation. To this the Holy Qur’an refers elsewhere too: “He created man, taught him (the mode of) expression” (55:3, 4).

Therefore, God “teaching” man means God granting him the **intelligence** and **intellect** to understand the laws of nature which then enables him to utilize them for his own benefit. An example of this “God teaching man” occurs elsewhere in chapter 2 verse 282 where a scribe is described as being “taught to write” by God. The “teaching” here definitely means the intellect and intelligence which enables a person to master **written language**. God “teaching” the Prophet David to make coats of mail would be another example.

The discovery of the laws governing the Material Universe is called science, and since the governing entities of these laws are angels, and these angels as mentioned before are truthful and completely obedient to God, the laws of science therefore are always true. Allah, the Most High has created everything with the truth, and one of His names is also “The Truth.” The knowledge of the angels is limited to the expression of the truth in these laws but they do not have the ability to investigate and thereby utilize these laws. But man because of his intellect can use science for his benefit.

### Angels “Submitting” to Adam

Commenting on the “submission of the angels” after Adam informs them of “the names of things,” Maulana Muhammad Ali states in his masterful commentary:

What is the significance of the angels being submissive to Adam? In the first place, it must be remembered that Adam throughout this section stands for man generally; so submission is not limited to one particular man; it is to man generally. Secondly, it has already been shown that man has a superiority over the angels on account of his great gift of knowledge of things, the angels being the controlling powers of the forces of nature. By his knowledge man could harness the forces of nature and exercise control over them; in other words, the angels submit to him.

### Iblis’ Refusal to Submit

A new entity, *Iblis*, is introduced in verse 34 in the allegory. Describing the Jinn or devil which is associated with the spiritual state of man, the Holy Prophet Muhammad has said that the devil courses through man as blood courses through his body, and that Allah the Most High has placed within man an angel (who prompts good) and a Jinn (devil) who prompts evil within him. When asked if he also had a Jinn, he replied “yes, but he has submitted and prompts only good.”

### Arrogance (Fiery Nature) of the Devil

Iblis was not one of the angels. As the Holy Quran states, “He was of the jinn, so he transgressed” (18:50). The Quran rejects all narratives which depict the devil as a “fallen angel.” The nature of the devil is characterized by arrogance (i.e., a fiery nature) as stated in the Holy Quran:

He (God) said: What hindered thee that thou didst not submit when I commanded thee? He said: I am better than he; Thou hast created me of **fire**, while him Thou didst create of dust. (7:12)

And the jinn, We created before of intensely hot **fire**. (15:27)

### Fire Defined

So what then is the nature of this fire? The Quran states:

It is the fire kindled by God which arises above the **hearts**. (104:6-7)

On the day when We say to hell: Art thou filled up? And it will say: Are there any more? (50:30)

This is not an earthly fire but is a spiritual fire of lower bodily passions or acquisitive desires which is created in all animals and which man shares with them. These desires are necessary for man’s physical survival in the world. The nature of these consumptive desires is likened to fire and this represents the nature of the devil.

Commenting on the nature of the devil, Maulana Muhammad writes:

... In v. 36 he is called Satan. It should be borne in mind that *Iblis* and Satan (Ar. *shaitan*) refer to one and the same being. The word *Iblis* is used when the Evil one’s evil is limited to himself, and Satan, when his evil affects others besides himself; or *Iblis* is the proud one, and Satan the deceiver. *Iblis* is derived from *balasa*, meaning *he despaired*, and *Shaitan* from *shatana*, meaning *he became distant or remote*. The same entity is thus mentioned under two different names; he is called *Iblis* because he despairs of the mercy of God and *Shaitan* because he allures others to do things which remove them further off from Divine

mercy. Iblis therefore stands for the lower desires which keep man off from bowing before God and seeking His mercy, and Satan incites the low desires of man to lead others away from the path of rectitude.

### Significance of the “Garden” and of the “Tree”

The narrative continues:

And We said: O Adam, dwell thou and thy wife in the **garden**, and eat from it a plenteous (food) wherever you wish, and approach not this tree, lest you be of the unjust. (2:35)

In the literal interpretation of this verse Adam and Eve are placed in the Garden of Paradise and are warned not to approach a certain tree. If they did, they would commit an injustice or sin. In the literal interpretation there are discussions in the commentaries about whether it was a wheat plant or a grape vine or some other plant etc., but no clear spiritual lesson is imparted.

Maulana Muhammad Ali in his commentary explains the meaning and significance of the “garden” and the “tree” in this allegory. He writes:

The garden spoken of in this verse was on this earth, as it was on the earth that man was placed. It was certainly not the paradise to which men go after death, and from which they will never be expelled (‘Toil afflicts them not therein, nor will they be ejected therefrom.’ Quran 15:48). The placing in the garden signifies leading a life of ease and comfort, as is shown by the words that follow: “Eat from it a plenteous food wherever you wish”. And more clearly still, the life in the garden is thus described in 20:117–119: “So let him not drive you both out of the garden so that thou art unhappy. Surely it is granted to thee therein that thou art not hungry, nor naked. And that thou art not thirsty therein, nor exposed to the sun’s heat”. And now, as it were, to complete the picture of happiness, the woman is brought in, and both Adam and his wife are made to dwell in the garden, though there is no mention of the wife in what has gone before. All this shows that life in the garden meant a life of comfort, ease and happiness.

What does the tree against which man is warned signify in this allegory. Maulana Muhammad states in his footnotes:

According to the Bible, the tree which Adam was forbidden to approach was the tree of knowledge of good and evil; the Qur’an does not say so. On the other hand, where the devil deceives man, he calls it “the tree of immortality” (20:120). It was

therefore just the opposite of what the devil stated it to be. It was the tree of death, the spiritual death of man — the tree of evil. Adam undoubtedly stands for man in the whole of this description, and it is evil which man is again and again forbidden to approach, and it is evil against which all prophets of God have warned men. In the Qur’an, it is always called *this* tree, which further shows that it was something which was known to man, and there is not the least doubt that not only has man been warned against evil throughout his history, but hatred for evil is also innate in him. That man hates evil by nature is shown by the fact that every man condemns evil when it is done by another. As regards the figurative use of the word *tree*, compare 14:24–26, where a good word is likened to “a good tree, whose root is firm and whose branches are high, yielding its fruit in every season” and an evil word is likened to “an evil tree pulled up from the earth’s surface; it has no stability.” The order to eat from the earth a plenteous food but not to approach evil is really a description of what pure human nature is. Man is entitled to all the benefits of nature to maintain the body, to harness the forces of nature for his physical comforts and happiness, so long as he does not forget his soul. It is an order not to pamper the body at the expense of the soul, but it is as yet an order innate in human nature, not an order given by Divine Revelation — the need for revelation comes on later.

### The “Fall” of Adam

The Quranic narrative continues in verse 36:

But the devil made them slip from it, and caused them to depart from the state in which they were. And We said: **Go forth (*ihbatu*)**, some of you are the enemies of others. And there is for you in the earth an abode and a **provision for a time**.

In the literal interpretation of these verses, after Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit, they suddenly become aware of their private parts and try to cover them with leaves of the Garden. They are then physically expelled from Heaven. Adam lands in Sri Lanka and Eve in Jeddah. They finally meet and commence to produce twins, one boy and one girl, each year for the next 120 years. These marry and multiplication of mankind begins. It is difficult to understand how this account can provide spiritual guidance, especially as it sanctions incest.

Again, Maulana Muhammad Ali’s allegorical interpretation of chapter 2 verse 36 provides deep insights into the origin of sin. Analyzing the Arabic words in this verse, Maulana Muhammad Ali writes:

*Azalla* (translated as *made them slip*) is derived from *zall*, to slip (foot or tongue) *unintentionally* (R), and *zallat* is a *fault committed unintentionally* (R). *Azalla-huma* therefore means the devil *made them commit a fault unintentionally*. The result was that they were made to depart from the happy condition in which they were. The lesson taught here is that real happiness lies in peace of mind, so that when the peace of mind is disturbed by committing an evil, even if it be unintentional, physical happiness does not avail a man. ... Here the Qur'an again contradicts the Bible. It was not the serpent that misled Eve, nor did Eve mislead Adam. The devil casts an evil suggestion into the minds of both Adam and Eve, as he casts evil suggestions into the mind of every son and daughter of Adam and Eve ...

One may add here that the Quran has done a great service to woman-hood by removing the blot from her that it was she who tasted the forbidden fruit and then mislead man to commit sin.

Elsewhere in the Holy Quran it states:

But the devil made an evil suggestion to them that he might make manifest to them that which had been hidden from them of their shame (*sau'at*) (7:20)

Discussing the word *sau'at* (shame) in this allegory, Maulana Muhammad Ali states:

*Sau'at* signifies *shame or parts of the body which it is necessary to cover*, and also, *any saying or action of which one is ashamed when exposed to view, or any evil, abominable or unseemly property, quality, custom, or practice* (T, LL). The devil's suggestions always lead man to the disclosure of his shame.

In a literal interpretation the word *sau'at* is meant to be the private parts of the body. This significance has no bearing on spiritual development, and again proves that Maulana Muhammad Ali's allegorical approach is the right one.

The question arises: How does the devil mislead man? The devil cannot force man to commit evil. He can only seduce and deceive him. The Holy Quran also refers to this deception in the following verse:

But the devil made an evil suggestion to him; he said: O Adam, shall I lead thee to the tree of immortality and a kingdom which decays not? (20:120)

The devil excites the lower impulses in man viz. the love of wealth, power, and sex. These are natural urges which man shares with animals. The possession of wealth and

power induces a sense of permanence in man and hence he commits acts of evil to gain these possessions which he thinks will make him abide (live forever) as it states in the Holy Quran in chapter 104 verse 3: "He thinks that his wealth will make him abide."

History is replete with examples where people have met a sad end by falling into this trap. The result of this disobedience is given in the following verses:

But the devil made an evil suggestion to them that he might make manifest to them that which had been hidden from them of their **shame** (*sau'at*) (7:20)

...they both began to **cover themselves** with the leaves of the garden ... (7:22)

...and **clothing that guards against evil** – that is the best. (7:26)

O children of Adam, let not the devil seduce you, as he expelled your parents from the garden, pulling off from them their **clothing** that he might show them their **shame** ... (7:27)

In the literal interpretation of the above verses, as soon as they had eaten of the fruit of the forbidden tree, Adam and Eve suddenly become aware of their private parts and try to cover them with the leaves of the Garden and as they are expelled from Paradise, the devil chases them and exposes their nudity. There is no spiritual lesson in this highly improbable narrative if it is interpreted literally.

Maulana Muhammad Ali's allegorical approach of the above narrative extracts a wealth of spiritual guidance from it. He writes the consequence of getting out of that state is only one, the becoming manifest to them of their evil inclinations or their shame. As he explains:

An explanation of this is found in 7:26, where it is said: "O children of Adam, We have indeed sent down to you clothing to cover your shame and (clothing) for beauty; and clothing that guards against evil — that is the best." Thus, it is the clothing that guards against evil that is really spoken of here, and by the manifestation of the shame is meant the consciousness of having done something evil. The allegorical nature of what is so often related as the story of Adam is thus evident. It will be further seen that the remedy pointed out is of a spiritual nature ... This shows that the spiritual aspect of man's life and not the physical one is the real theme of Adam's story.

The second word which needs explaining is the expulsion of Adam and Eve, *ihbatu* as stated in chapter 2 verse 36:

And We said: **Go forth (*ihbatu*)**, some of you are the enemies of others. And there is for you in the earth an abode and a **provision for a time**.

Maulana Muhammad Ali in his explanation of this allegorical account states:

*Habt* sometimes means *going down a declivity, or descending from a high place to a low one*, but its more frequent use in literature is simply in the sense of *removing from one place to another*, as in *ihbitu misr-an* (2:61), which means *go to, or enter into, a city*. It also signifies simply change in condition. According to LL, *habata* means *he came forth from it* and also *he became lowered or degraded*. And *habt* further signifies *falling into evil; or becoming low or abject; or suffering loss or diminution*. This loss or suffering is brought about by indulging in evil.

The new condition in which man finds himself by submitting to his low desires is the condition of the mutual enmity of one to the other, the tyranny of man to man being undoubtedly the greatest evil which man can commit. The use of the words “some of you are the enemies of others” shows clearly that this address is not to Adam and Eve alone, but to all mankind or man in general.

The words “an abode and a provision for a time” refer to man’s span of life on earth, which is limited as compared with the eternal life of the next world.

### Closing Verses of Narrative:

#### Spiritual Guidance Granted to Humanity

The pain suffering and unhappiness produced by the enmity leads to remorse and repentance which is stated in the following verses:

They said: Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves; and if Thou forgive us not, and have (not) mercy on us, we shall certainly be of the losers. (7:23)

Then Adam received (revealed) words from his Lord, and He turned to him (mercifully). Surely He is Oft-returning (to mercy), the Merciful. We said: Go forth from this (state) all. Surely there will come to you a guidance from Me, then whoever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve. And (as to) those who disbelieve in and reject Our messages, they are the companions of the Fire; in it they will abide. (2:37-39)

Commenting on these closing verses, Maulana Muhammad Ali writes:

This section is now closed with the statement of a general law that Divine Revelation will be granted

to the whole of humanity and prophets will appear everywhere from time to time, and that it would be by following the Guidance sent by God through His prophets that men will attain to perfection. This state of perfection is described as a state in which “no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve.” The man who truly follows the Divine Revelation shall have no fear of the devil misleading him, for he has subjugated his devil, nor shall he grieve that he wasted the opportunity given him in this life, for he turned it to the best us.

Contrasting those who follow the guidance with those who reject the guidance and try to destroy it, Maulana Muhammad Ali writes:

Against those who attain to perfection by following the Divine message, the people spoken of in this verse are those who not only disbelieve but also exert their utmost to oppose revealed truth and uproot it. Such people are described as companions of the Fire. They keep company with evil in this life, so the fire becomes their companion in the next to purge them of the evil consequences of their evil deeds. Their hearts burn with evil passions in this life, and it is this very fire that assumes a palpable shape in the next.

### Moral of the Story

The moral of the story is that man is able to acquire mastery over the material world due to his ability to harness the forces of nature as he possesses intelligence and intellect but is in need of spiritual guidance to control his lower nature. There is much more to the story of Adam when it understood as an allegory and when the key terms in the story are defined by how those terms are explained in other sections of the Holy Quran.

A great debt is owed to Maulana Muhammad Ali for his thorough exposition of the topic in his commentary of the Holy Quran, which is a perfect illustration of the true rationality of religion. ■



## The Story of Moses (and Khidr)

By Dr. Ayesha Khan

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### Introduction

Stephen Hawking, one of the most brilliant scientists since Einstein, a man whose residual stardust is interred between Darwin and Newton in West Minister Abby, was often asked about the existence of God. Hawking was a scientist-- one of our best to note—and as such, I am more interested in his application of scientific reason to the question than I am in his conclusion. As he set out to answer this big question, some things of note in his arguments are elucidated in his following quote:

If we do discover a complete theory, it should in time be understandable in broad principle by everyone, not just a few scientists. Then we shall all, philosophers, scientists, and just ordinary people, be able to take part in the discussion of the question of why it is that we and the universe exist. If we find the answer to that, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason—for then we would know the mind of God.

One day, I hope we will know the answers to all these questions. But there are other challenges, other big questions on the planet which must be answered, and these will also need a new generation who are interested and engaged, and have an understanding of science. How will we feed an ever-growing population? Provide clean water, generate renewable energy, prevent and cure disease and slow down global climate change? I hope that science and technology will provide the answers to these questions, but it will take people, human beings with knowledge and understanding, to implement these solutions. Let us fight for every woman and every man to have the opportunity to live healthy, secure lives, full of opportunity and love.

Three important principles arise from his reasoning. That any quest for, and answers to divinity should be (1) congruent, explain all we know to be true without contradiction (2) rational, as our intellect is our primary driving force for understanding everything (3) instructive, what need is there for the Divine if the Divine is divorced from the problems we face today? I bring up Stephen Hawking because of the intersectionality he represents in the quest to understand the Divine, and

scripture as the word of the Divine. For the existence of God to hold as true, it should not cause dissonance in what we know of the natural world.

In this vein, the Quran states:

They say: We believe in it, it is all from our Lord.  
And none mind except men of understanding.

The commentary of the Quran by Maulana Muhammad Ali, a man of understanding, is of service to the religious community in this spirit. His countless hours of research and study distilled scripture as instructive and guiding, with congruency, so that we may all understand. As the book itself tells us the Holy Quran may be divided into two inter-related elements, decisive verses and allegorical verses. The allegorical verses are subject to interpretation and the decisive verses are the basis of the book, containing the fundamental principles of religion. These verses are stated plainly, for example,

Do not kill any soul... (17:33)

Kill not your children for fear of want... (17:31)

Eat not up one another's property... (2:188).

On the other hand, allegorical verses refer to the spiritual themes that are clothed in multi-hued garb and often expressed in the form of stories carrying profound spiritual guidance. These stories are often those of the prophets and this article examines one such story about Prophet Moses.

### Story of Moses and Khidr

The narrative elements of Prophet Moses' (a.s.) story can be summated as follows: Prophet Moses possessed immense knowledge but to gain more spiritual knowledge he sets out on a journey to find a place where two rivers that meet but don't mix. He is given a divine indication that this is where he will find an opportunity to increase his spiritual knowledge. He was to take a fish with him and its disappearance would indicate the place where he was to meet Khidr, a holy man and spiritual teacher. Accompanied with his servant, Moses set out to seek Khidr and when they arrived at the junction of two seas, the servant forgot the fish and it made its way into the waters. After a tiring journey, Moses asked for the fish to be brought, but his servant explained apologetically that the fish had made its way into the sea and Satan had made him forget to mention this to Moses. When Moses heard this, he retraced his steps back to the spot where the fish had disappeared as this place was where it was indicated to him that he would meet Khidr. The Quran details this story in the following words:

And when Moses said to his servant: I will not cease until I reach the junction of the two rivers, otherwise I will go on for years.

So when they reached the junction of the two (rivers), they forgot their fish, and it took its way into the river, being free.

But when they had gone further, he said to his servant: Bring to us our morning meal, certainly we have found fatigue in this our journey.

He said: Sawest thou when we took refuge on the rock, I forgot the fish, and none but the devil made me forget to speak of it, and it took its way into the river; what a wonder!

He said: This is what we sought for. So they returned retracing their footsteps.

Then they found one of Our servants whom We had granted mercy from Us and whom We had taught knowledge from Ourselves.

Moses said to him: May I follow thee that thou mayest teach me of the good thou hast been taught?

He said: Thou canst not have patience with me.

And how canst thou have patience in that whereof thou hast not a comprehensive knowledge?

He said: If Allah please, thou wilt find me patient, nor shall I disobey thee in aught.

He said: If thou wouldst follow me, question me not about aught until I myself speak to thee about it. (18:60-70)

### Assessing the Story

The interpretation of these verses can be literal or allegorical: we can consider this story to be a walk taken by Moses along a river to meet a man named Khidr. The story references a fish, possibly alive out of water or dead and then returning to life to take its way back into the water. A servant accompanies Moses and he forgot the fish. And that is where literal understanding stops. Or we can try to understand this story as an allegory: Moses was on a journey. Prophet Moses, in this story, represents a 'seeker of Spiritual Reality'. He is one who possesses the humility and desire to seek further enlightenment. His quest for truth is so intense, that even a very long, arduous struggle does not dampen his spirit or deter him from journeying on this difficult path. The river that Moses journeyed along was one that was known to him—a river that belongs in his physical world. We can consider that this is the journey we are all on, seekers of truth. It is a journey where we use our intellect and knowledge to seek out the truth of our existence, whether as scientists, philosophers, or a person from any walk of life. We start from observable fact and make inferences about the truth. Eventually this journey brings us to the spiritual realm. The physical world and human knowledge is bound by

limitation—we are dependent on our 5 senses to understand it. Whereas this other river, separated by a barrier is one that cannot be observed through our 5 senses. It is the river of divine knowledge and is limitless.

### Allegorical Understanding of the Story

To understand this allegory better, we can consider the difference between the argument of a prophet and that of a philosopher. The prophet works from the unknown to the known while the philosopher does the opposite - he starts from the known from which he makes inferences concerning the unknown. Thus, a philosopher who reasons from observable conditions or events can only go so far in his conclusions as to say: "Such and such a thing ought to be." On the other hand, the prophet receives knowledge directly from God and so he confidently announces that such and such a thing is a reality. Their likeness is like the blind and the seeing. For example, a blind person will examine a chair by touching and feeling it. He makes a conjecture from what he feels with his fingers and draws the conclusion that this must be a chair but the person with eyesight sees plainly that the piece of furniture is indeed a chair.

Similarly, these rivers represent the river of human knowledge (the known) and the river of divine knowledge (the unknown). Between the physical and spiritual world there is a barrier, a veil, so they meet but do not mix. To gain knowledge from the Divine, this is as far as Moses could come using his human intellect—his knowledge as a philosopher so to speak and not yet one of a prophet. The fish in this story represents the intellect which guides us to this point but cannot accompany us into the depths of spiritual knowledge. The servant with Moses is the part of the self which is called the self-reproaching spirit (*nafs-e-lawummah*). This spirit is the stage of our development where we try to do good but sometimes forget as the servant forgot the fish, but are humble in accepting our mistake. (one can conceptualize Satan as being a force that distracts us from the tasks that further our spiritual journey).

The story continues to Moses retracing his steps to the point where the fish disappeared to find Khidr. Khidr is a spiritual teacher here represented as the boatman who will help Moses traverse the river of Divine knowledge. Though one's heart (the boat) may be ready to receive divine knowledge, we may initially be in need of a guide to help us. The Quran refers to Khidr as a servant of God as follows:

Then they found one of Our servants whom We had granted mercy from Us and whom We had taught knowledge from Ourselves.

Moses said to him: May I follow thee that thou mayest teach me of the good thou hast been taught?

He said: Thou canst not have patience with me.

And how canst thou have patience in that whereof thou hast not a comprehensive knowledge?

He said: If Allah please, thou wilt find me patient, nor shall I disobey thee in aught.

He said: If thou wouldst follow me, question me not about aught until I myself speak to thee about it (18:65-70)

The teacher knows that gaining knowledge of the divine is difficult and warns Moses to have patience. So with a promise that he will have patience, Moses and Khidr cross onto the sea of divine knowledge and 3 events occur:

The first is involves a boat in which Khidr makes a hole:

So they set out until, when they embarked in a boat, he made a hole in it. (Moses) said: Hast thou made a hole in it to drown its occupants? Thou hast surely done a grievous thing.

He said: Did I not say that thou couldst not have patience with me?

He said: Blame me not for what I forgot, and be not hard upon me for what I did. (18:71-73)

The second event involves the slaying of a boy:

So they went on, until, when they met a boy, he slew him. (Moses) said: Hast thou slain an innocent person, not guilty of slaying another? Thou hast indeed done a horrible thing.

He said: Did I not say to thee that thou couldst not have patience with me?

He said: If I ask thee about anything after this, keep not company with me. Thou wilt then indeed have found an excuse in my case. (18:74-76)

The third event involves the repairing of a broken wall in a town of unwelcoming strangers:

So they went on, until, when they came to the people of a town, they asked its people for food, but they refused to entertain them as guests. Then they found in it a wall which was on the point of falling, so he put it into a right state. (Moses) said: If thou hadst wished, thou couldst have taken a recompense for it. (18:77)

Khidr then explains these three events as follows:

He said: This is the parting between me and thee. Now I will inform thee of the significance of that with which thou couldst not have patience.

As for the boat, it belonged to poor people work-

ing on the river, and I intended to damage it, for there was behind them a king who seized every boat by force.

And as for the boy, his parents were believers and we feared lest he should involve them in wrongdoing and disbelief.

So we intended that their Lord might give them in his place one better in purity and nearer to mercy.

And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and there was beneath it a treasure belonging to them, and their father had been a righteous man. So thy Lord intended that they should attain their maturity and take out their treasure — a mercy from thy Lord — and I did not do it of my own accord. This is the significance of that with which thou couldst not have patience. (18:78-82)

In their entirety, these verses narrate a story that is extremely problematic if taken literally. It contradicts **rationality**. Maulana Muhammad Ali points out that if this was not an allegory, how is it possible for Khidr to damage a boat in the presence of other travelers without the owner of the vessel or the witnesses expressing outrage, trying to prevent him or remonstrate him? The story contradicts **congruency**: It seems to sanction destruction of another's property as well as honor killing or killing of a child by a parent. Yet these actions are so explicitly forbidden in the Quran and the hadith that a literal interpretation of this story cannot stand. To get around these contradictions, some say that Khidr was an angel and so acting by the will of God, these actions are not a sin. The idea of Khidr being an angel leads to its own problems though. Why would an angel express anger or impatience? What reflection of God's mercy is shown here? If one was to accept that this was the story of an angel, what lesson would this story hold for humans? What benefit comes from Divine knowledge in such a representation?

### Key Significances Explained by Maulana Muhammad Ali

It is important to note one thing about the shift of this tale from literal to metaphorical. Maulana Muhammad Ali is always very careful to follow the rules of interpretation of scripture. His stance is not an apologist stance. It follows the rules of interpretation as outlined previously. This story is a metaphorical telling of the journey of Moses. Both because it contradicts the most fundamental principles of the Quran here when it isn't interpreted as such, and because when it *is* interpreted as an allegory, it is congruent and instructive on multiples levels.

As Maulana Muhammad Ali interprets this allegory, it can be read in two ways, one that portends what is to



come in the life of Moses and one that is instructive for humanity, all those that are seekers of truth, for all times to come. Each event with its two explanations follows:

### ***The Boat***

Divine laws are ultimately working for the good of humanity though they may sometimes appear to be working to the detriment of a person. Sometimes the loss is apparent as in the making the hole in the boat. But as events unfold, the reality is nothing was lost and much benefit was brought about to the owner of the boat. Similarly, the parallel in the life of Moses is that he brought his people to the Red Sea where it appeared they may be drowned yet they found safe passage through and it was their opponents who were defeated.

### ***Death of A Boy***

This part of the tale signifies a real loss to a person but one that occurs for the greater good of humanity. In the allegory, a person is sacrificed to ultimately save his parents from harm. Of course, this act must be taken metaphorically because the preemptive death of a child for evil they do in the future goes against the fundamentals of Islam. Rather the child represents a vain desire that may lurk in the heart of the seeker. As the seeker is taken along the spiritual path, the teacher thwarts the vain desires. Sometimes, vain desires appear harmless and innocent to the seeker, so he demands an explanation from his teacher for destroying them. The teacher explains that though these vain desires look innocent they bringing sorrow and despair in the end and is better to be rid of them when they first occur rather than to let them grow to the point they consume you. The corresponding foreshadow in Moses' life is that he had to command his people to fight against an iniquitous people. This command resulted in the real loss of lives but ultimately it was to break the tyranny of the iniquitous and evolve to a better people. The desire to not fight (a desire that seems innocent enough on its own), would have resulted in the oppression of truth and the dominance of tyranny.

### ***Building a Wall***

This third incidence represents doing good when it bears no immediate reward but the good will benefit the next generation. The wall that was built was built for those orphans yielded no money or benefit to the builder. Similarly, Moses' devoted his life to the Israelite people but they did not become a great people till later generations. For us, the crumbling wall of the city, underneath which lies the invaluable treasure, depicts the inner state of the seeker where the seeker feels the urgency to gain knowledge of God and is sometimes prepared to give up the world and renounce temporal duties—let their life crumble so to speak. But this world is the gauntlet in which we develop our spiritual selves. The teacher

strikes a balance between the spiritual and the temporal aspects of the life of the seeker. This is shown in Khidr's work of re-building the crumbling wall.

### **Conclusion**

These lessons, rich, deep, and full of relevance to our lives are what we are given by carefully researched and divinely guided interpretation of the Quran by Maulana Muhammad Ali. Stories that some hold in the realm of superstition or fairy tales are actually beautiful lessons of the patience needed to traverse the path of the truth seeker, to learn of the divine, to let go of the ego and ultimately, to understand that it is through addressing the challenges of this world, by fighting for "every woman and every man to have the opportunity to live healthy, secure lives, full of opportunity and love," that we will unlock the treasure of divine knowledge. ■

## **The Story of Jesus**

**By Mr. Ebrahim Mohamed**

*[Mr. Ebrahim Mohamed is the President of the South Africa branch of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement.]*

### **Introduction**

Of all the prophets of God, the character, mission and preaching of Jesus Christ have attracted the most controversy. His birth and early age, and so called miracles have been contested and debated across all Abrahamic faiths for ages.

What is important to remember in any discussion about Jesus, though, is that his mission was to the lost tribes of the Children of Israel. At the time of his appearance in Jerusalem, the Lost Tribes were scattered as far away as Afghanistan and Kashmir. His mission was to find them and preach to them. He said, 'I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' – Matthew 15:24. The Holy Quran verifies this statement in the following words: 'He (Jesus) was a Messenger to the Children of Israel' – (3:49). We also know that Jesus was the last prophet of the Mosaic dispensation. He appeared; it is said, approximately 1471 years after the death of Moses. We also know that he was raised by God to serve as the Messiah (i.e. The Spiritual Reviver, Anointer or Healer of the Faith) of the Jews.

We are also equally aware of the fact that the Jews in Jerusalem rejected his claim to Messiahship and called him an imposter, a liar and a fraud. Most importantly the Holy Quran makes it quite clear that Jesus and his mother were mere mortals and not divine as some suggest. The Holy Quran tells us, 'They both used to eat food.' – 5:75 This is an expression the Quran often uses to indicate mortality. Nevertheless, the bulk of the

confusion about his character and mission stems from the fact that he spoke mostly in parables that require interpretation. If taken literally it makes little sense. The Bible says: ‘He (Jesus) did not say anything to them **without using a parable.**’ – Mark 4:33. Also aspects of his narrative that we come across in the Holy Quran, present a similar challenge to the reader since the Holy Quran too contains parables, metaphors and allegory that require interpretation.

Our attention is thus drawn to this phenomenon in the following words of the Holy Quran:

He it is Who has revealed the Book to thee some of its verses are decisive they are the basis of the Book and others are allegorical. (3:7)

The verse also highlights the fact that the proper interpretation of such allegorical parts will require Divine guidance, deep knowledge and a formidable reasoning capability. Thus we are told: ‘And none knows its interpretation save Allah, and those deeply rooted in knowledge.’ And then it ends by stating, ‘And none mind except men of understanding.’ Therefore I say that much of the myths attributed to Jesus stem from erroneous, literal interpretations of allegorical verses.

For the sake of clarity and a better understanding of such verses I have relied primarily on the exegeses (interpretations) thereof by that illustrious 20<sup>th</sup> century religious scholar and academic Maulana Muhammad Ali, Founder of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society. Using his monumental English translation of the Holy

Quran, I will read to you the Quranic verses mentioned that will form the basis of this topic; and provide summary explanations, as I go along, based on the respected Maulana’s commentary of these verses. For the sake of brevity, I will omit detailed explanations dealing with the lexicology of words we typically come across in his commentaries.

### Conception Narrative

When the angels said: O Mary, surely Allah gives thee good news with a word from Him (of one) whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, worthy of regard in this world and the Hereafter, and of those who are drawn nigh (to Allah) (3:45)

Here Mary was given a prophecy (this is what is meant by the phrase ‘a word from Him’) that she will give birth to a son that will be named Jesus who will be the awaited Messiah of the Jews. He was thus given the title of Messiah and the surname ‘son of Mary’.

According to Lane’s lexicon, Messiah either means *one who travels much* or *one wiped over with some such thing as oil* or one might thus say ‘The Anointed’ one. Both meanings are relevant to Jesus. Evidence, based on fairly recent discoveries in historical terms, shows that Jesus travelled in the East after his unfortunate experience at the hands of the Syrian Jews, and preached to the lost ten tribes of the Israelites who had settled in the East, in Afghanistan and Kashmir. This is thus the preferred meaning of Messiah accepted by most commentators and lexicologists.



In my opinion, since he is said as being ‘of those drawn near to Allah’ in the Holy Quran, his holiness brought healing to the spiritual malaise of many of those to whom he was sent and thus he also fits the description of the ‘Anointed One’. The fact that his surname was ‘Son of Mary’ and not ‘Son of Joseph’, his father, whose name is not mentioned in the Holy Quran does not mean he had no father, explains Maulana Muhammad Ali. The same can be said about Moses whose mother and not father is mentioned in the Holy Quran. The reason for naming Jesus after his mother Mary was simply because Mary undoubtedly was much more well-known than Joseph. To illustrate by way of a contemporary example; historians especially generations from now will find it best to refer to King Charles III as the son of the very famous Queen Elizabeth II instead of the lesser known Prince Philip, his father.

And he will speak to the people when in the cradle and when of old age, and (he will be) one of the good ones. (3:46)

Maulana Muhammad Ali argues that neither speaking in the cradle nor when of old age, can be considered a miracle. He makes the point that every healthy child which is not dumb begins to talk when in the cradle. Speaking when of old age is also characteristic of every ordinary human being who is healthy and lives to an old age. It is here that the good news lies and that is the fact that the child prophesied will be a healthy child and shall not die in childhood. MMA quotes another authority namely Imam Fakhr al Din Razi who says, ‘the reason for mentioning Jesus speaking in childhood and in old age is to show the change of condition of Jesus from childhood to old age.’ Since change in the Divine Being is impossible, here the argument, on which the divinity of Jesus is based, is summarily dismissed. This is also ample proof to show that Jesus did not die at the age of thirty-three years, but lived to a sufficiently old age.

In another chapter of the Holy Quran dedicated to Jesus’ mother Mary (chapter 19) it becomes clear that ‘speaking in the cradle’ is a metaphor for a younger person speaking in the presence of elders. According to the Bible he started preaching in the synagogues at the age of twelve already and he was crucified when he was thirty three years. The accuracy of these ages of Jesus might be disputed but one thing is for certain he was still young when he declared his prophethood and that of being the awaited Messiah to the elders of the Jewish community. Even if we should be of the view that he was most likely forty years old already, he would still have been looked down upon as a mere child in the eyes of the elders.

Thus, when Jesus, accompanied by his mother Mary came to Jerusalem, her people questioned her about

him, referring to him as an imposter (*farrīyan*). When she pointed to him to answer them, they immediately objected and said, ‘How can we speak to one who is a child in the cradle?’ – 19:29. That they were not talking to a little baby in a crib but a mature adult becomes clear from the answer Jesus gave them. He said to them: ‘I am indeed a servant of Allah. He has given me the Book and made me a prophet: And He has made me blessed wherever I may be, and He has enjoined on me prayer and poor-rate so long as I live.’ – 19:30-31. These are with a doubt the words of a mature adult.

### Marriage Arrangements

Let me now proceed to the next verse:

She said: My Lord, how can I have a son and man has not yet touched me? He said: Even so; Allah creates what He pleases. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it, Be, and it is. (3:47)

MMA explains that Mary’s confusion here stems from the fact that at the time of this revelation she was yet unaware that her marriage had been decided. Now from the scriptures we see that there was indeed a marriage going on in the background. The Bible states:

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazereth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin **pledged to be married to a man named Joseph**, a descendant of David. **The virgin’s name was Mary.** (Luke 1: 26, 27).

An earlier Quranic verse of the same chapter three viz., verse 44, places this eventuality in context. It informs the Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) of her marriage arrangements being made in her time of which he did not know about:

This is of the tidings of things unseen which We reveal to thee. **And you were not with them when they cast their pens (to decide) which of them should have Mary in his charge**, and you were not with them **when they contended one with another.**’ (3:44)

This verse refers to Mary’s marriage arrangements that were made by the High Priest Zachariah together with her parents when Mary reached the age of puberty and could no longer stay in the Temple in the care of Zachariah according to Jewish Law. Mary, being unaware of this at the time when the news of a baby boy was revealed to her, naturally proclaimed that no man had yet touched her. Her marriage was the only obstacle she was concerned about. And she was told in reply, ‘Even so’ i.e., the child will be born by God first bringing about the circumstances that will lead to the conclusion of this decreed marriage mentioned in the scriptures. She married Joseph and gave birth to Jesus.



### “Be and it is”

The words ‘even so’ and ‘Be and it is’ do not imply that she would conceive out of the ordinary course of nature. We see the same command of ‘Be and it is’ given for the creation of the heavens and earth (see 36: 81-82) and as much as it would be absurd to assume that this was done outside of God’s immutable laws of nature, so it is equally absurd to assume that Jesus’ birth occurred outside the normal course of nature and outside wedlock. That he was born in the normal way is confirmed by none other than the Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in a debate he had with a Christian delegation from Najran in the following words:

Do you not know that Jesus was conceived by a woman in the manner **in which all women conceive?** - *Jami al Bayan fi Tafsir al-Quran*, by Imam al Tabari

Here the Holy Prophet (pbuh) was merely stating what the Holy Quran says about conception and that is that it can only take place between a male and a female:

So when **he covers her** she bears a light burden then moves about with it. (7:189)

O mankind, surely We have created you from a **male and a female**. (49:13)

Surely We have created man from **sperm mixed with (ovum)** (76:2)

To hold the view that Jesus and his mother Mary were an exception to this divine law, would be problematic, to say the least, as there is no scriptural basis for it; in

fact it would be in direct contradiction to the scriptural-based arguments presented thus far.

### The Speech of Parables

The next two verses read:

And He will teach him the Book and the Wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel (3:48)

And (make him) a messenger to the Children of Israel (saying): I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, that I determine for you out of dust (a thing) like the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird with Allah’s permission, and I heal the blind and the leprous, and bring the dead to life with Allah’s permission; and I inform you of what you should eat and what you should store in your houses. Surely there is a sign in this for you, if you are believers. (3:49)

To understand the significance of this passage, Maulana Muhammad Ali explains, it is necessary to bear in mind that the chief characteristic of Jesus’ speeches is that he spoke in parables and preferred to clothe his ideas in allegorical language, as I said in the introduction.

The first of the statements in this passage speaks of the making (*khalq*) out of dust (*tin*) birds (*tair*) and breathing (*nafkh*) into them. As a parable this is perfectly intelligible; if taken literally, however, it is incomprehensible. If on the one hand a prophet’s dignity is nobler than that of a magician or wonder worker, on the other hand the act of creation, according to the Holy Quran, cannot be attributed to anyone but the Divine Being. For

example the word *khalq* used here for creation cannot be attributed to any being except Allah. The Holy Quran has laid the greatest stress upon this point. It again and again speaks of the Divine Being as *the Creator of everything*, so that there is nothing of which anyone else may be said to be a creator. And of those persons, such as Jesus, who are taken as gods by some people, the Holy Quran emphatically states that *they do not create anything, while they are themselves created* (16:20; 25:3). To understand the use of the word ‘dust’ (*tin*) we must look at it in relation to human beings. We will see it stands for their humble origin; and *nafkh* - *breathing* into such human beings makes them deserving of respect by the angels. The Holy Quran makes this clear in the following verse:

When thy Lord said to the angels: Surely I am going to create a mortal from dust. So when I have made him complete and breathed (*nafkh*) into him of My spirit, fall down submitting to him. (38:71,72)

Then if we now look at the use of the word *tair*, ‘bird’ we will see it is to signify *one who soars into higher spiritual regions and is not bent low upon earth or earthly things*. Thus, the parable of the dust receiving life like a bird simply means that Jesus, by breathing the spirit of the divinely revealed Gospel (*Injeel*) into his apostles of humble origin (like dust) made them soar into higher spiritual regions like birds. This, after all, was the task of the Messiah!

If we now turn our attention to the miracle of Jesus’ healing the sick, we see it refers to his spiritual healing as confirmed in the *Enc. Bib.* by the Rev. T.K. Cheyne. He alludes to Jesus’ message to John the Baptist, Jesus says: “The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them” (Matt. 11:5). Placing the poor that has the Gospel preached to them in the same category as the blind, the lame, the deaf, and the dead indicate it is the spiritual defects of humanity that are referred to. Similar metaphors are used in the Holy Quran when it comes to spiritual healing. For example the Holy Quran is described as ‘a healing for what is in the breasts’ - (10:57). The breast or the heart is usually referred to as our soul i.e. the spiritual repository of our desires and emotions.

Let us see what is meant by bringing the dead to life here? Let us see what Jesus says about the dead. In Luke 9:60 he says, ‘Let the dead bury the dead,’ This is an obvious metaphor for the spiritually dead. The Holy Quran says plainly that those who die are not sent back to this world:

Allah takes (men’s) souls at the time of their

death, and those that die not, during their sleep. **Then He withholds those on whom He has passed the decree of death** and sends the others back till an appointed term (39:42).

And again, speaking of the dead God says:

And before them is **a barrier, until the day they are raised.** (23:100).

However, the raising of *the spiritually dead to life* is frequently spoken of in a metaphorical sense in the Holy Quran. Some examples are:

O you who believe, respond to Allah and His Messenger, when He calls you to that which gives you life (8:24).

Neither are the living and the dead alike. Surely Allah makes whom He pleases hear, and thou canst not make those hear who are in the graves (35:22).

What this all simply mean is that the prophets were raised for quickening to life those who are spiritually dead, and it is to this quickening to life through the Messiah Jesus Son of Mary that the Holy Quran refers to in the verses under discussion.

### Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to express my immense gratitude for the enlightenment and satisfaction of heart and mind MM Ali’s interpretations gave me. I have studied the Maulana’s works for over forty years now and in the process compared it with many other interpretations related to Jesus. His interpretations I have found soar above the traditional fabulous stories about Jesus we come across out there.

In particular what I like about his explanations is that it makes the narrative of Jesus consistent with those decisive verses in the Holy Quran that points to the fact that Jesus, like all the other prophets, was a mere mortal and not a divine being. In a unique way, his version of the events surrounding this noble prophet, upholds the fundamental principle of the unity of God that forms the bedrock of Islam. In an erudite and scholarly manner he gives true meaning to Jesus’ preaching and works and for that matter of all the other prophets of God. And that is that they are not sent to be magicians or wonder-workers etc., but rather to revive the spirit of the masses (i.e. bring the spiritually dead to life and make their souls sore like birds above mere material existence).

With that we say peace and blessings on the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary and his mother. May Almighty God be pleased with them. Thank You very much! Wa Alaykum Salaam. Peace be unto you. ■

## The story of Solomon

By Dr. Haleema Saeed

[Dr. Haleema Saeed resides in Pakistan. She is a pediatric oncologist by profession, and devotes much time to programs for the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement.]

Today I will be discussing some of the stories from the Holy Quran about Prophet Solomon (or Hazrat Suleman). Hazrat Suleman is one of the prophets of Allah mentioned in the Quran:

Indeed, We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him. And we revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, the Descendants, Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David We gave the book. (4:163)

There are many fascinating stories concerning him in the Quran. If these stories are taken literally, they tend to have a magical, fairy tale like quality to them that captures our imagination. However, we know from the Quran that all prophets are human, like the people to whom they were sent to guide, and they did not possess powers beyond human limits. As the Quran explains:

If there were upon the earth angels walking securely, We would have sent down to them from the heaven an angel [as a] messenger. (17:95)

And We sent not before you, any but men to whom We sent revelation. (21:7)

It is quite fascinating to see that once we let go of the notion that the powers ascribed to Hazrat Suleman were of a physical nature, it opens up so many practical ways of interpreting and understanding these events and applying them to our lives and current times.

Hazrat Suleman was the Son of Hazrat Daud (Prophet David). He not only inherited his father's powerful kingdom but also his wisdom, knowledge and spirituality. Some of these powers are mentioned in Surah Al-Anbiya and Surah Al-Saba:

...and to each of them we gave wisdom and knowledge, and we made the mountains declaring our glory, and the birds subservient to David and We were the Doers. (21:79)

And to Solomon we subdued the wind, blowing violent, pursuing its course by His command to the land which We had blessed and We are ever Knower of all things. (21:81)

And certainly we gave David abundance from us: O mountains repeat praises with him and the birds and we made the iron pliant to him. Saying: make

ample (coats of mail) and assign a time to the making of coats of mail and do good. Surely I am Seer of what you do. (34:10)

... and we made the wind subservient to Solomon; it made a month's journey in the morning and month's journey in the evening and We made a fountain of molten brass to flow for him. (34:12)

The misinterpretation of these verses has led to fanciful tales of Hazrat Suleman having a superhuman control of wind and mountains, where he could move them as he wanted. However, we see that in the Quran, when Allah refers to elements of nature being subservient to humans, it simply refers to the human ability to utilize nature for their benefit. This verse explains this concept:

Allah is He Who has made subservient to you the sea that the ships may glide therein by His command. And that you may seek of His grace, and that you may give thanks. And He has made subservient to you whatsoever in in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth, all, from Himself. (45:12-13)

Keeping these basic principles in mind let's study Hazrat Suleman's prowess.

### Command of the Wind

The Holy Quran states regarding Hazrat Suleman:

So We made the wind subservient to him, running gently by his command wherever He desired. (38:36)

Hazrat Suleman was famous for his fleet of ships that he used for trade as well as expansion of his empire. These ships utilized wind for movement and Hazrat Suleman was able to utilize this force of nature for his benefit. The Arabic word for wind is '*rih*' which also refers to power, influence, dominance or conquest. Accordingly, the reference to making the wind subservient to him (as explained by Maulana Muhammad Ali in his commentary of the Holy Quran) refers to how he was able to use the wind for these beneficial purposes.

### Control of Iron and Molten Brass

Elsewhere, the Holy Quran states concerning Hazrat Suleman:

And certainly we gave David abundance from us: O mountains repeat praises with him and the birds and we made the **iron** pliant to him. Saying: make ample (coats of mail) and assign a time to the making of coats of mail and do good. Surely I am Seer of what you do. (34:10)

And we made a fountain of **molten brass** to flow for him. (34:12)

Similar to the interpretation of controlling the wind, Maulana Muhammad Ali explains the control over metals could refer to the utilization of iron and brass to make tools, armor, and weapons. In a spiritual sense, it could also refer to the melting of hard hearts and the gentle spread of his influence. It is important to note that the doing of good is mentioned as the objective.

### Mountains declaring his Glory

Another reference to Hazrat Suleman in the Quran is as follows:

...and to each of them we gave wisdom and knowledge, and we made the mountains declaring our glory, and the birds subservient to David and We were the doers. (21:79)

The mountains declaring his glory could refer to Hazrat Suleman's ability to overcome the obstacle of mountains and exploit it for his benefit. For instance, what appears to be suggested is the mining of mountains for natural minerals and resources. Another interpretation is that the mountains actually refers to the people living in that area (i.e. the mountainous tribes). According to this understanding then, what is suggested is that those mountainous tribes became subservient to Hazrat Suleman's rule. Yet another interpretation is that *jibaaal*, or mountains, represent powerful people or hardship and difficulties. As a result, the understanding would be that Hazrat Suleman was able to overcome powerful opposing groups of people or very difficult hardships and difficulties (that posed great obstacles).

### Underlying theme of Controlling Nature

When we study the verses above, whether we consider them to refer to the physical use of natural resources, or we understand them metaphorically to represent Hazrat Suleman's ability to affect hearts, spread Allah's message like the wind, or overcome immense hurdles and difficulties, the underlying principle that is mentioned repeatedly is that of the importance of **knowledge** and **wisdom**. Acquiring knowledge and using it wisely to benefit humanity is the constant here. The other theme that emerges is that of humility and gratitude, as is evident from verses below:

“And certainly We gave **knowledge** to David and Solomon. And they said: **Praise be to Allah**, Who has made us excel many of His believing servants.” (27:15)

“And Solomon was David's heir, and he said: O men, we have been taught the speech of birds, and we have been granted of all things. **Surely this is manifest grace.**”

“...and to each of them we gave **wisdom and knowledge.**” (21:79)

These lessons are an essential reminder in today's world where our utilization of natural resources has reached unsustainable levels. We are given the example of Hazrat Suleman, who was harnessing the forces of nature for the advantage of his nation, without damaging the natural environment or being hostile to people. He kept his power subservient to Allah's Power, and did not let his worldly authority corrupt him.

### Interactions with Jinn and Birds

The Holy Quran refers to Hazrat Suleman's interactions with jinn and birds:

And his hosts of the jinn and the men and the birds were gathered to Solomon, and they were formed into groups. (27:17)

The word *jinn* in Arabic refers to anything that is concealed or hidden and its meaning depends on the context, for example the germs that cause disease are called *jinn*, as they cannot be seen with the naked eye. When referring to humans it generally refers to a certain category of people for example rich and the poor, the elite and the common person, etc. To understand the meaning of *jinn* in reference to Hazrat Suleman's army, we can study their description in the Quran as given in the verses below, where the word, *shayatin*, or devil is used:

... and of the devils there were those who dived for him and did other works. (21:82)

... and the devils, every builder and diver, and others fettered in chains. (38:37-38)

... and of the jinn there were those who worked before him by the command of his Lord. (34: 12)

From these verses it seems that that *jinn* refers to a specific portion of Hazrat Suleman's army that performed tasks like diving and building. The devils may be a rebellious portion of the army or members of tribes that remained hidden in the mountains that had been subjugated by Hazrat Suleman. There is no reason to suppose they were other than human.

The third segment of Hazrat Suleman's army is referred to as birds. This could refer to actual birds, as birds tend to follow victorious armies. Also, birds can be utilized to carry messages and that could have been their function in Hazrat Suleman's army. The cavalry is at times also referred to as birds due to their fast speeds. However, in other verses of the Quran it is said that Hazrat Suleman knew “*mantaq ut tair*” (or, the language of birds). This could refer to a code language used to send secret messages and so the birds could be referring to the Intelligence wing of the army. Furthermore, in metaphorical terms, *tair* also refers to spiritually elevated people, and so the meaning could be that Hazrat Suleman was able to capture the attention

and allegiance of those persons who were spiritually inclined.

Whether we interpret verse 27:17 to mean that Hazrat Suleman commanded an army of ordinary men, mountain tribes and cavalry, or that he commanded the respect of ordinary men, the rebels, and spiritually elevated people, the underlying theme is that he had power and authority and he utilized his knowledge and wisdom to organize his people with discipline to achieve a good purpose.

### **The valley of the Ants**

The Holy Quran refers to another story concerning Hazrat Suleman in the following way:

Until when they came to the valley of the Naml, a Namalite said, O Naml, enter your houses, lest Solomon and his hosts crush you, while they know not. He smiled wondering at her word and said,

My Lord, Grant me that I may be grateful for thy favor which Thou hast bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I may do good as thou art pleased with and admit me by Thy mercy, among Thy righteous servants. (27: 17-18)

Maulana Muhammad Ali explains that Naml is a valley near Taif, and so this incident may not be about actual ants but rather can refer to the nation of Namal. Understanding the narrative in this way then provides the lesson of how Hazrat Suleman was aware of his environment and the rights of others around him. He did not use force in a way that was oppressive to the environment or to others around him. It also shows how he achieved this awareness through gratitude and humility.

### **Valuable Guidance for those in Positions of Authority**

Hazrat Suleman's story is full of guidance for all who are in a position of power or leadership, if the various narratives in the Quran concerning him are interpreted in a manner that goes beyond the mere literal words. It is difficult to derive practical lessons that can be applied in daily life if we simply adopt an understanding that Hazrat Suleman was given supernatural powers. We can learn so much from these narratives if we focus on characteristics attributed to Hazrat Suleman – that of knowledge, wisdom, humility, and gratitude – which are the core qualities of every good leader.

While there may be many ways to understand the significance of these stories, the guiding principle is to maintain an interpretation that is in accordance with the basic principles of the Quran. Since these incidents has been related to us in a book of timeless guidance, it is important to focus on the practical lesson that can be derived from them so that we may implement such teachings in our daily lives. ■

## **The Story of the Holy Prophet's Isra and Miraj**

**By Sadru Sahukhan, Esq.**

*[Mr. Sadru Sahukhan is the President of the Australia branch of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement. He is a retired Senior Prosecutor by profession.]*

Today, it is common for stories in scripture to be viewed as fairy tales, akin to bedtime stories. And this is due to people interpreting stories in scripture literally, not appreciating the fact that scripture contains allegories, metaphors and parables that are designed to provide a spiritual lesson that can be practically applied in life. As a result, religion is increasingly viewed nowadays as irrational. And Islam is no exception to this line of argument.

As an illustration, Nupar Sharma, a member of the Indian parliament, recently spoke words of criticism against Islam by presenting two examples. One concerned the Prophet Muhammad's marriage to Hazrath Aisha, alleging that Hazrat Aisha was six years old at the time of the marriage and nine years old when the marriage was consummated. The other concerned the story of the Isra and Miraj, in which Prophet Muhammad travelled on a flying horse from Makkah to Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, and then to heaven where he met God and other prophets, and then returned to this world. The allegation regarding the age of Hazrath Aisha at the time of her marriage to the Holy Prophet is without merit, as overwhelming evidence shows her correct age was closer to 19 years (as demonstrated by Maulana Muhammad Ali in his book *Muhammad the Prophet*). The second allegation coincides with the topic I will be discussing today.

### **The Quran on the Isra and Miraj**

The Holy Quran in 17:1 states the following concerning the Isra and the Miraj:

Glory to Him Who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Mosque, whose precincts We blessed, that We might show him of Our signs! Surely He is the Hearing, the Seeing.

Al-Aqsa means "farthest", "far away" or "remote" in Arabic, and refers to Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, next to the dome of the rock.

There are variant opinions about the interpretation of this verse since the early days of Islam. They are as follows:

1. The Holy Prophet Muhammad was carried bodily from the Masjid al-Haram (in Mecca) to Masjid al-Aqsa (in Jerusalem) – or as some say, in Medinah –



and therefrom to the heavens up in the skies.

2. The Holy Prophet Muhammad was carried bodily from the Masjid al-Haram to Masjid al-Aqsa and therefrom only his spirit was allowed to rise to the heavens (i.e. a belief in a partial physical, partial spiritual Mi'raj).
3. That the whole event of carrying from Masjid al-Haram to Masjid al-Aqsa and then onward to the heavens was simply a manifest vision, a spiritual experience in a state of being awake without moving the body from where it was.
4. That the whole event was shown in the form of a dream or in a state of sleep.

It should be noted that the idea of physical ascension in Mi'raj no doubt offers a depiction of a very beautiful journey which the human mind can visualize. Stories of physical ascensions to the heavens by the founders and righteous men and prophets are commonly found in the mythology of Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and even Sikhism; in certain cases, it goes to the extent of raising to the heavens of a religious personage or a leader of a nation along with his horses and chariots. Today, based on our advanced state of knowledge and understanding, we know that these stories of physical ascensions are stories, accounts based on traditions, legends and mythologies. Thus, any effort on one's part to insist on the belief of the bodily ascension of the Holy Prophet does not in any manner prove the superiority of the Holy Prophet over other religious personages; rather, it simply places him on the same level of all other legendary heroes of human history.

It is also common for spiritual experiences reported by way of metaphor to be interpreted in physical terms by people who are devoid of any spiritual experiences themselves, as their comprehension is limited to things apparent to their physical senses. A deeper spiritual sense is beyond their capacity. For example, if a person sees the sun, the moon, the stars and the skies, he does not think the sight of these things carry any special significance for him, or that there is a prophecy in it for him. If the same person sees the sun, the moon, the stars or the skies in a dream or a vision, then he tries to find the spiritual significance of these things and decipher the underlying meanings. Such is the case with the story of the Isra and the Mi'raj.

#### **Maulana Muhammad Ali's explanation**

Maulana Muhammad Ali provides a convincing interpretation of the story in his commentary of the Holy Quran. He references 17:60 and authentic hadith that cite to this verse's applicability and relevance to the interpretation of the story. Chapter 17 verse 60 states:

And when We said to thee: Surely thy Lord encompasses men. And We made not **the vision** which We showed thee but a trial for men, as also the tree cursed in the Qur'an. And We warn them, but it only adds to their great inordinacy.

Maulana Muhammad Ali provides a detailed explanation in his commentary of this verse; he writes:

The reference here is to the vision of Ascension or the Mi'raj (B. 63:42), which was really a prophecy of the ultimate triumph of Islam; There has been a difference of opinion among the learned as to whether the Holy Prophet's Ascension was bodily or spiritual; the majority adhere to the first view, but among those who hold the latter view there are personages of sound opinion, such as 'A'ishah and Mu'awiyah. In view of the plain words of the Qur'an, however, which refer to the Ascension as being the vision which We showed thee, the opinion of the majority must be rejected. The sayings of the Holy Prophet support this view. Thus in a report it is stated that the angel came to him on another night when his heart saw, and the Prophet (peace be on him), his eyes slept but his heart did not sleep; and such are the prophets, their eyes sleep but their hearts do not sleep, then Gabriel accompanied him and he carried him to heaven (B. 61:24). The concluding words of another report which speaks of the Mi'raj are: "And he awoke and he was in the Sacred Mosque" (B. 98:37). In another report the words describing the condition in which he was at the time of Ascension are, whilst I was in a state between that of one sleeping and one awake (B. 59:6). In fact, it is quite true that he was not asleep — he was in a vision, but at the same time it was not a corporeal Ascension. He was actually carried to the Holy Presence, and he was shown great wonders, but it was in spirit that he was carried, and it was with the spiritual eye that he saw those wonders, not in body and with the physical eye, for things spiritual can only be seen with the spiritual eye. And this vision had an important significance. He saw it at a time when his condition was, to human seeming, one of utmost helplessness, and he was shown that a great future lay before him. His opponents, as usual, disbelieved in such visions, and laughed at him.

Maulana Muhammad Ali further explains in his commentary the underlying significance of the reference to the "cursed tree" and its relation to the vision of the Isra and Miraj. He writes:

The cursed tree is the tree of zaqqum (B. 63:42). According to the Holy Qur'an, every good action



is a good tree and every evil action is an evil tree. One explanation of the cursed tree being a trial for the disbelievers is given in 37:62a. But the statement is made here in contrast with the Prophet's vision, and both, in fact, have a deeper significance. As the Prophet's vision signified his future triumph and gave an indication of the greatness to which Islam would rise, the statement made elsewhere that the tree of zaqqum was the food of sinners (44:43, 44) contained a prophecy of the discomfiture of the enemies of Islam, telling them that a deadly food was in store for them. It was these two prophecies that the opponents laughed to scorn, hence they were a trial for them. And the reason why the vision and the statement about the cursed tree are conjoined is thus evident. The triumph of Islam and the discomfiture of the enemy went hand in hand.

This understanding of the Isra and Miraj as a spiritual experience with an underlying message of hope provides perspective on the context in which this verse was revealed. The Mi'raj is an event of the early days of the mission of the Holy Prophet. We know that the first verse of Surah Bani Israel (Chapter 17) is one of the early revelations. This was a period full of afflictions, difficulties, adversities and trials for the Holy Prophet and his companions. Those who have read the history of the period know fully well that the magnitude of the sufferings of the Holy Prophet and his companions experienced was so great that it could be endured only

by those with the firm conviction of faith found in men appointed by God. Reading through the verses appearing at the end of Surah Bani Israel (17:90-93), one finds that the opponents of the Holy Prophet were asking all sorts of questions and were raising all types of objections against him. As it states:

And they say: We will by no means believe in thee, till thou cause a spring to gush forth from the earth for us, Or thou have a garden of palms and grapes in the midst of which thou cause rivers to flow forth abundantly, Or thou cause the heaven to come down upon us in pieces, as thou thinkest, or bring Allah and the angels face to face (with us), Or thou have a house of gold, or thou ascend into heaven. And we will not believe in thy ascending till thou bring down to us a book we can read. Say: Glory to my Lord! am I aught but a mortal messenger?

Naturally, in such adverse circumstances what was required was something which could provide a ray of hope to the Holy Prophet and his companions on the one hand and a manifest proof of his truthfulness on the other hand. A physical ascension of the Holy Prophet on his journeys between Masjid al-Haram and Masjid alAqsa, not witnessed by his opponents, if offering anything at all, was only to the Holy Prophet himself and to no one else. This will not suffice to establish the truthfulness of his mission. What was required was something greater than this, a clear proof of the truth of Islam visible to all and sundry and that is what is contained in the first verse of Bani Israel (chapter 17:1). This verse contained a message of success of the mission of the Holy Prophet and his Ummah.

The philosophy underlying the Mi'raj is simply this: after the proclamation of prophethood by the Holy Prophet, he was subjected to great afflictions, and in such a distressed condition, glimpses of the success awaiting him and his Ummah and the resultant elevation of the human race were manifested to him.

#### **Deeper Spiritual Insights into Hadith descriptions of Isra and Miraj**

Appreciating the significance of the story of the Isra and Miraj being a vision (a spiritual experience rather than a physical journey), as explained by Maulana Muhammad Ali, lays the foundation for a much deeper understanding of all of the particulars of the story as elaborated upon in hadith reports. A summary of the references to the story from hadith reports is as follows:

- It is reported that the Holy Prophet stated: "I was asleep in Hateem when the roof of the house opened and Gabriel descended in the company of a few other angels.

- They first led me to Zam Zam (a fountain in Mecca) and opened my chest there, took out my heart and washed it with the water of Zam Zam. Thereafter, a tray full of Imaan (faith) and wisdom was brought and Gabriel took Imaan and wisdom from the tray and placed it in my chest and closed it.
- After that, an animal called “Buraaq” was brought. It ran at great speed so that each of its steps was touching the horizon. Riding on this “Buraaq” we first came to Masjid al-Aqsa and offered two raka’at prayers and thereafter we set out on a journey through the skies to heaven in the company of Gabriel.
- We met Adam on the first sky. There I was shown two rivers and on my asking, Gabriel told me that these were Euphrates and Nile. We met Prophet Joseph on the second, Idrees on the third and John and Jesus on the fourth, Haroon on the fifth, Moses on the sixth and Abraham on the seventh sky.
- Then we passed through the garden where I saw a river on which palaces having domes of pearls and grounds of musk were built; then we reached a place where the sound of the pen of the Creator could be heard and therefrom we proceeded to “Sadratul Muntaha” and then Allah drew nearer to me so that the distance was reduced to the extent of two ends of a bow, even lesser.
- Then I was given three gifts: 1) the last verses of Surah Baqarah (Chapter 2, “The Cow”), 2) good news of Allah’s Mercy that He will forgive all except those who set up equals with Him, and 3) saying of prayers fifty times a day was enjoined. “I met Moses on my way back ...”. A discussion took place between Moses and myself which ultimately resulted in Allah reducing the number of prayers to five times per day.
- On my way back I returned to Masjid al-Aqsa where all the prophets of the past had assembled and all of them offered their prayers led by me.
- One Hadith states: “fastalqaza wa huwa fil masjidalharam” (i.e. that thereafter the Holy Prophet awoke and he was in Masjid al-Haram).

Hafiz Sher Muhammad, the great late missionary of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement, provided a fascinating account of the meaning and significance of the various

metaphors included in the story. A summary of his insights are as follows:

1. Gabriel’s opening the prophet’s chest and placing “Iman” (faith) and “wisdom” in it is an indication of the facts that the Holy Prophet’s heart has been cleansed of all base sentiments and that the Holy Prophet and his Ummah have been bestowed with “Iman” and “Wisdom”, all prejudices replaced with open-mindedness, a natural element of wisdom.
2. The Holy Prophet travelling on “Buraaq” is an indication that the religion of the Holy Prophet will spread with great speed, and history bears testimony that Islam spread much faster than other religions. Additionally, the Holy Prophet’s riding on the “Buraaq” which appeared in animal form rather than a bird having wings to fly, is an indication that animal passions have been subjugated by the Holy Prophet and that with the advent of Islam animal passions will give way to the progress of humane rationalism.



3. Rising to the skies and meeting the prophets of the past is an indication of the great heights to be touched by Muslims and along with them the whole human race, and that all the prophets are parts of one institution, all having been raised to lead humanity to one goal –

that is, rising to the destined heights. All other prophets welcoming the Holy Prophet is a clear prophecy of the fact that the followers of all other religions will embrace Islam and that the welfare of the human race lies in the unity of all believing people.

4. The Holy Prophet's leading the prayers of the other prophets is a very significant indication of the finality of the Prophethood. This tells us that whatever good for the human race was possible had been done and they are offering their prayers led by a prophet who finalized the process; now, none else will be raised as a prophet. In Masjid al- Aqsa all the prophets handed over the spiritual as well as worldly Khilafat to the Holy Prophet by accepting him as their Imam and as a result of this the Bani Israel and the Christians gave over the succession to the prophets in favor of the Ummah of the Holy Prophet.
5. By showing the Nile and Euphrates to the Holy Prophet, it was prophesied that in the near future not only Bait-ul-Muqaddas would fall to the Muslims but Egypt, Iraq, and Syria would also come under Muslim domain.
6. When Moses was shown to the Holy Prophet in a weeping condition and complaining about hardness of the hearts of his followers, this was an indication of the state of hard heartedness, thanklessness, crookedness, materialism and altering of the teachings of Torah. Moses shedding tears indicates his grief over the moral and spiritual state of his Ummah, and what Moses tells the Holy Prophet about the prayers has an element of warning for the Muslim nation in neglecting to discharge the duty of saying prayers regularly, which is evident to all today.
7. The three gifts received by the Holy Prophet also have great significance:
  - a. Salat or the prayer, which has been called the Mi'raj of a believer, is the greatest mode of spiritual elevation and in it all the believers were made to share the Mi'raj with the Holy Prophet.
  - b. The promise of mercy and forgiveness to all except those who set equals with Allah is in fact the cornerstone of the Islamic doctrine of "Unity of Allah."
  - c. The third gift – the last verses of Surah "Baqarah" (Chapter 2, "The Cow") –

wherein is contained the promise of the triumph of Islam, its great future and coming to an end of the period of hardships – carries the message of completion of the Deen (religion) and principals of forgiveness and mercy. Thus the "Meraj-Un-Nabi" in fact is the story of the Mi'raj of the human race, which has been told in parables and metaphor concealing in it the great message of hope for a suffering humanity.

### Conclusion

These beautiful pearls of wisdom articulated by Hafiz Sher Muhammad is a perfect example of how symbolic meanings may be found in scriptural narratives when the correct foundation is first in place. By appreciating the foundation of the story of the Miraj being a vision, and not a physical journey, one is then able to ponder and reflect on the deeper spiritual insights to the story. Hence, the importance of the foundational interpretations in the literary works by Maulana Muhammad Ali.

I will end here. Thank you very much. ■

## The Story of Gog and Magog (and Relation to the Dajjal)

By Dr. Mohammed Ahmad

[Dr. Mohammed Ahmad is the President of the USA branch of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement. He is a retired primary care physician.]

My dear brothers and sisters, assalaum aleikum. I will be sharing with you today some insights from the works of Maulana Muhammad Ali on the story of Gog and Magog.

This topic is one of the most misunderstood subjects dealt with in Islamic literature. And this is because the story of Gog and Magog is intertwined with various hadith reports about the Dajjal and prophecies about future happenings. Because of its complexity, many intellectuals have gone so far as to declare all *hadith* relating to these prophecies as unreliable or fabrications (despite these prophecies being connected to the Quranic narrative).

### Quran on Gog and Magog

Let's first review the references in the Quran related to Gog and Magog. In Chapter 18, titled *Al Kahf* (or, in English, "The Cave"), we are told that *Yajuj* and *Majuj* (or Gog and Magog) are suppressed by *Dhul Qarnayn* (the "two horned one"). Then, *Dhul Qarnayn*, having journeyed to the land of the "rising sun," found a people who could "hardly understand a word" of his. The

following is then relayed in verses 94 through 99:

They said: O Dhu-l-qarnain, Gog and Magog do mischief in the land. May we then pay thee tribute on condition that thou raise a barrier between us and them?

He said: That wherein my Lord has established me is better, so if only you help me with strength (of men), I will make a fortified barrier between you and them:

Bring me blocks of iron. At length, when he had filled up the space between the two mountain sides, he said, Blow. Till, when he had made it (as) fire, he said: Bring me molten brass to pour over it.

So they were not able to scale it, nor could they make a hole in it.

He said: This is a mercy from my Lord, but when the promise of my Lord comes to pass He will crumble it, and the promise of my Lord is ever true.

And on that day We shall let some of them surge against others and the trumpet will be blown, then We shall gather them all together, (18:94-99)

Later, in Chapter 21, in the context of presenting the lesson that those who are dead cannot return to life, and how this lesson also applies to nations that were once destroyed, the Quran mentions that this principle also applies to Gog and Magog (despite their widespread dominance on earth at some time in the future). It states in 21:96:

Even when Gog and Magog are let loose and they sally forth from every elevated place. (21:96)

### **Identity of Gog and Magog according to traditional interpretations**

The identify of Gog and Magog has been interpreted in a number of ways over the centuries. The traditional interpretations, which incorporate much fanciful folklore, have been summarized by Zakariya al-Qazwini (a famous Persian cosmographer and geographer of the 13th century). He relates the following:

- Gog and Magog live near to the sea that encircles the Earth and can be counted only by God. This sea is believed to be the Caspian Sea, Black Sea or the Sea of Azov.
- They are human, but only half the height of a normal man, with small eyes almost like the mongols with claws instead of nails, and a hairy tail and huge hairy ears which they use as mattress and cover for sleeping.

- They dig into their wall each day until they almost break through. They break for the night saying, “Tomorrow we will finish”, but each night God restores it.
- Then one day, as they stop digging for the night, one will say, “Tomorrow we will finish, God Willing”, and in the morning, it is not restored as with every night.
- When they do break through, they will be so numerous that, “Their vanguard is in Syria and their rear in Khorason.”

According to some Shia sources, Gog and Magog are not “from the Children of Adam” (meaning, not human). However, in other sources, they’re described as small-eyed humans. *Al-Kafi*, one of the primary collections of Shia hadith, states that it has been narrated from Ibn Abbas that when he asked Hazrat Ali about the so-called “creatures”, Hazrat Ali responded by saying:

God has created 1,200 species on the land, 1,200 species in the sea, 70 species from the Children of Adam, and the people (that is, our species of humans) are the Children of Adam except for the *Yajooj* and *Majooj*.

Sunni sources, however, including those in *Sahih Al Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*, clearly state Gog and Magog are indeed human, and this is the belief of the overwhelming majority of Islamic scholars.

Throughout history, various nations and peoples were identified as Gog and Magog. At one point, it was the Turks, who threatened Baghdad and northern Iran. Later, when the Mongols destroyed Baghdad in 1258, it was they who were identified as Gog and Magog. The “Abbasid orthodoxy” believed the Ilkhanate Mongol invaders who laid siege to and then sacked Baghdad, were Gog and Magog. Historian and exegete Ibn Kathir mentioned similar theories in his book *Al-Bidaya wa'l-Nihaya* and mentions “Gog and Magog are two groups of Turks, descended from Japheth, the father of the Turks, one of the sons of Noah. Various later scholars of history and geography also regarded the Vikings and their descendants as Gog and Magog.

### **Identity of Gog and Magog according to Maulana Muhammad Ali**

In his commentary of the Holy Quran, Maulana Muhammad Ali presents a view of the identify of Gog and Magog that is based on historical records, geographical evidence and Biblical references. He explains that the ancestors of the present Teutonic and Slav races are the Gog and Magog spoken of in the Holy Quran. He provides a scholarly analysis that is compelling to any objective reader.



Maulana Muhammad Ali notes that most biblical scholars have neglected to pay attention to the reference to Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38:2 when trying to determine their identity. This all-important verse states: “*God, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal.*” He explains in his commentary:

Tubal and Meshech are almost always mentioned together, and their identification has been a task of great difficulty, so much so that a renowned Biblical critic suggests the names of certain nations in South Palestine. But this contradicts the views of ancient writers like Josephus, who settle the Magog north of the Caucasus. If we go, however, to the north of the Caucasus, we find still two rivers bearing the names Tobal and Moskoa, on the latter of which is situated the ancient city of Moscow, and on the former the more recent town of Tobolsk. It seems almost certain that these two rivers received their names from the two tribes of Ezekiel 38:2, the Tubal and Meshech, and then gave their names to the two above-mentioned cities, thus keeping the names of these tribes. This view is in accordance with the opinion of Josephus, who identifies Magog with the Scythians, for “throughout the classical literature Scythia generally meant all regions to the north and north-east of the Black Sea, and a Scythian any barbarian coming from these parts.

Maulana Muhammad Ali then concludes that: **“It is clear from the above that the name Magog stands for tribes which occupied territories to the north and north east of the Black Sea, tribes which gave their names directly or indirectly to the towns of Tobolsk and Moscow.”**

Maulana Muhammad Ali also points to the gigantic effigies of Gog and Magog in Guildhall, London. He explains the following (with references to Encyclopedia Britannica):

... the preservation of the effigies of Gog and Magog in England, which can be traced to a very early period in English history, makes it probable that the Angles or the Saxons had in very ancient times some connection with the Scythians or other tribes living north of the Caucasus or the Black Sea ...

Maulana Muhammad Ali then concludes by stating: **“It is thus clear that the ancestors of the present Teutonic and Slav races are the Gog and Magog spoken of in the Holy Quran. The effigies of Gog and Magog in London and the names of Tobal and Moskoa, occurring in the Bible, are clear indications of this fact.”**

#### **The connection between Gog and Magog (of the Quran) and Dajjal (of Hadith)**

In addition to clarifying the identity of Gog and Magog, Maulana Muhammad Ali expounds upon the teachings of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad by making the connection between the numerous references to the Dajjal in hadith reports with the Quranic narrative of Gog and Magog. For a comprehensive and illuminating discussion on this topic, I refer you to the chapter titled “The Antichrist and Gog and Magog” in the book “The Ahmadiyya Movement” by Maulana Muhammad Ali (which has also been published as a separate booklet by the USA Jamaat).

Maulana Muhammad Ali explains that hadith refer to the first and last 10 verses of the chapter The Cave (Chapter 18) as affording protection from the tribulations of the Dajjal. The theme in these verses, in fact of the whole chapter, deals with Islam’s position on Christianity, in particular Islam’s position that Jesus Christ never claimed to be the son of God or to be divine. It is no secret that this is the fundamental difference between Islam and Christianity, and the Quran emphasizes that the belief in Jesus Christ being the son of God or divine was not taught by Jesus Christ himself.

Reviewing the first and last 10 verses of this chapter in fact alludes to 2 unique aspects of Christianity:

- The first aspect is **religious**. It concerns the

belief in Jesus Christ being the son of God or divine; as it states in the opening verses of the chapter:

Praise be to Allah! Who revealed the Book to his servant ... And warn those who say Allah has taken a son. (18:1-4)

- The second aspect is **temporal**. It concerns the worldly or material achievements that will be made by nations subscribing to this doctrine. As it states in the concluding verses of the chapter:

Say: Shall We inform you of the greatest losers in respect of deeds? Those who effort goes astray in this world's life and they are making good manufacturers. (18.102-104)

Accordingly, in the first 10 verses we have reference to the Christian doctrine of Jesus being the son of God and in the last 10 verses there is a prophetic portrait of the Western Christian nations being the leaders of manufacture and establishers of materialistic societies.

Moreover, immediately after speaking of Gog and Magog fighting each other in verse 102 of Chapter 18, the account reverts to the subject of the Dajjal. It states:

Do those who believe think that they can take My servants to be friends beside Me?

This again is a reference to the belief that Jesus Christ is divine, and this reference being made immediately after speaking of Gog and Magog shows the Quran identifies the people of Gog and Magog with the Dajjal. The term "Gog and Magog" refers to the people and the term "Dajjal" refers to their activities. As to why the Quran mentions Gog and Magog and not Dajjal, the reason is that the word Dajjal means "liar" or "deceiver" and to characterize a people with such an epithet would seem derogatory and offensive. However, no exception can be taken to simply referring to the national origins of the concerned people.

With this understanding, the reference to Gog and Magog in 21:96 becomes ever more insightful, which states:

Even when Gog and Magog are let loose and they sally forth from every elevated place.

Maulana Muhammad Ali explains the significance of this verse in his commentary; he writes:

Sallying forth from every elevated place evidently means that they (i.e. Gog and Magog) will establish their supremacy all over the world. The way the Quran speaks of them in both places shows that a time will come when these people will over-

power all nations of the world. It also appears that they already existed at the time of the revelation of the Book, but that their movements were to remain checked until a certain time, after which they would wield uncontrolled authority into the whole world.

### **Lesson from the Story of Gog and Magog**

This understanding of the identity of Gog and Magog (and the connection with hadith on the activities of the Dajjal) provides a much more perceptive view of the story. The story no longer sits in the domain of fairy-tales about mysterious creatures and fanciful legends about inexplicable feats. Rather, the story becomes a practical reality about the history of nations and their observable dominance on earth.

It is a historical fact that the colonial activities by European Christian nations (having emerged from the Slavic and Germanic peoples) dominated the non-European and non-Christian world (both in terms of being occupying forces and through missionary pursuits). They spurred the industrial revolution establishing the West as the greatest manufacturing peoples of the world. And, they spread a culture of materialism and consumerism to all corners of the earth, whereby popular culture throughout the world is influenced by, and reflective of, what is accepted in the West. And, due to the grand scientific and technological advancements of these nations, religion itself (and belief in God) is increasingly in decline and viewed as mere fiction of the past. These factual accounts are all in accordance with the understanding of the story of Gog and Magog presented in the literary works by Maulana Muhammad Ali. They further give appreciation to the apt description of the Dajjal being "the greatest tribulation of all time."

Further practical manifestations of this understanding of the story of Gog and Magog are reflected in the conflict between Russia and the United States (or the Western Bloc) and the rivalry between the communist and capitalist systems and their impact over the nations of the world.

Most importantly, though, is the practical lesson from this understanding of the story. The story is in essence about a battle between materialism and spirituality. That there will come a time when a culture of materialism and consumerism is so widespread, where worldly pursuits are sought to the deprivation of one's spiritual well-being, and where the masses are deceived into believing they are self-sufficient and not in need of Divine guidance. The story provides a stark warning and reminder that all people and nations (no matter how mighty and dominating) have their end, yet one's soul is everlasting. That despite the great temptation to have

one's life revolve around purely secular attractions, remaining steadfast to the spiritual guidance provided by the Almighty Creator of all secures the real victory and is the attainment of everlasting success.

May Almighty Allah help us all in appreciating this lesson and striving towards implementing it in our daily lives. Ameen. Thank you very much for your kind attention. ■

## Depictions of Heaven and Hell

By Mr. Omar S. Raja

[Mr. Omar Raja resides in Virginia, USA and is an active member of the USA branch of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement. By profession, Mr. Raja is an information technology professional.]

### Introduction

We often hear that heaven and hell are the names of two specific places set aside for a future life that comes after we die, heaven being a place of ultimate reward for those that believe in the right doctrine or perform the correct rituals, while hell is said to be a place of eternal punishment for those who do not. So, the ideas presented are that you either “win” or you “lose” as if religion is a mere game of sorts, ideas that do not at all take into the account a person's heart, soul and inner state of mind, known only to God. This view inevitably results in a negative portrayal of the nature of God, where God is then perceived as being in need of man's compliance as well as vengeful and unforgiving. Moreover, it is commonly thought that the descriptions contained about heaven and hell in scripture are to be taken literally.

Not all understandings of the concepts of heaven and hell follow these conventional thoughts. Maulana Muhammad Ali presents a clear and detailed overview of the concepts of heaven and hell in his commentary to the Holy Quran<sup>1</sup> that uncovers their descriptions' underlying significance and, as a result, reveals the true nature of God, as well as the true nature of His Divine judgment on every soul.

### The Shaping of the Human Soul in this Life

The concept of heaven and hell in Islam is very much related to the conditioning of the human soul. The human soul, as taught in the Quran, is the spirit of God breathed into every human being,<sup>2</sup> showing every soul has a special connection to Him. This gives every person the inherent potential to attain nearness to Him, so long as that person does not forget to do good to his or her own soul. Hence, the Quran states:

Whoever does good, it is for the good of his own soul; and whoever does evil, it is to its detriment. (41:46)

Relating to this, the Quran draws our attention, time and time again, to the divine law of reward and requital. Elsewhere, the Quran states:

Whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it. And whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it. (99:7-8)

Commenting on this verse, Maulana Muhammad Ali writes:

Every good deed bears fruit, and every evil deed bears an evil consequence, whether the doer is a **Muslim or a non-Muslim**.<sup>3</sup>

In another place, the Quran states:

Whoever brings a good deed will have tenfold like it, and whoever brings an evil deed, will be recompensed only with the like of it, and they shall not be wronged. (6:160)

Commenting on this verse, Maulana Muhammad Ali writes:

No other sacred book gives such prominence to the preponderance of the quality of mercy in the Divine Being. While evil must have its evil consequence, it is only its like, but virtue brings a tenfold reward.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, good deeds are magnified while evil is only nullified, which all has bearing on the inner, spiritual condition of one's soul; a condition that survives death, and which we take with us in the afterlife. In this respect, God states:

He knows indeed your condition. And on the day when they are returned to Him, He will inform them of what they did. (24:64)

### Day of Judgment or Resurrection

This returning to God in the life after death is repeatedly spoken in the Quran of as the day of *great rising* or *Resurrection*<sup>5</sup>, also known as the day of *Judgment*<sup>6</sup>, the day the day of *Requital*<sup>7</sup> and the day of *Meeting (with God)*.<sup>8</sup> By then, just as the world around us would have come to end and changed into something new, the same would be true of ourselves. As the Quran states, “the earth shall be changed into a different earth and the heavens as well” (14:48), and everyone's state of being will “grow into what you do not know” (56:61), indicating we live on in this new world of existence not with the material body of this life, but a new ‘spiritual’ body that grows out of the deeds of a person. Accordingly, it will be a time when “hidden things are manifested”



(86:9), when every soul will become fully aware of the hidden consequences of their actions which they could not fully perceive with the physical eye of this life before death. This accountability before God is spoken elsewhere in the following way:

And We have made every human being's actions to cling to his neck, and We shall bring forth to him on the day of Resurrection a book which he will find wide open. Read your book. Your own soul is sufficient as a reckoner against you this day. (17:13)

Commenting on this verse, Maulana Muhammad Ali explains:

This verse reveals the principle that every action produces an effect which is made to cling to a person, and that this very effect will be met with on the day of Resurrection in the form of a wide open book. It is thus by leaving its effect behind that every action is recorded, and this very effect constitutes the book of a person's actions.<sup>9</sup>

The "wide open book" is thus to feel the full **effect** of one's deeds from this present life. Moreover, as the Holy Quran states, heavy deeds result in a successful soul (meaning a soul that was drawn close to God), and light deeds will result in a lost soul (meaning one that became distant from Him).<sup>10</sup> So, the life after death is a summation of our actions, good and bad, impressed on the soul, the end-result being a spiritual condition that finds oneself in either a heavenly state or a hellish state. But no matter the condition, as will later be discussed, Islam teaches continuous progression of the soul in the afterlife. With this understanding before us, let us now turn our attention to the descriptions of heaven and hell in the Holy Quran.

## Heaven

### *Descriptions of Heaven in the Hereafter*

Often the Quran employs a range of literary devices to convey ideas of a delicate or intricate nature. In fact, the Quran states, "some of its verses are decisive — they are the basis of the Book — and others are allegorical" (3:7). So, it should come to no surprise then that the descriptions of heaven and hell in the life after death are especially spoken of in a literary style that is highly allegorical. With regards to the blessings of heaven, the Prophet Muhammad himself said that according to God its blessings are such that "no eye has seen and no ear has heard, and which the heart of man cannot conceive."<sup>11</sup> The Quran affirms, "no soul knows what joy of the eyes is hidden for them: a reward for what they did" (32:17). In light of this, Maulana Muhammad Ali has explained in his commentary that "their description in words which convey an idea of the blessings of this life

is metaphorical. Words cannot reveal to us the real nature of those blessings."<sup>12</sup>

With this in mind, let us consider the followings description of heaven in the Quran:

And give good news to those who believe and do good deeds, that for them are Gardens in which rivers flow. Whenever they are given a portion of the fruit thereof, they will say: This is what was given to us before; and they are given the like of it. (2:25)

A parable of the Garden which is promised to those who keep their duty: In it flow rivers. Its fruits are perpetual. (13:35)

Maulana Muhammad Ali explains one possible interpretation of this parable is that the gardens are symbolic of the seeds of faith and the rivers, the deeds of a person from this present life. So, just as water is necessary for the development of the seeds in a garden, good deeds are necessary for giving life to the development of one's inner, spiritual self. I may add that in the descriptions relating to heaven, there is a lesson to be gained in that any belief or ritual for that matter, in and of itself, does not bring about salvation if it does not inspire one to practice good in everyday life. For example, if one does not heed the lessons from prayer to be charitable and a force of goodness in this world, then prayer loses its value, and this leads one away from the true spirit of worship.

In one place, after mentioning the Gardens of the next life, the Quran goes on to state that every good deed (which is considered to be a good deed of faith), is likened to a good tree that bears fruit.

And those who believe and do good are made to enter Gardens, in which flow rivers ... Do you not see how Allah sets forth a *parable of a good word/deed as a good tree*, whose root is firm and whose branches are high, yielding its fruit in every season ... (14:23-25)

In this light, Maulana Muhammad Ali explains that as the trees of the garden represent good deeds that bear fruit, the promised fruits are thus the *spiritual fruits* of one's own good deeds tasted spiritually in this life. Hence, those in paradise will reminisce, *this is what was given to us before* in this life.

This show that heaven has its beginnings in this life. In this regard, Maulana Muhammad Ali has said:

The Garden of this life is the spiritual bliss which the righteous find here in the doing of good, whereof gardens and rivers and fruits are symbols.<sup>13</sup>

I may add that according to the Quran those who attain to the highest stage of spiritual development and find perfect peace with God in this life (i.e., heaven on earth), are deemed to be a “soul at rest” as God is well-pleased with them and they are well-pleased with Him.<sup>14</sup> This is another indication that the descriptions of the Garden of the hereafter are symbolic of our inner, spiritual states of mind in this life, which become evident to us in the next and similar is the case with all other descriptions mentioned in the Holy Quran.

Some other descriptions of paradise include its dwellers donning luxurious clothing made of fine and thick silk; adorning themselves with jewelry, made of pearls, gold and silver; reclining on raised couches; having before them beautiful cushions set in rows and carpets spread out.<sup>15</sup> The aim here is always to present a picture of perfect happiness. But again, they are not the physical things of this world. In fact, the Quran states the material things of this life, including gold and silver, are only provisions for this life,<sup>16</sup> so these descriptions of heaven must not be taken literally. As to what form they will be materialize in the next life we do not know, except that they will not at all pertain to the material ornaments and beautiful things of this life, but rather be symbolic of the *spiritual ornaments*, *spiritual clothing* and *moral beauty* possessed in this life. Elsewhere after speaking about the temporary provisions of this life, including the love of desires which is made attractive to people, the Quran goes on to state:

Say: Shall I tell you of what is better than these [temporary provisions of this life]? For those who guard against evil are Gardens with their Lord, in which rivers flow, to abide in them, and pure companions and Allah’s goodly pleasure. And Allah is Seer of the servants. (3:14-15)

Commenting on these verses, Maulana Muhammad Ali states:

We are here told that, though the enjoyments of this life have their attractions, yet the desire to be with Allah is the goal which the true believer sets before himself. Of the blessings of paradise is Allah’s goodly pleasure... The addition of this word here shows that the blessings of paradise are spiritual.<sup>17</sup>

As the blessings of paradise are spiritual, then clearly, the physical, material desires of man in this world do not pertain to the hereafter, and therefore even the mention of “pure companions” in the Holy Quran cannot and must not be interpreted in some carnal fashion, as unfortunately done by many readers of the Holy Quran.

#### *Pure (húr), Beautiful Ones (‘in)*

According to Maulana Muhammad Ali, it is likely that the mention of “pure companions” are the same as the *húr ‘in* mentioned elsewhere in the Quran, Arabic words

which he renders as signifying “pure, beautiful ones” as in the following verse:

The dutiful (men and women) will be surely in Gardens and bliss ... We shall join them to pure (*húr*), beautiful ones (*‘in*). (52:17, 20)

Regarding the significance of the Arabic words *húr* and *‘in*, Maulana Muhammad Ali has explained that these words as mentioned in their plural forms in the Quran and based on the Arabic lexicons, apply not only to men and women, but even to *qualities* and *deeds*, characterized by *purity* and *beauty*. Interestingly, the Arabic word, *hawari* is derived from the same root as *húr*, which means *a pure and sincere friend*, a term which we find to have been particularly applied to the disciples of Jesus in the Holy Quran.<sup>18</sup>

As these spiritual blessings have unique reference to the pure, beautiful qualities and deeds of the righteous, Maulana Muhammad Ali has chosen to render these terms in his English translation of the Holy Quran as *pure, beautiful ones*. It should be understood then that the *pure, beautiful ones* are the spiritual fruits of one’s pure and good deeds. Moreover, in light of the teachings of the Quran, their nature will be entirely different from the things of this world and are spiritual blessings to be granted equally to both women and men.<sup>19</sup> This stands in stark contrast to the common belief that the *húr* are virgins that are presented to believing men in heaven as some carnal reward.

So, as the *húr ‘in* apply to both men and women, then why the misconception? Because in some places the descriptive qualities for the *húr ‘in* mentioned in the Quran are either grammatically feminine (e.g., “with them are those modest in gaze,”) or described in language thought to be feminine in nature, such as they being likened to precious gems (e.g., “as though they were rubies and pearls”), and on this basis, it has been assumed these “pure, beautiful ones” are blessings promised only to men. However, just because a word is described in the feminine or in what is thought to be feminine language, it doesn’t necessarily imply that it must be referring to females. In the Arabic language, even *pure things (sálihát)* and *good deeds (tayyibát)*, attributes which inherently characterize the blessings of the *húr* in paradise, are words found to have *feminine* plurals. This may be a reason why the Quran contains descriptions for the *húr* in the feminine though linguistically both *húr* and *‘in* are plurals of words applying to both men and women. Also, another reason may be, as explained by Maulana Muhammad Ali, is that if there be a symbol of purity and beauty (in terms of *purity of character* and *beautiful deeds*), then this is found in *womanhood* and not *manhood*.<sup>20</sup>

Whatever the case may be, as previously mentioned, the *hūr* are nonetheless spiritual blessings promised to both men and women in the hereafter. The same is true for the descriptions of jewelry and clothing presented in the hereafter which some may conclude to be feminine in nature since they may be perceived as being more natural for women to wear in this life (e.g., clothing made of silk, bracelets of gold, silver, pearls). Yet, as these spiritual blessings are not the beautiful things of this world, but rather symbolize moral beauty and the spiritual adornments of the righteous, they are therefore applicable to both men and women with respect to the hereafter. Similarly, the *hūr*, which in this case are symbolic of pure, beautiful qualities and deeds of the righteous, are also equally applicable to both women and men. So, at most we may say the manifestation of the *hūr* as pure companions in the hereafter will be symbolic of the pure, beautiful, moral *qualities* that were either a man's or woman's pure companions in this life. As such, it is totally unwarranted to attach a sexual connotation to the *hūr* as the Quran totally rejects the idea that the material and physical wants of man in this life will find realization in the hereafter.

It is unfortunate then there are those of the mindset who believe these blessings will be manifested in the hereafter in some carnal fashion. In opposition to this misconceived notion, Maulana Muhammad Ali has written in his book, *The Religion of Islam*:

All descriptions given are simply to show that the life of the righteous will be perfect in the Resurrection. It is with the same end in view that mention is made of the company of men and women in that state, to which sensually minded people have attached a sensual significance.<sup>21</sup>

Elsewhere in the same book he has written, "what these blessings actually are, no one knows, but the whole picture of Paradise drawn in the Qur'an strongly condemns the association of any sensual idea therewith."<sup>22</sup>

### **Purpose of Heaven**

Indeed, the entire picture of paradise presented in the Quran is one of peace, purity, spiritual upliftment, happiness, and meeting with the Divine. As the Quran states, "they hear therein no idle or sinful talk, but only the saying, Peace! Peace!" (56:25-26) and "the greatest of all is Allah's goodly pleasure. That is the grand achievement" (9:72). But even achieving this greatest bliss is not the end. According to the Holy Quran, this is just the starting point to further advancement. Hence, those in paradise will "certainly ascend to one state after another (84:19).

Further, as the desire to rise to higher and higher spiritual stages will be without end, those in paradise will

pray, "Our Lord, make perfect for us our light" (66:8).

### **Hell**

#### *Descriptions of Hell*

While the ideas of rising higher and higher are connected with paradise, the opposite is true of hell which has been described as an abysmal depth associated with "burning fire" (101:11). The description of the "fire" of hell is used quite frequently and in varying ways throughout the Holy Quran. It has been described in one place in the Quran as a "fire kindled by God, which rises over the hearts." (104:6-7). Maulana Muhammad Ali has explained in light of this verse, it is therefore "within the heart of man [in this life] that the origin of hell-fire lies."<sup>23</sup>

So, just as the heaven begins in this life within a person's heart, so too does hell begin in this life, which in this case is a heart consumed with the fire or burning of low desires (which includes one's 'burning' with rage, greed, envy, etc.). Hence, the Quran refers to its dwellers as having been consumed in wrongdoing.<sup>24</sup> These are they whom did not take care of their souls which is really a spiritual blindness due to making one's soul distant from God, because they did not take the opportunity in this life to develop the inner, spiritual self by way of good deeds. As a result, this spiritual blindness carries over into the next life. As the Quran states:

And whoever is [spiritually] blind in this [life], he will be [spiritually] blind in the Hereafter. (17:72)

In contrast, those who led a spiritually fruitful life are described in the Quran to be illuminated with spiritual light in the hereafter:

On that day thou wilt see the faithful men and the faithful women, their light gleaming before them and on their right hand. Good news for you this day! — Gardens wherein rivers flow, to abide therein! That is the grand achievement. (57:12)

Other descriptions speak of hell as a place of no escape,<sup>25</sup> where one is restrained in heavy chains<sup>26</sup>; is given boiling and intensely cold drinks<sup>27</sup>; and food of thorns that neither nourishes nor satisfies.<sup>28</sup> The place of no escape signifies that one cannot escape the consequences of their deeds as well as feelings of intense regret for crimes committed; the chain represents the entanglements of this world that led one astray; the hot and intensely cold drinks of hell signify those who went to extremes, losing sight of the path that called for moderation and the doing of good deeds; and the food of hell that has no nourishing value, appears to be symbolic of leading a sinful, unfruitful life. All the punishments mentioned in the Holy Quran are symbolic of the misdeeds of this life that distanced oneself from God.

It may be asked then why are the punishments of hell (or the rewards of heaven for the matter) described in such vivid terms? It is to make clear that they will assume a real shape in the next life in accordance with one's spiritual condition.

#### *Purpose of Hell*

Interestingly, the same verse that speaks of hell as an abyss, also refers to as a "mother" (101:9) and elsewhere as a "patron" (57:15) showing that the underlying purpose for these punishments is to raise one's condition to a higher state until it leaves its hellish one. This is why the punishment of hell is described in the Quran as a "requital corresponding" (78:26) to sin. So, the purpose of hell is not torture, but for spiritual purification. As such, those in hell are said to feel painful regret. For example, its dwellers will say:

I wish I had sent (good deeds) ahead for this life of mine! (89:24)

If only we had listened or pondered, we should not have been among the inmates of the burning Fire. (101:8-11)

Regarding the remedial nature of hell, Maulana Muhammad Ali has explained:

Hell is a temporary place for the sinner, whether **Muslim or non-Muslim**, and this also supports the view that the chastisement of Hell is not for torture but as a remedy, to heal the spiritual diseases which a person has incurred by his own negligence, and to enable him to start again on the road to the higher life. Therefore, the punishment in hell is not everlasting.<sup>29</sup>

The Holy Quran has affirmed this concept in the following verse:

Then as for those who are unhappy, they will be in the Fire ... abiding in it so long as the heavens and the earth endure, **except** as your Lord please. Surely your Lord is Doer of what He intends. (11:107)

The wording, "except as Allah please" is not without purpose. After all, a person can only ever commit a limited and not an infinite amount of wrongdoing in this life. The punishment cannot exceed the evil, otherwise this would contravene God's attributes of Requital, Justice and Mercy. "And My mercy encompasses all things" (7:156), says God in the Holy Quran. Elsewhere the Quran states God is the "Most Merciful of those who show mercy" (12:64).

#### **Heaven and Hell as Spiritual Conditions**

While there is a limit placed on hell there is no such limitation placed on heaven. As the Quran states, it is "a

gift never to be cut off" (11:108). In fact, the Quran refers to heaven as being as wide as the heavens and the earth, thereby covering the whole of space.<sup>30</sup> This shows that heaven and hell are more like two conditions, rather than specific places, because otherwise, hell could not possibly exist. The Prophet Muhammad affirmed this idea in his response to the following question from an emissary to the Byzantine emperor Heraclius: "You call to a garden whose breadth is the heavens and the earth. So where is the fire?" The Prophet replied, "Glory be to God! Where is the night when the day comes?"<sup>31</sup> The idea is where there is spiritual light, there is an absence of spiritual darkness. Walking in spiritual light in the afterlife means that the light stays with oneself wherever one goes. It is everywhere. This is how we can imagine heaven then as being extensive as the heavens and the earth, if thought as a spiritual condition, rather than a specific place.

#### **Conclusion**

To conclude, Maulana Muhammad Ali's commentary brings to light that according to the Quran heaven and hell have their beginnings in this present life within our hearts, linked to the fruits of our good actions and consequences of our misdeeds, regardless of religion. They are hidden, spiritual conditions of that soul that will one day assume a real shape in the life after death, something which beyond the realm of human imagination. As such, the descriptions of heaven and hell along with their associated rewards and punishments, could only ever be described in symbolic language to convey to the mind just a small glimpse of what they may feel like, while also relate to the spiritual, inner conditions of the human soul.

I may add that Maulana Muhammad Ali's commentary on the subject of the afterlife and heaven and hell advances the goal of religion which is to call people to live a life with the purpose of improving their own spiritual condition and developing spiritual life within themselves through good deeds. Further, his commentary permits concepts of the afterlife to be understood in a logical way that appeals to one's rational and intellectual self, and not to be taken as some dogma. Also, importantly, his interpretations uphold the integrity of the understanding of the nature of God as One Whom is a Loving, Merciful Nourisher and Provider. ■

**Footnotes**

1. For a detailed discussion on the subject of Life after Death, see the Holy Quran Arabic Text with English Translation and Commentary by Maulana Muhammad Ali (OH, USA: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore Inc., 2002), Introduction, pp. I-43 – I-51.
2. Quran 15:29, 38:72.
3. Ali, Quran (2002 ed.), Introduction, p. I-44.
4. Ali, Quran (2002 ed.), 6:160 commentary, p. 323.
5. Quran 17:13, 19:95.
6. Quran 82:18, 74:46.
7. Quran 1:3.
8. Quran 40:15.
9. English Translation of the Holy Quran with Explanatory Notes, originally by Maulana Muhammad Ali, edited by Zahid Aziz (Wembley, UK: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Lahore Publications, 2010), 17:13 commentary, p. 341.
10. Quran 23:102-103.
11. Sahih al-Bukhari as quoted in The Holy Quran Arabic Text with English Translation and Commentary by Maulana Muhammad Ali, p. 820.
12. Ali, Quran (2002 ed.) 32:17 commentary, p. 820.
13. Ali, Quran (2002 ed.), 55:46 commentary, p. 1048.
14. Quran 89:27-30.
15. Quran 18:31, 35:33, 76:21, 88:12-16.
16. Quran 43:35.
17. Ali, Quran (2002 ed.), 3:14 commentary, p. 139.
18. Quran 61:14.
19. An example of the Holy Quran placing men and women on equal footing with respect to the promised, spiritual these will enter the Garden, and they will not be dealt with unjustly in the least. (4:124). Also see 9:72, 40:40, 43:70, and 57:12.
20. See Maulana Muhammad Ali's footnotes on this subject, compiled into a single article at the following link: <https://www.muslim.org/islam/hur.htm>
21. The Religion of Islam by Maulana Muhammad Ali (Dublin, Ohio: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam, 5th edition, 2012), p. 208.
22. Ali, The Religion of Islam, p. 211.
23. Ali, Quran (2002 ed.), 104:7 commentary, p. 1244.
24. Quran 2:81.
25. Quran 2:167, 4:121, 18:53.
26. Quran 73:12, 18:53.
27. Quran 38:57, 78:25.
28. Quran 88:6-7.
29. Ali, The Religion of Islam, p. 234. Also, see Ali, Quran (2002 ed.), 57:15 commentary, p. 1061.
30. Quran 3:133.
31. Nasr, Seyyed Hossein; Dagli, Caner K.; Dakake, Maria Massi; Lombard, Joseph E.B.; Rustom, Mohammed. The Study Quran (p. 496). HarperOne. Kindle Edition.

## Report: Work of Spreading Maulana Muhammad Ali's Enlightened Interpretations throughout the World

By Samina Malik

[Mrs. Samina Malik is Vice-President of the USA branch of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement. She is also Director-in-Charge of the translation and publication work.]

There are many translations of the Holy Quran, but from the wonderful presentations we have heard in this symposium, Maulana Muhammad Ali's translation and commentary of the Holy Quran is the preeminent translation which speaks most effectively to the modern, rational mind.

This appreciation is not simply an academic exercise, but it is of great practical importance in today's world. Many allegations made against Islam, and religion in general, are responded to through the presentation of spiritual guidance contained in Maulana Muhammad Ali's translation and commentary of the Holy Quran.

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad wrote the following in his book *Izala-e-Auham*:

... I suggest that instead of these preachers, we should send literature of a high standard to these (Western) countries. If my jamaat helps me heart and soul, I wish to produce a commentary of the Holy Quran, and get it translated into English, and send it to these people (of the West). But I must strongly emphasize that such a work is a task that shall be achieved by myself and by none other, or by one who is an off-shoot of mine and is thus included in me.

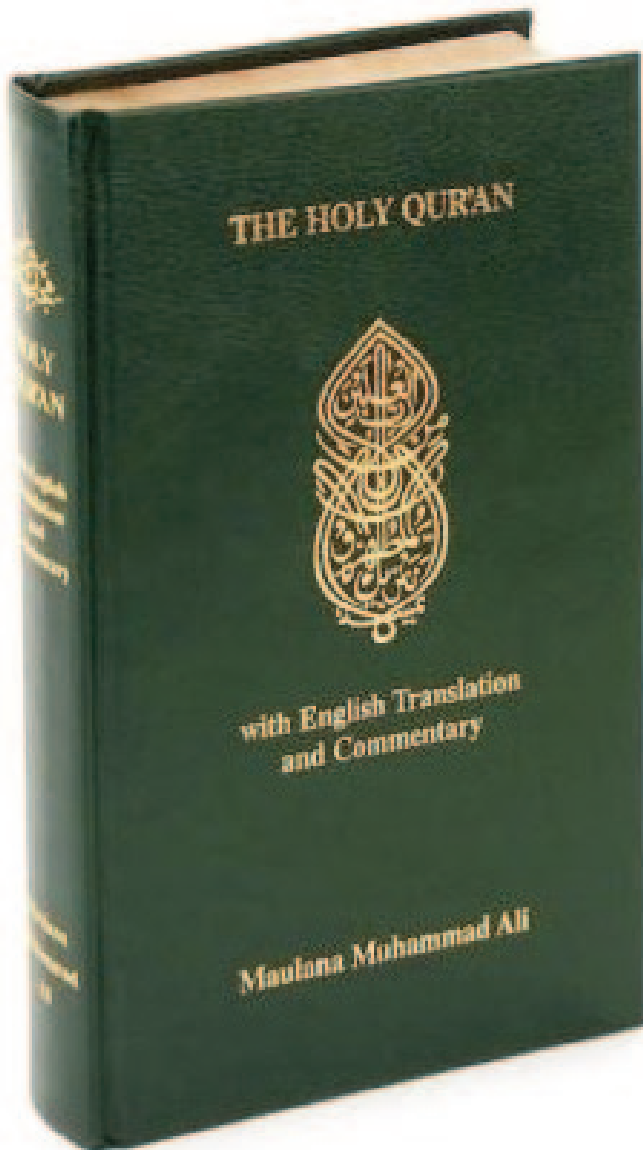


The man who fulfilled Hazrat Mirza Sahib's desire was his close companion and devotee, Maulana Muhammad Ali, who at the young age of 25 sacrificed a promising career in law to be with his mentor, the Mujaddid of the 14th century. And it was from his close relationship with Hazrat Mirza Sahib that he learnt those Islamic truths which later would help him produce the invaluable library of literature in Urdu and English associated with his name.

I would like to share with you today information on some of the recent work being done by the USA Jamaat to spread our Jamaat literature, in particular the publications by Maulana Muhammad Ali, throughout the world.

### West Africa

For the past few years, the USA Jamaat has been devoting much time and effort working in West Africa. There are both French and English speaking countries in this



region. The French speaking countries include: Mali, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Guinea and the Congo. The English speaking countries include: Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Togo.

The widespread acceptance and establishment of Maulana Muhammad Ali's publications in West Africa has a special significance. Many years ago, Maulana Muhammad Ali had a dream in which he was packing his suitcase to go to Africa. But this dream never materialized. With the events which are now unfolding in which hundreds of thousands of copies of Maulana Muhammad Ali's French and English Holy Quran translations have been distributed in these countries, the meaning of the dream is becoming clear: although Maulana Muhammad Ali personally would not go to Africa, his translations and commentaries of the Holy Quran translations and other books would be received there with great love and admiration.

Nowhere else in the world has Maulana Muhammad Ali's French Holy Quran and other books found as much enthusiastic acceptance as in West Africa, especially in Mali and the Ivory Coast. And a primary reason for this is that we have a trusted and valued partner in Sufi Sheikh Bilal, a leading spiritual leader in Mali who has a deep love for the writings of Maulana Muhammad Ali.

Sheikh Bilal has recognized the value in the spiritual lessons contained in the interpretations by Maulana Muhammad Ali. He sincerely believes these interpretations shine the true light of Islam and are especially important in the current times when foreign groups are introducing extremist ideologies into the region. Masha Allah, he is dedicated to make Maulana Muhammad Ali's French Holy Quran translation the leading translation in all French speaking African countries.

### Mali

Noman and I have visited Mali several times and have attended the Annual *Mauloud* events held in Bamako by Sheikh Bilal.

This year we attended the *Mauloud* event in Bamako from October 12 to 15. After the *Mauloud* we stayed an additional four days for meetings with Sheikh Bilal about further plans for the Quran distribution projects and about having the Holy Quran translated into Bambara, the native language of the majority of people in French speaking West Africa as well.

About 40,000 people attended the *Mauloud* event held in a large outdoor stadium. In one of the sessions, Sheikh Bilal spoke to the assembled masses about Maulana Muhammad Ali's French Holy Quran translation, praising the translation and thanking us for providing him with the donated Holy Qurans. He also gave a Quran *Dars* on *Sura Al-Aala*, referencing the commen-

tary from Maulana Muhammad Ali’s French Holy Quran translation. Noman and I also addressed the large audience and reiterated our commitment to this noble cause of spreading the Holy Quran and the correct teachings of Islam in West Arica.

The last day of the event was devoted mainly to the free distribution of the Holy Quran to representatives from various parts of Mali and surrounding countries. It was a joy to see the appreciation and gratitude from delegates who were picking up their allotted shares.

Sheikh Bilal asked Noman and I to present the French Holy Quran to selected individuals. At one point, the crowd from the general public became so excited to receive a copy of the French Holy Quran that it seemed the stage itself may collapse. But Alhamdulillah, everything was successfully managed and we were able to leave safely.

There are 400-million French speaking people in West Africa creating a huge demand for the French Holy Quran. To a small Jamaat like ours, the task to supply them with our literature sometimes seems impossible. But the Holy Quran states in Chapter 13 verse 31:

*And if there could be a Quran with which the mountains were made to pass away, or the earth were cloven asunder, or the dead were made to speak— nay, the commandment is wholly Allah’s.*

The meaning of this verse truly begins to dawn on one’s mind when one sees instances of Sufi Sheikh Bilal holding aloft and praising Maulana Muhammad Ali’s French translation in front of an approving crowd of tens of thousands of people or one sees a surge of humanity advancing forward with hands outstretched for a copy of the Quran at the Quran distribution. These are instances in which one witnesses “the passing away of mountains” before one’s very eyes.

**Mosque in Mali**

During our visit in October of this year, we also visited the Mosque that Noman and I are building in Mali



named *Maulana Muhammad Ali Mosque*. People had gathered in the partially completed Mosque for *Maghrib* prayers when we arrived. After prayers, Noman and I gratefully addressed the congregation.

We later went to the *Maulana Muhammad Institute for Quran Studies* which Noman and I had previously built. As I had mentioned in past reports, this Institute was built for the purpose of having a center from which studies of the Holy Quran may take place. *Insha Allah* it will serve as a prototype for other locations throughout the region. With the conference hall full, we met with members of the Sufi community at the Institute. Sheikh Bilal and Sheikh Saido addressed the audience and both Noman and I gave short speeches. We were very pleased to see the manner in which the Institute is being used and we pray to Almighty Allah for its continued success. The meeting ended with beautiful Quran recitations by students from the Sufi community school. Both the speeches in the Mosque and the proceedings in the Institute were recorded and shown on local Mali TV for several days.

**Meeting with Grand Sufi Sheikh Bilal and Sheikh Saido**

For the next few days, we had very productive meetings with Sheikh Bilal and Sheikh Saido about the need for a translation of the Holy Quran and other books of our movement into Bambara. We are now in the process of getting sample translations from qualified university professors as part of the initial evaluation for choosing a translator. In addition, we discussed further plans for the distribution of our literature.



### Distribution of the French Holy Quran and other literature in Mali

To date, we have shipped 76,400 copies of the French Holy Quran to Mali and 168,000 copies of our other titles, which comprise:

- The Religion of Islam
- Manual of Hadith
- Muhammad the Prophet
- Early Caliphate
- Living thoughts of the Prophet Muhammad
- Introduction to the Study of the Holy Quran
- Teaching of Islam
- The True Conception of Jihad in Islam
- Islam the Religion of Humanity
- The Prophet of Islam
- Introduction to Islam
- Message of Peace
- History of the Prophets

*Inshallah*, we intend to ship an additional 15,000 copies of the French Holy Quran and 168,000 copies of the above 13 French Books in early 2023.

Sheikh Bilal also has Sufi centers in Mauritania where Arabic is the official language. We have accordingly also sent Sheikh Bilal 3000 copies of *Bayan ul Quran*, our Arabic translation of the *Tafseer* of Maulana Muhammad Ali's English Holy Quran. Sheik Bilal's Sufi centers in Mauritania provide an excellent network through which Maulana Muhammad Ali's Arabic books can be widely distributed in the country, just as our French publications are being spread in Mali.

### Arabic Translation

I would like to also share with you some information about the USA Jamaat's Arabic translation project. Our translator, Professor Hussein Aly, was a professor of translation in American University of Cairo, Egypt and is now in the USA completing a second Ph.D. in Islamic Studies.

He has translated the following books:

- *Bayan ul Quran*, the Arabic translation of the

Commentary in Maulana Muhammad Ali's English Holy Quran translation

- The Three Volumes of The Great Reformer
- Prophethood in Islam
- The Ahmadiyya Case
- The Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement
- The Ideal Prophet
- New World Order
- Ahmadiyya Movement by Maulana Muhammad Ali
- and Muhammad in World Scriptures

As you will recall from my previous reports, the following books have been translated into Arabic, published and have had several shipments sent for distribution to Egypt and other countries:

- The Religion of Islam,
- Manual of Hadith,
- Muhammad the Prophet,
- Early Caliphate,
- Teachings of Islam,
- Islam the Religion of Humanity,
- The Prophet of Islam,
- and Living Thoughts of Prophet Muhammad

### Ghana

The USA Jamaat is also doing a lot of work in the African country of Ghana. By the Grace of Almighty Allah, distribution of the English Holy Quran is proceeding very well there thanks to our devoted friend, Dr. Hakeem Ahmed Wemah. Dr. Wemah is currently Chairman of the Cotton Development Authority and Chairman of a group of industrial companies. In the past, he has held high positions in the Government of Ghana.

Dr. Wemah first made contact with me after reading the E-book version of our English Holy Quran. He was so pleased with the translation that he sent me a message expressing his praise for it. I called and talked to him about the Holy Quran and was very impressed by his





desire to spread the interpretations in Ghana, as presented by Maulana Muhammad Ali in his commentary. As a result, Noman and I decided to travel to Ghana to meet him in 2017.

Noman and I have visited Ghana three times since then. In one of the visits Dr. Wemah arranged for us to deliver lectures in universities and Islamic institutes. He also took us to meet influential religious leaders, including the leader of Sunni Muslim community in Ghana and the Archbishop of Accra. We presented Maulana Muhammad Ali's Quran to everyone we met. To date we have sent 25,000 copies of the English Holy Quran and 1,000 copies of Religion of Islam to Ghana for free distribution.

Dr. Wemah is dedicated to spreading the correct peaceful message of Islam throughout the country. He stores and distributes the Holy Quran and other books at his own expense. We are very grateful for his valuable assistance in this work. May Almighty Allah reward and bless him for his dedicated service to Islam.

Inshallah, early next year we will be sending Dr. Wemah additional Holy Qurans and several other titles for free distribution, including:

- The Religion of Islam
- Manual of Hadith
- Muhammad the Prophet
- Early Caliphate
- Teachings of Islam
- Living Thoughts of the Prophet Muhammad
- Introduction to the study of the Holy Quran.

### Translation and Publication Projects

#### *Quran publication*

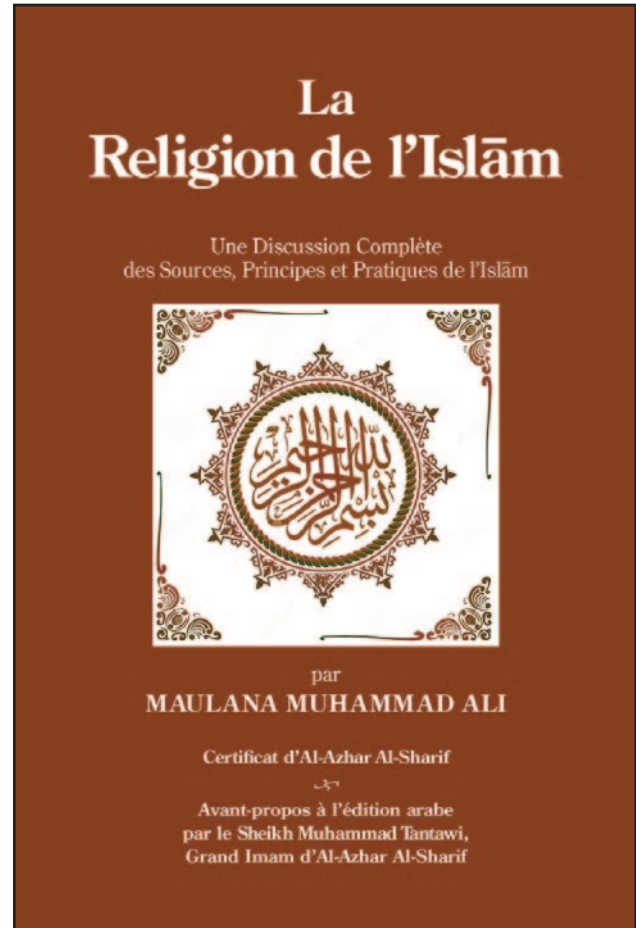
We are thankful to Almighty Allah for His great help to our small organization. We have done so much in this short time. Alhamdulillah!

We have translated, proofread and printed the following translations of Maulana Muhammad Ali's English translation and commentary of the Holy Quran:

- French
- Spanish
- Italian
- Turkish
- Dutch
- Russian
- Chinese
- and Bayan ul Quran (the translation of the commentary of the Holy Quran in Arabic).

The latest Holy Quran translation we have published is Chinese, released in 2021. This past October, Noman and I went to Istanbul to meet printers for the new edition of the Turkish Holy Quran translation. We plan to distribute the new edition free to all major libraries and professors of religious studies in Turkey. As Turkish is also spoken in Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, we will,

insha Allah, arrange for its distribution in these countries as well. And, we are very excited for forthcoming translations into the following languages: Albanian, Portuguese, Hebrew and Tagalog. These translations have been completed and are being proofread and typeset.



#### *Digital Media*

In addition to the printing of our publications, we are continuing to add to our collection of publications in digital form. We are in the process of having the French translation of the Holy Quran and 13 other French translations of books by Maulana Muhammad Ali available in E-book format, insha Allah. We will also be making available all eight translations of Maulana Muhammad Ali's English translation and commentary of the Holy Quran in E-book format soon.

As for our audio collection, we are in the process of completing audio books for 2 more of our English publications: The Religion of Islam and Muhammad the Prophet. We hope to have both available shortly, as soon as the checking is complete.

We have also been working on an updated App of Maulana Muhammad Ali's English Translation and

Commentary of the Holy Quran. It is nearing completion and should be available at Apple Store and GooglePlay early next year, insha Allah. Among the revised features, it has a fully searchable text, hyperlink footnotes and copy and paste functions. It has two arrangements. One has the translation of the 114 chapters with footnotes. The other arrangement consists of the text only in 30 parts, without footnotes, primarily for easier reading during the month of Ramadan. Both arrangements have audio of the English Text narrated by Mr. Robert Adams. Insha Allah, the App for the French translation of the Holy Quran is nearing completion as well and will be available early next year.

#### *Maulana Muhammed Ali's Friday Sermons*

The Friday Sermons of Maulana Muhammad Ali (22 volumes) are being translated by Dr. Muhammad Ahmad. He has translated volumes 1 to 8 and volume 22. Volume 1 and 22 have been edited and will be printed in the next few weeks, insha Allah. Volume 2 through 8 are being edited and will be published when editing is complete. May Almighty Allah Bless and Reward Dr. Muhammad Ahmad for his hard work.

#### *France*

I would like to end by making special mention of Mr. Daoud Boisson, the Secretary of our *Jamaat* in France, who has been busy distributing our literature and engaging people personally. The USA *Jamaat* stores the French Holy Quran and other French Books in France, which Mr. Boisson then distributes.

Recently, he drove 100 miles to donate 500 copies of the French Holy Quran and other literature of our Movement to Mr. Mohammed Iqbal Zaidouni, the Regional Prison Muslim Chaplain appointed by the Ministry of Justice, to be given to all the Prison libraries of the Brittany region. Mr. Zaidouni is also the Imam of Brittany's capital, Rennes, and the chairman of the Regional Council of Muslim Affairs of the French Government. We are very grateful to Mr. Daoud Boisson for his dedicated work for the *Jamaat* in France.

#### **Conclusion**

To end, I would like to thank Almighty Allah for the opportunity that He has given us to serve Islam. But I feel so much more needs to be done.

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, Maulana Muhammad Ali and other great elders of our *jamaat* have paved the way for each member of this *Jamaat*. What they have left behind is this precious library of literature which contains divine guidance, so very much necessary for humanity today.

Many paths have opened for us. We have influential partners who have recognized the value of this literature. And we have millions of people eagerly awaiting

their chance to be blessed with the opportunity to study our literature. In fact, we have an opportunity to provide an entire generation of young people the correct teachings of Islam in West Africa and other parts of the world.

This work requires monetary contributions. Many of you have given generously. May Almighty Allah reward you abundantly for it. But for this work to be done, still more effort is required. As you know, 100% of all donations go directly to the publication project. All administrative costs and expenses, including all of the funds required for traveling to do this work, are borne by volunteer workers themselves. Funds are simply needed to print the publications. May we all take advantage of this blessed opportunity and may Almighty Allah give us the resolve and strength to accomplish the task. Ameen!

And may Almighty Allah bless and reward Dr. Saeed Ahmad, the late Ameer of the Lahore Ahmadiyya *Jamaat*, for initiating the current Translation and Publication project of the USA *Jamaat*, without whose prayers this work would not have been possible. No matter how much we may sacrifice and how much we may accomplish, we will always give credit to this man of God for his inspiration.

I thank you for listening, jazak Allah. ■

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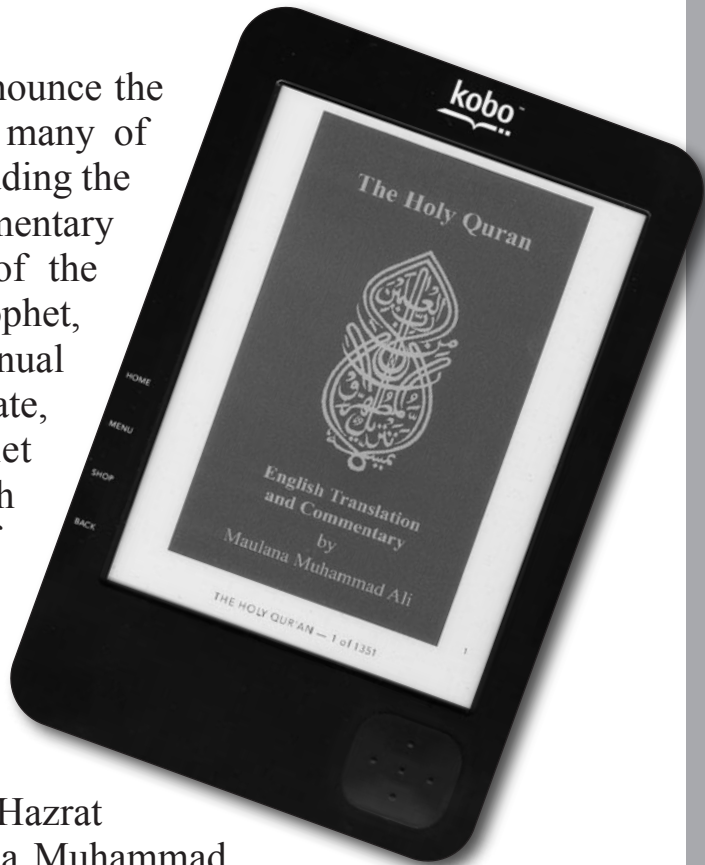
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