

“Call to the path of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation,  
and argue with people in the best manner.” (Holy Quran, 16:125)

# *The Light*

AND

## **ISLAMIC REVIEW**

**Exponent of Islam and the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement  
for over ninety years**

**October – December 2016**

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

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CONTENTS

No. 4

***Imam Al-Ghazali’s Moderation (“Wasaatiyyah”) Theology 3***

*A Creative Synthesis of the Role of Reason and Revelation in Philosophy*

– By Prof. Henry Francis B. Espiritu

***Lessons on the Quran . . . . . 7***

*Chapter 7 (Elevated Places), Section 8 (Noah) – By Fazeel S. Khan, Esq.*

***Arise and Warn! . . . . . 10***

*Jummah Sermon delivered in South Africa – By Ebrahim Mohamed*

***Individual Spiritual Reform . . . . . 13***

*Means to Eradicating Transgression and Inequity in the World*

– By Maulana Muhammad Ali (Translated by Dr. Mohammed Ahmad)

***“Takfir” (Excommunication) in Contemporary Practice . . 16***

*Part 1 - Introduction – By Dean Sahu Khan, Esq.*

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

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**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.

# Imam Al-Ghazali's Moderation (“Wasaatiyyah”) Theology

A Creative Synthesis of the Role of Reason and  
Revelation in Philosophy

By Prof. Henry Francis B. Espiritu

[Professor Espiritu is Associate Professor-VI of Philosophy and Asian Studies at the University of the Philippines (UP), Cebu City. He was the former Academic Coordinator of the Political Science Program at UP Cebu (from 2011-2014) and is presently the Coordinator of the Office of Gender and Development. His research interests include Islamic studies, Islamic feminist discourses, Islamic philosophy, Sufism and Public theology, and he is a fervent student of the writings of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. In this article, Prof. Espiritu reviews the works and teachings of the venerable Imam Muhammad Al-Ghazali, a prominent Muslim philosopher of medieval times. In particular, he addresses Imam Al-Ghazali's teachings on moderation in the practice of religion, and the intersection between revelation and reason in understanding one's faith.]

## Historical facts on the life and times of Imam Al-Ghazali

Hazrat Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad Al-Ghazali, known in the writings of Western medieval philosophers as Al-Gazel, was one of the famous Islamic philosophers in the medieval era. His name Muhammad al-Ghazali, means “Muhammad from Ghazal” (a town near Tehran, Iran, when it was still a country of classical Sunni learning before the onslaught of the heterodox Safavi Shi'ism on Iran). From Ghazal—early in his teenage life and his career as a theologian—he migrated to Baghdad, Iraq in order to teach the orthodox Sunni faith and to escape from what he perceived as the growing hold of heretical and fundamentalist brand of Shiite Islam in his native country, Iran. From this early episode of his life, we can already have a glimpse of Al-Ghazali's fierce commitment to the mainline, orthodox, conformist and moderate Sunni Islam.

Al-Ghazali is often called by the majority of Muslims “*Imam-ul-Mutlaq*”, i.e., “paramount teacher-leader”. He is always respectfully called as “Hazrat Imam Al-Ghazali (Venerable Teacher/Leader, Al-Ghazali). He is often grouped with Averroes (Ibn Rushd), Avicenna (Ibn Sina), Al-Farabi, Al-Kindi, and Ibn Khaldun as the classical philosophers in the medieval era. He was the most religiously conservative among these famous medieval philosophers of Islam.

Al-Ghazali was born in 1055 A.D and died at around 1111 A.D. He has written more than a hundred theological and philosophical treatises, the most famous of which is his works synthesizing the demands of Islamic *shari'ah* (jurisprudence) with Islamic mysticism (*tasawwuf*), which is entitled *The Alchemy of Felicity*, as well as his books upholding the centrality of revelation over and above reason, e.g., *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* and *The Folly of Unaided Knowledge* [For further information regarding Al-Ghazali, please refer to Oliver Leaman, *A Brief Introduction to Islamic Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999), pp. 1-12; under the heading “A Short History of Islamic Philosophy”].

In my own estimation, Al-Ghazali is one of the most interesting philosophers and theologians of Islam in the medieval period. Among medieval Islamic philosophers, he was the most prolific writer. Likewise, he is often seen as the most conservative since he unequivocally upheld the priority of revelation as found in the *Qur'an*, over and above reason and philosophy. His book, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* uses philosophical arguments as arsenals to uphold the foundational priority of revelation over reason (See Leaman, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-12. See also Mohammed Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983; pp. 74-87.). During his lifetime, he saw the decline of the Abbasid Caliphate, since it was burdened with sectarian revolts, wars of succession from within, as well as the Turkish and Seljuk influx of Baghdad, the capital of the Caliphate, which made the Turks the real power behind the throne of the Caliph. With his very eyes, he saw the varying opinions of the sects within Islam (e.g., Shia, Sunni, Asharites, Mutazilites, Rationalists, etc.). He also saw the coming of various nationalities (Arabs, Persians, Kurds, Turks, Mongols, Slavo-Balkans, Armenians, Georgians, Circassians etc.) into the Islamic Empire with their diverse *ethos*, belief systems and social customs. The expansion of Islam in the West, particularly in Greater Asia Minor (Anatolia), saw the ever-growing influence of Greek philosophy among Muslim thinkers and theologians.

More than anything, Al-Ghazali became very much concerned over the sway of Greek philosophies in the minds and hearts of Islamic intellectuals who were now beginning to disparage and dismiss the primacy of Divine Revelation as found in the *Qur'an*, and replace its authority with their emphasis on Reason. Being a religious lawyer and a spiritual master of Islamic mysticism (Sufism), Al-Ghazali was likewise burdened—to the point of psychological exhaustion—by the incessant demands of Islamic ritualism and formalism propagated by doctors of Islamic Law (*Shari'ah*) and the equally

formidable challenge of the Sufis for an emotive, and sentimental Islam devoid of legalist strictures. Al-Ghazali's epoch was therefore a good example of an era when pluralism in the midst of diversity is truly manifest; therefore, Al-Ghazali, as a philosopher-theologian committed to the centrality and priority of Islamic Revelation cannot help but reflect on his religious and ethical beliefs *vis-à-vis* other belief systems in the midst of such pluralities and disparities of views (Fakhry, *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.). It was during these challenging times that Al-Ghazali wrote and reflected on how Islam can effectively address the pluralistic situation, but at the same time faithful to its creedal tenets and tradition, which he was truly committed to uphold.

**The Theology of Wasaatiyyah (Moderation):  
A quick overview of Imam Al-Ghazali's literary  
works and their thematic contents**

Imam Al-Ghazali is indeed a very complex thinker and theologian that one can outrightly misunderstand if one simplistically and naively judges him as a "fideist" (i.e., concerned only with faith to the exclusion of Reason) and "anti-philosophy". I believe that the strength in Al-Ghazali's treatises lies in their complexity of thematic contents. This complexity of thematic contents allows him to establish strands of philosophical nuances/distinctions/creative tensions marking him as conservative, yet a very tolerant Islamic theologian capable of developing philosophical syntheses and convergences among divergent philosophical persuasions.

One recurring theme of Al-Ghazali's writings is his persistent call for Muslims to become an "*ummatan wasaatan*" (community manifesting balance or moderation; *wasaat*, in Arabic, has many strands of meaning: *viz*, normalcy, balance, mean/average, prudence, moderation, modesty). Although this phrase is originally *Qur'anic* since the Prophet Muhammad himself used the term "*ummatan wasaatan*" (community of moderation) to describe the ideal Muslim society, when Almighty Allah through the Prophet Muhammad exhorted the Muslims: "We have indeed made you, a community of moderation (*ummatan wasaatan*) so you will be the exemplar among the nations... therefore establish justice and moderation (*wasaat*) [See *Holy Qur'an, Surah Baqarah*:143. See also *Surah Shuraa*:38]; however it was Al-Ghazali, who in his writings constantly exhorted the faithful to adhere to moderation and likewise explained fully the intricacies and components of what this Islamic "moderation" (*wasaatiyyah*) meant to him.

During his time, Imam Al-Ghazali perceived that many elements in the Muslim society had already deviated from the Prophetic exhortation to moderation and each sectarian groups showed tendencies of extremism (*ghuluww*) in one form or the other. The doctors of

Islamic laws (*faqih* or *qazi*) emphasized on the *Shari'ah* (Islamic jurisprudence) with its rigid rituals and legalistic formulations at the expense of the spirit that animates the forms and rituals of Islamic worship. Some Sufis, on the other hand, went to the antinomian extreme; they denied the efficacy of Islamic Law and the established forms of worship and exaggerated emotionalism, mysticism, sentimentalism, emotivism and unbridled disregard for Islamic laws under the name of freedom, mysticism, enlightenment and spirituality. These pathetic extremist (*ghulat*) tendencies had weighed on Al-Ghazali's heart, which made him write treatises promoting understanding, balance, syntheses, moderation and tolerance among disparate sectors of Muslim society.

At this juncture, I would like to describe at least three important books of Al-Ghazali (among hundreds of treatises) to show his sincere concern for moderation in order to achieve Prophet Muhammad's vision of a normal (*wasaat*) Islamic society (*Ummah*). His book, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* strives to establish Divine Revelation as the primary source of all knowledge, be it metaphysical, epistemological, or ethical. However, Al-Ghazali likewise maintained that despite the primacy of Divine Revelation, reason, if it is employed in coordination and in conjunction with the truths of Divine Revelation, could be a secondary basis of knowledge. Reason as per Al-Ghazali, is not contradictory to Divine Revelation, rather supports and supplements it. It is also very interesting to note how Al-Ghazali in this book, *Incoherence of the Philosophers* utilized philosophy and philosophizing to expose what he called philosophy's "pretensions of the ego" (*riyaa-un-nafs* in Arabic, it means "boastings of the self") and to prove the need of humankind for divine guidance as found in Divine Revelation. Here, it is very clear that Al-Ghazali seeks to delineate, delimit, and to put boundaries on philosophy's claim to knowledge; and not to outrightly dismiss philosophy as useless.

Al-Ghazali's book, *Revival of Religious Sciences* shows the need for both Islamic Law (*Shari'ah*) and Islamic mysticism/spirituality (*tassawuf*/Sufism). He shows that Islam is founded on the "forms" (Arabic, *rukun*, which means formal rubrics or structures of worship) established by Divine Law as well as the "spirit" (Arabic, *ruhani*, which can mean piety or emotional bliss in worship) established by sincerity and spirituality. A formalistic Islam devoid of emotion, spirit, sincerity, and spirituality, is a dead Islam; while a sentimental, emotive, and ecstatic Islam of libertines devoid of moorings coming from the *Shari'ah* is divisive, anarchic, and bereft of foundations and is thereby open to deviations and heresies. It is in this book that Al-Ghazali shows the balance between *Shari'ah* and

Sufism, and the synthesis between matters of formal law and the spirit emanating from the law.

Al Ghazali's book, *On Deliverance from Errors* endeavors to show that Islamic society can steer away from errors only by adopting an attitude of prudence and balance (*at-taqwa wal wasatiyyah*) in all good things in religion; because even all good things in religion, if practiced to the extremes and if applied without moderation can become virulent sources of heresies and errors. For the Islamic *Ummah* (community) to be delivered from errors and heretical exaggerations, it has to follow the inner law of prudence (*taqwa*) and moderation (*wasat*). Errors and heresies that divide Islamic society come from extremism, exaggerations, and spiritual scruples (*dhalalat*). In this book Al-Ghazali proceeds to show the synthesis between the spiritualities of love and fear, hope and prudence; while making distinctions between obedience and scruples, faith vs. presumptions, spiritualities of the heart (emotive expressions of worship) versus reasons of the mind (creedal pronouncements); with a view of establishing working balance/normative mean between these seemingly opposite dispositions of spiritualities. Interestingly, as Al-Ghazali strives to establish the synthesis of the disparate spiritual tendencies found within Muslim societies, he was able to show the need for tolerance and toleration in the midst of these pluralistic differences.

#### **Imam Al-Ghazali's primary source of knowledge: Divine Revelation**

Contrary to the secular approach to philosophy that strives to diminish the importance of religion, Al-Ghazali insists that a religious grounding of knowledge is imperative. As per Al-Ghazali, the ultimate foundation for all principles of knowledge is Divine Revelation as found in the *Qur'an*. Al-Ghazali argues that the metaphysical and philosophical principles found in the *Qur'anic* revelation — “its utter comprehensibility and wisdom for the simple and the sophisticated men alike” — is one of the primary evidence for its comprehensive and universal value. For Al-Ghazali, one can have absolute confidence in the wisdom of the *Qur'an* because of its timeless value, relevance, and trustworthiness — and this is because of its Divine origin. Indeed, Al-Ghazali is uncompromising in his view on the primacy of Divine Revelation as the primary source of knowledge such that any orthodox Muslims (or even an orthodox Christian or Jew for that matter) will be able to identify or sympathize with him in this starting point of his philosophical theology.

In the same vein, Al-Ghazali's foundational methodology in ascertaining principles from the *Qur'an* is uncomplicated. For him, to discover philosophical truths is simply to ascertain what the Divine Designer

and Lawgiver says and commands to us. The will of God as the Divine Lawgiver is found in the *Qur'an*, and it is our incumbent duty to hermeneutically deduce metaphysical, moral, and epistemological principles as found in its pages and apply these insights to our respective situations in life.

This principle articulated by Imam Al-Ghazali that one who is in need of divine guidance from the *Qur'an* must personally consult the holy scriptures for such guidance is based on Al-Ghazali's Sufi conviction that religious experience should come from direct experiencing of guidance (*dhawq-ul-hudaa*). This means that for Al-Ghazali, in order for one to know God in an intimate manner, one must experience or taste (*dhawq*) God's presence and personally perceive God's divine favor (*ni'mah*); for the knowledge of God cannot be mediated by another—the person himself must develop this loving relationship with God in his inner life (See, his book, *Al-Jawahir al Qur'aniyya wad Duraruh Ilahiyya* [“The Jewel of the *Qur'an* and the Pearl from the Divine”]; pp. 32-36). For divine guidance in our personal life, Al-Ghazali strongly encourages believers to perform their own individualized *ijtihad*—which is striving for their own interpretation of the *Holy Qur'an* using their own unique contexts and personal circumstances — by delving into the revelations in the *Qur'an* and utilizing their own rational faculties and existential situatedness to ascertain God's will for our life (See *Al-Jawahir al Qur'aniyya wad Duraruh Ilahiyya*; pp.45-47). This above point clearly shows that personal *ijtihad* (striving individually to know God's will using the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*) as well as *dhawq-ul-hudhur-ilahi* (personal experiencing of God's presence), far from being heretical innovations (as they are considered today by some newly formulated Islamic sects like the Wahhabiyya and Salafiyya) are in fact strongly affirmed and prescribed by one of the greatest theologian of classical orthodox and normative Sunni Islam, namely Hazrat Imam Al-Ghazali.

#### **Al-Ghazali on the cooperative role of Reason and “natural philosophy” as sources of knowledge next to the Qur'an**

Al-Ghazali's granting epistemological primacy to Revelation does not mean that he already dismissed the philosophical value of Reason as a source of knowledge. Let us take for example some insights in his book, *Adabiyyah fil Islam* (Morality in Islam), Al-Ghazali made use of reason to validate a divine command. For him, the revealed injunction as found in a divine command is thoroughly compatible with rational reflections on what is right or good. Al-Ghazali, by his validation of the divine injunction using natural reason, implicitly recognizes that human reasoning complements our understanding of divine principles in revelation as made

known to us by the *Holy Qur'an* (See Albert Malcolm, *Principal Philosophical Themes among Islamic Medieval Philosophers*. Washington D.C.: Academic Council for Islamic Philosophy, 1969; p. 111.).

Understandably, Al-Ghazali would insist that one should still follow Qur'anic injunctions even if one cannot see its apparent wisdom. But the point is, his "natural-law" presupposition is that, given the Creator desires the best for his creatures, one can expect to find rational justifications for all Qur'anic injunctions if one sincerely reflects on the logical reasons and implications of these injunctions. In Al-Ghazali's methodology, rationality is compatible with revelation, although reason takes on a subordinate position to Divine Revelation; and by reflecting on the divine injunction, reason can intuit the rationality of a particular divine command. This is indeed an encouraging aspect in Al-Ghazali's theology. Despite his religious conservatism, he still insists on the importance of rational explanation and places this rational justification as confirmatory basis of Divine Revelation's ethical relevance, without of course taking away the centrality of the divine injunction.

Furthermore, Al-Ghazali's implicit allusion to human rationality that underlies all ethical reasoning affords a pluralistic venue in the midst of diversity. This implies that non-Muslims too can know what is good or right and by reflecting on this rational endowment, their judgment can likewise coincide with the divine injunctions set-forth in the *Qur'an*. Moreover, our rational endowment as a reflection of an inner ethical principle allows Muslims and non-Muslims to converse with each other using our own common rationality and moral intuition (Albert Malcolm, *Ibid.*, pp. 112-114.). Therefore, the attacks made by some philosophers on Al-Ghazali as "anti-philosophical" and as a "fideist" (a believer in faith to the exclusion of Reason) crumble in the light of the abovementioned point regarding his valuation of Reason as subordinate yet complementary to Divine Revelation.

#### **Epilogue: Assessment of the Relevance of Al-Ghazali's "Wasaatiyyah" Theology to the Contemporary Situation of the Muslim Ummah**

Taking into consideration his philosophico-theological milieu, Hazrat Imam Al-Ghazali needed to articulate his defense of the orthodox Islamic views of faith and conduct, in the midst of the imminent danger of disintegration of the once stable Sunni Abbasid Caliphate as an aftermath to the onslaught of Shi'ite rebellions against it, the divisive quarrels between formalistic doctors of the *Shari'ah* law and antinomian Islamic mystics (Sufis), as well as the growing fascination of Greek philosophy among Islamic intelligentsias. He stood his

ground against any dilution of what he perceives as the orthodox Sunni understanding of faith and morals from the onslaught of skepticism and agnosticism that characterized the works of other Islamic philosophers (e.g., Al-Farabi, Al-Kindi, Averroes, Avicenna, etc.) [See Leaman, *An Introduction to Medieval Islamic Philosophy, op. cit.*, pp. 186-189.].

What is perceived by some scholars as apparent conservatism in Al-Ghazali's theology serves his double aims of preserving the values and *ethos* of Islam as found in the *Qur'anic* revelation and informing the Islamic believers regarding the coherence, rationality, and beauty of the orthodox Islamic faith (*Ibid.*, pp. 190-191.). Al-Ghazali's works should be understood as addressing the abovementioned dual aims. It is in this sense that I therefore consider Al-Ghazali as performing the very crucial role of preserving the classical Sunni Islamic faith-tradition during the precarious times characterizing his day and age.

In our contemporary times, it is indeed imperative to have a philosophical and theological framework that is grounded on the truths of one's faith-tradition but it must likewise be a framework that incorporates its commitment to pluralism and diversity. What we find in the medieval Islamic philosopher-theologian, Al-Ghazali is an exemplary and inspiring philosophy that is clearly grounded in his own faith-tradition, yet simultaneously, committed to synthesis, moderation, pluralism, and tolerance for diversity.

It is beneficial therefore, that both Muslims and non-Muslims reflect on the synthesis that Al-Ghazali undertook with respect to his commitment to orthodoxy and to his openness to moderation, pluralism and tolerance. Taking into consideration his circumstance as an Islamic philosopher in the Medieval Era, he was able to come up with some interesting ways of synthesizing his faith with other faith-traditions, as well as clarifying what he thinks to be the relationship between faith and ethics, reason and revelation, creedal pronouncements and emotive spirituality, etc. Al-Ghazali was both a philosopher and a theologian, so his metaphysics is strongly grounded in revelation, and yet can be known to anyone willing to use his rational facility and moral discernment. He insists on the truths of the revealed faith while acknowledging the legitimacy and limitations of natural philosophy. He knows how to acknowledge the validity of reason in philosophy, but simultaneously, he is also very brave to question its intellectual pretensions and arrogance.

Taking account of our present global situation, Al-Ghazali's work is indeed profitable to both Western and Eastern scholars, Muslims and non-Muslims alike; for indeed, he has many relevant things to say on the issues

of pluralism, tolerance, moderation from all forms of extremism, and of bridging the secular and theological foundations of ethics. Al-Ghazali can be a relevant source of inspiration and a fruitful conversation partner to contemporary thinkers, who are still willing to uphold the view that philosophy can be grounded in the theological claim of Revelation, and who are likewise cognizant of the need for dialogue, pluralism, moderation, and tolerance in the midst of diversity in our present contemporary milieu. ■

## Lessons on the Quran

### Chapter 7 (Elevated Places), Section 8 (Noah)

By Fazeel S. Khan, Esq.

*[Lahore Ahmadiyya Members in various locations gather each week for a Quran study group via Skype. The study group commenced with lessons from Sura Fatihah and continued with a subsequent section of the Quran every week. Members take turns presenting on a particular section, and discussion from all participants follow. This article is based on a lesson presented to the study group by the Editor. It deals with Section 8 of Chapter 7 of the Holy Quran, and the topic concerns Prophet Noah. Although the story of Prophet Noah, the flood and the ark are well known, the point emphasized in this article is the practical spiritual lesson that can be learned from the story and its relation to understanding the broader concept of salvation.]*

Today we will be discussing Section 8 of Chapter 7 of the Holy Quran. The prominent theme in this chapter concerns arguments in support of the truth of divine revelation. The previous sections dealt with warnings given to the opponents of the Holy Prophet of the consequences to their deeds, and now this section and the next few sections present illustrations from history of past messengers and the manner in which their opponents were dealt.

This particular section touches on the story of Prophet Noah, it being one of several sections discussing this story throughout the Quran. And this story, of the building of the ark, and the preservation of the animals, and the devastating flood is something that has been retold throughout history, as the story is found in many religious scriptures and other historic documents. It is not only well known in the Abrahamic traditions, but is also found in the Hindu scriptures. In the Hindu scriptures a story is told of a person named “Ma-nu” (very similar to “Nuh” in the Arabic language) and how this person and his family were saved from a tremendous flood by seeking refuge in a boat. And I recently

came across an article on the CNN website from January 28, 2014 about British researchers who found a 4,000 year old cuneiform tablet in what is now Iraq that contains a story about a divinely sent flood and a person who builds an ark, who takes all the animals on board to preserve them, and it even includes the famous phrase “two by two” (that appears in the biblical accounts).

Because this story is so well-known and found in so many traditions, dating back thousands of years, much before the time of the Old Testament (from which most people believe this story is first told), it supports the view of the “universality of divine revelation”. If revelation is a universal phenomenon, it makes sense that this story was revealed to many people around the world and that traces of it can still be found today. How else can this same story (so distinctive in nature) be found in some many different religious texts and historical documents from different people around the world. And in a way it also supports the belief in the “unity of mankind”, that all people have the same essence, in that it seems all people, in different parts of the world and throughout the ages, seem to honor this story, and derive spiritual benefit from it, so much so that it was preserved in so many ways.

This story about Prophet Noah also always seems to generate a debate about the manner in which stories in scripture are to be interpreted. It seems to compel people to address (or at least reflect upon) the issue of literal versus figurative interpretation. And relaying this story at this juncture in the Quran is also significant. Like Maulana Muhammad Ali explains in his commentary, the clear point being made is that the opposition that the Holy Prophet Muhammad was facing was normal and expected, as all prophets experienced the very same thing. So the reason for its inclusion at this juncture shows the real purpose for these stories – not to simply relate historical facts (as the purpose of religious scripture is not to be a book of history *per se*), but rather to provide a lesson for people – something that can serve as guidance and benefit them spiritually. So, here the story of Noah is introduced, not to provide a lesson on history, but to give the lesson that other prophets also preached the same message, they too were opposed, and the opposing forces did not ultimately prevail.

#### Verse 59

*Certainly We sent Noah to his people, so he said: O my people, serve Allah, you have no god other than Him. Indeed I fear for you the chastisement of a grievous day.*

In this verse, Prophet Noah is introduced. He was a prophet about whom the Arabs were familiar. And it is pointed out here that all prophets preached the same message: serve Allah (do not associate others with the

One True God), and there are consequences for opposing the divine message of guidance. There also appears to be a subtle but important point contained in this verse. And that is in the reference to Prophet Noah being sent to “his people”. Although the prophets were all the same and deserve equal respect and honor, the reference to Prophet Noah being sent to “his people” is a subtle indication to the distinguishing characteristic of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. By being sent to a particular group of people shows that Prophet Noah was a national prophet. And the exact same thing is related about Prophets Hud, Salih and Shuaib in the coming sections – each one of them we are told was sent to “his people”. Similarly, elsewhere, Prophet Moses is spoken of as being commissioned to “bring forth *thy* people from darkness into light” (14:5) and Prophet Jesus is spoken of specifically as a “messenger to the *children of Israel*” (3:48).

In contrast to this, we see that the Holy Prophet Muhammad is referred to not as a national prophet sent to a particular group of people, but rather as a universal prophet for all of humanity. Later in this very chapter (7:158), the distinction is made by it being revealed to the Holy Prophet Muhammad: “Say: O *Mankind*, surely I am the Messenger of Allah to you *all*”. Similarly, elsewhere Prophet Muhammad is referred to as “a warner to *all nations*” (25:1), “a bearer of good news and a warner to *all mankind*” (34:28).

#### Verse 60 through 62

*The chiefs of his people said: Surely we see thee in clear error.*

*He said: O my people, there is no error in me, but I am a messenger from the Lord of the worlds.*

*I deliver to you the messages of my Lord, and I offer you good advice, and I know from Allah what you know not.*

These verses emphasize the same point about it being a universal truth that all prophets and messengers of God were opposed by their people. And again, it becomes clear why such stories about previous prophets are being introduced at this juncture. It serves as an opportunity for people to determine whether there is anything extraordinary about the Prophet Muhammad being opposed. And it offers the opportunity for people to reflect on whether the Prophet Muhammad’s message is different from what previous prophets taught, and also what the eventual result was for those who opposed those previous prophets.

These verses also provide insight about the role of a “prophet”. That being, basically, to deliver a divine message and to offer good advice so that people may be provided guidance on how to live a beneficial life and

not one that is detrimental to their own self. In addition, as the term “prophet” connotes, one function of a prophet is to prophecy – so a prophet is given knowledge of things that is not ordinarily known by others.

#### Verse 63

*Do you wonder that a reminder has come to you from your Lord through a man from among you, that he may warn you and that you may guard against evil, and that mercy may be shown to you?*

In this verse, the role of a prophet is further delineated by relaying the function of “warning” the people to whom he is sent. And this warning is for their benefit – so that they can guard against evil and be shown mercy from God. And I think the use of the word “reminder” here is significant. This too seems to allude to the principle of the “universality of revelation”. That revelation was not through one person only, or for one nation only, but rather the institution of prophethood entailed prophets being sent with divine guidance to all nations of the world. And that this message was in essence the same: believe in the One True God and do good to humanity.

And, as part of this institution of prophethood, subsequent prophets would reinforce the divine message of the previous prophets, and this would serve as a “reminder”. If there was only one message, revelation or scripture, prophets wouldn’t serve as “reminders” (as what they would be stating would be unique and new). It is for this reason the Quran repeatedly refers to itself as a “reminder for all nations” (68:52; 81:27; 17:104)

#### Verse 64

*But they called him a liar, so We delivered him and those with him in the ark, and We drowned those who rejected Our messages. Surely they were a blind people!*

This section ends by stating that those who actively opposed Prophet Noah (not those who simply did not accept him, but rather those who called him a “liar” and thereby made the determination that he was false and the message of guidance that he relayed should be rejected) were subjected to divine punishment. Elsewhere in the Quran (71:21) it is further clarified that these people who were subjected to the divine punishment were those who actively tried to destroy him and those who accepted him and his message.

As I stated earlier, this story of Prophet Noah building an ark, and placing in it animals, and then being protected from a storm the like of which had never been witnessed before, one that caused a flood of enormous proportions, is a story that is very well-known. There are, however, some interesting variations in the story from different sources. The Bible states that the storm caused

the “entire world” to be flooded. And this has caused much debate among biblical scholars, as to whether it is to be taken literally or not. And, interesting, the most popular view nowadays is that the words “entire world” must be contextualized. It is understood that the words “entire world” refer to Prophet Noah’s “known” world; that is, the extent of the world that he and his people knew, not necessarily the entire body of the earth (because the people of that time were not even aware of the extent of the entire world). This understanding further supports the principle of Prophet Noah (and all prophets prior to Prophet Muhammad for that matter) being “national” prophets – that because their “world” was limited, so too were their respective missions.

Now, again, regardless of the historical facts, whether some aspects of the story are to be taken literally or not, this story provides invaluable spiritual lessons that can serve as guiding principles in people’s day to day lives. The obvious lesson is that one should not reject and oppose the guidance provided by God, and doing so will have disastrous consequences. But I think the spiritual lesson from this story is much more descriptive than simply this notion of “don’t reject divine guidance or you will be punished”. And that is, just as the people to whom Prophet Noah was sent, all people are given opportunities in their lives to either follow divine guidance or reject it on a daily basis. It may be in big things, or very subtle things. And this world in which we live is like a constant storm, with dangers and pitfalls at every step, ever ready to engulf and drown people. Further, by choosing to follow divine guidance, we too can be afforded divine protection from the dangers of life, just as if we were in a physical ark in the middle of a storm.

The ark of divine protection in our lives requires a constant struggle to try to better ourselves, not isolate one’s self from the world like a monk but rather to face the challenges of the storm. As the story illustrates, Prophet Noah did not hide himself in a boat alone, but rather took with him all the animals in the ark. And this seems to suggest that for us to be afforded this divine protection, we must attend to the *animalistic instincts* inherent in each one of us, not run away from them but develop them so that they become moral qualities. Hence, the animals in the ark are analogous to the animal desires within, that can either bring one to ruin or elevate one to high spiritual heights.

And as we know, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Sahib, the Mujaddid of the 14th Century, presented the analogy of his *Jamaat* (Organization) in this age being like the ark of Noah, and he explained how in this age following the guidance provided by the *Imam* of the time can lead to this divine protection. Another important

point to keep in mind is how much emphasis he gives in his book *Kishti-i-Nuh* to warning that this divine protection is only afforded to those who actually live up to the conditions of the *baiyat* (pledge), which is nothing more than a summary of the divine guidance presented in the Quran and by the Holy Prophet Muhammad on how to live a spiritual life. So, he makes it very clear that labels mean nothing; no one should think that simply being part of the *Jamaat* (or even a follower of Islam) gives them salvation, like gaining membership in a club. Rather, divine protection only comes to those who strive to live according to the divine guidance. Just like Prophet Noah’s son, who was a part of Prophet Noah’s family, was not saved despite the closeness of his connection and relationship to the messenger.

### Conclusion

And the last point I’ll make is that this understanding of the lesson or spiritual significance of the story of Prophet Noah (that divine protection, or salvation, is achieved through the work of developing one’s self spiritually) is in contrast to the popular Christian view that salvation is only attained by believing that Jesus (on whom be peace) died on the cross for the sins of humanity. Although there is much in common between the two faiths, this is a fundamental difference between Islam and Christianity. One suggests action and the other suggest belief. Interestingly, this contrast came to my mind while reading another verse about Prophet Noah in the Quran. In 54:13 it mentions that Prophet Noah was delivered “on that which was made of **planks and nails**”. Now, the popular Christian belief in salvation also concerns a story about “planks and nails” – that Jesus (on whom be peace) was **nailed to planks** of wood and crucified. Just as “planks and nails” is a description of the ark, so too is it a description of the cross, thereby highlighting the contrasting views of salvation in Islam and Christianity. ■

## CALL FOR PAPERS!

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welcomes submissions of articles for publication. Preferably, articles should be between 5-10 pages long, single-spaced, in *Microsoft Word* format and submitted via e-mail. Authors from all faiths and denominations are welcome, the subject matter of the paper, though, must be substantively related to Islam. Please contact the Editorial Board for more information on Editorial Guidelines. (See page 2 for contact information)

## Arise and Warn!

Jumma Sermon delivered in South Africa

By Ebrahim Mohamed

[This article is a transcript of a Jumma (Friday congregational prayer) Sermon delivered in September, 2016 by Ebrahim Mohamed (President of the Lahore Ahmadiyya branch in South Africa) just before the conference on the 'True Significance of Islamic Caliphate' held in Cape Town in collaboration with the US branch. In this article, Mr. Mohamed explains the import of the Quranic injunction "Arise and Warn", found in chapter 74. In addition, he goes on to provide an inspirational discussion regarding how a correct understanding of this principle led to the advancement of the Islamic civilization in its early days, and how this is also a clarion call for the Movement founded by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in contemporary times.]

I bear witness that nothing deserves to be worshipped except Allah Who is One and has no partners and I bear witness that Muhammad is the servant and messenger of Allah. I begin in the name of Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful.

O thou who wrappest thyself up,  
Arise and warn,  
And thy Lord do magnify,  
And thy garments do purify,  
And uncleanness do shun,  
And do no favour seeking gain,  
And for the sake of thy Lord, be patient.  
(Holy Quran, 74:1-7)

After a long period of utter darkness that enveloped the world, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was given the above-mentioned charter by Almighty Allah. His divine appointment introduced the dawn of the reformation of the entire human race.

The very mode of address in this revelation was inspiring and affectionate. *Muddathir* – covered in a mantle – became one of the names of our beloved Prophet (PBUH) – a sort of endearing nickname. The title was also meant to remind the followers of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) ever after, that Allah does not always select great leaders necessarily from royal lineage.

The second verse is the epitome of the life and breath of Islam. In two words the secret of the future glory of Islam was given. The key to the advancement of the Muslim nations was *kum fa anthir* - 'arise and warn!' It was their motto – it was the cry that took them forward and imbued them with the spirit with which they conquered the hearts and minds of a large section of the then known world.

In the 7th century, Islam became a religion of action, not of dreams. Our Holy Prophet (PBUH) obeyed the heavenly command and as long as his people followed in his footsteps they led the whole world! Almighty Allah has given a Muslim life and vigour to be spent not in indolence, not in seclusion, not in a monastery, but on the intellectual, moral and spiritual battle fields of the world to assert such Light and Truth that will forever stimulate man's intellect and reasoning faculties.

*Kum fa Anthir* – 'Arise and Warn!' was the watchword of our beloved Prophet (PBUH). It was the clarion call that reverberated across the Arabian Desert and soon reached the shores of Europe and North Africa. It was the driving force behind the rapid spread of Islam. It ignited the hearts of a dedicated band of Muslims for one purpose only and that was to obey the command - And thy Lord do magnify. The Muslims saw in their leader and guide, the noble Prophet (PBUH) no selfish motives, no personal glories accompanying this noble quest. They soon learnt that to magnify their Lord did not mean chanting praises of His name but to put to good work their hidden faculties that were vouchsafed to them by Almighty Allah. They came to understand that Almighty Allah gave man the mental and spiritual capacities to rise to great heights and gain control and rule the world, in which he resides; that he was given intelligence to gain control over and harness the forces of nature, the sun, the moon, the wind, the sea etc., to his advantage; that he was endowed with moral and spiritual attributes, which, when developed, drive a selfless zeal to improve the condition of all of humankind. They saw these noble qualities in the great exemplar for humankind, Muhammad Mustapha (PBUH) and they followed suit and soon bore witness to the fact that it was only through the application of these noble attributes and the good that flow from it that man was able to magnify his Creator and thus earn the right to be called a vicegerent of Almighty Allah on earth in the truest sense of the word.

But before he could lay claim to such a noble and lofty status, there were some preconditions he had to observe:

- "*wal ruj za fah jur*": i.e. he had to 'shun every abomination', everything mean, low, and sordid. He was commanded to be mentally and morally pure; to be straight in all his dealings with others, to be free from hypocrisy, deceit, and duplicity, to be bold and upright in all his actions and thoughts. At the same time he was commanded to observe the golden rule of avoiding all forms of corruption and bribery.
- *Wa laa tamnun tas takthir*: And do no favour seeking gain.

If only all political and religious leaders could put to use this golden rule the world would indeed be a far bet-

ter place to live in. The Holy Quran thus teaches that only through the total avoidance of all these vices that have repeatedly led to the ruin of large empires, temporal and religious, a solid foundation for the preservation and stability of societies across the world will be laid. And thus man will be able to magnify his Lord through peaceful harmonious governance and deal responsibly with the assets placed in his charge, by his Lord, the Creator, Nourisher and Sustainer of the all the worlds. Such a heavenly situation on earth existed for a while during the era of our Holy Prophet (PBUH) and his righteous Caliphs and for a while thereafter, and then corruption slowly set in.

Fast forward 1400 years later and we find a world again steeped in a state of spiritual darkness much like the pre-Islamic era. Despite the fact that man has now gained control over the forces of nature like never before, his technological prowess has made him arrogant and morally and spiritually bankrupt; and he thinks he now owns the world. His lust for material power and pelf is reaching frightening proportions with an ominous threat of a plunge into an abyss of conflict looming precariously on the horizons.

Inside this global picture of spiritual gloom, the Muslims on the other hand find themselves entangled in a soul-destructive ideological web. Confusion prevails and they do not know which way to turn. Their religious leaders have nothing to offer them in the form of guidance and their youth are lured into a trap of false security via an ultra-radical version of Islam in a desperate hope of finding some sort of solace for their disturbed souls.

But all is not lost. Before his departure from this earth, the Holy Messenger of Allah (PBUH) made a promise to the Muslims of a Messiah that will appear in the latter days among them much like the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary appeared among the Jews. He gave the assurance that with himself at the vanguard of the divinely ordained universal Peace Mission and with the Messiah at the end, his community will never go astray.

Muslims, unfortunately, did not understand these prophecies related to the latter-day Messiah and many, to their peril, still do not even today. Misguided theologians from among them entirely misled the community by giving literal interpretations to prophecies couched in metaphor, common errors made by theologians over the ages. Many literalists saw in these Hadith promises of a military type of messianic saviour in the form of Jesus whom they believe is still alive today. They are under a delusion that when he finally descends from the heavens to earth, he will purge society of all unbelievers by engaging in an expedition of mass slaughter of all infidels, which include all Christians and Jews and destroy their places of worship. We now know that this

twisted interpretation of the Hadith of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), is one of the root causes that inspire the murderous exploits conducted in the name of Islam by terrorist groups such as the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq or commonly known as ISIS.

But just a little reflection on the matter immediately tells us that the expectation of a blood-thirsty Messiah is a complete contradiction of the teachings of our beloved prophet Muhammad (PBUH) whom Almighty Allah gloriously posted at the head of this universal Peace Movement, called Islam. Therefore, all expectations of even a reasonably sane person would be that the teachings of the one prophesied to come at the end of this divinely ordained spiritual cycle should be the same as and not in conflict with that of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). That would be the most significant criterion by which to judge whether the person to come in the latter days to ensure that the Muslims do not stray from the straight path, is indeed true and not an imposter.

So in this generation of darkness which started at the beginning of the 14th century *hijra*, the strains of ***Kun fa Anthir – ‘Arise and Warn!’*** was once again heard, this time from a distant corner of the earth, a small village in northern India, called Qadian by one whose very name Ghulam Ahmad means ‘a servant of Ahmad.’ He pronounced on top of his voice that according to the Holy Quran and authentic traditions of our Holy Prophet (PBUH), Prophet Esa (Jesus) (PBUH) was dead and that there was no such thing as a bloodthirsty militant messiah to appear. He said he is the Messiah that was promised to the Muslims and that he comes in peace in a similar kind of spirit as that of Prophet Esa (PBUH), and that by means of arguments by mouth and with the pen he will provide proofs from the Holy Quran and the previous scriptures, without force or coercion that will establish the truth of Islam forever. He immersed himself in the being of our Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) so much so that his righteousness beamed forth like the noon day sun and restored faith amongst his followers in much the same manner the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) did at the beginning of the Grand Reformist cycle of humanity. He claimed that Allah had raised him up as the *Mujjaddid* (Reformer of the Faith) of the Age in accordance with the prophecy of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and invited all Muslims to set aside their petty differences and take the beautiful message of Islam to the world.

***Kun fa Anthir – ‘Arise and Warn!’*** too was his clarion call. He formed a dedicated fraternity of pious followers who pledged to assist him in this noble task of spreading the true light and learning of Islam and hold it above all the religions of the world. He championed the Reformist Movement by calling the Muslim frater-

nity back to the Holy Quran and the Sunna. By means of solid arguments from the Holy Quran, he corrected the erroneous interpretations that had crept into Islam centuries after the Holy Prophet (PBUH). His widely acclaimed defence of Islam and his spearheading the fight against irreligion and atheism are well documented achievements of note and are more than enough proof to any fair-minded sensible thinker that he is indeed the person the Holy Prophet (PBUH) prophesied will prevent the Muslim community from going astray in the latter days.

But as is the fate of all righteous servants of Allah, he was rejected and his teachings ignored with the result that many Muslims have gone astray with the horrific consequences we see today. Without the teachings of the Messiah to guide them, we have seen how the majority of Muslims from those countries in the East find themselves trapped in an ideological maze that leads nowhere except to a bloody sectarian conflict and ultimately to a complete loss of faith. Their worldly empires too are teetering, plagued by rebellion and anarchy a situation that has led to a refugee crisis of shocking proportions, millions of women and children seeking asylum in safer havens in Christian ruled Europe.

It reminds me of the prophecy related to the Messiah Jesus, son of Mary which he received the night before the crucifixion as recorded in Matthew 26 verse 31:

I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.

I recall having heard from someone that when Pakistan under Zia ul Haqq, passed a law in the 1980s that made it a criminal offence for Muslims belonging to the Ahmadiyya community to openly practice Islam, one of our elders observed that that piece of pernicious legislation spelt the ‘crucifixion’ of Hazrat Mirza Saheb, the Promised Messiah of the Muslims who came in a similar spiritual mould as Prophet Esa (PBUH).

Until today none of the Muslim countries from where we see a mass exodus of people, raising an objection to this cruel religious persecution which most probably is the worst violation of a basic human right of any Muslim and that is the right to worship freely as laid down in the Holy Quran itself. What is more striking is that Hazrat Mirza Saheb wrote an almost prophetic article many years before entitled *Zia ul Haqq*, wherein he depicts the fate of people who behaved in the manner of Abu Lahab, which means ‘father of the flame’, the name given to the uncle and inveterate enemy of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also mentioned in the Holy Quran. It is notable too if we consider that it was at the behest of Zia ul Haqq together with the ultra-conservative clerical

body, Jamiat ul Ulema in Pakistan that Taliban was transformed into militant jihadists, initially to combat threats of a Soviet invasion, but subsequently grew uncontrollably into the various monstrous groups of terror that we see today. Their master Zia ul Haqq – the Abu Lahab, father of the flames of the 1980s – met his fate mysteriously in a ball of flames. The question I often ask myself, is there a Mighty Hand behind the events we see unfolding before our very eyes today? Are these manifestations of the prophecies of that great seer Hazrat Mirza Saheb? I may stand challenged but I indeed believe it is. Those who have any doubts of this assertion that Hazrat Mirza Saheb’s prophecies are indeed unfolding before our own eyes, let us see what he wrote in a booklet entitled *Jihad and the British Government* published in July 1900, 116 years ago and I quote:

Remember, the doctrine of *jihad*, as understood by the present day Muslim scholars, who are called Muslim priests, and the form in which they state this doctrine to common people, is absolutely incorrect. Its result is nothing except that they, through **their passionate sermons, turn the men of brutish qualities into venomous beasts dispossessed of all pious virtues of humanity.** Thus, so it happens. I know for certain that the sin for all the brutalities and unjust bloodshed that results at the hands of these ignorant conceited persons... rests on the shoulders of these Muslim priests who secretly keep teaching such doctrines, which lead to such sorrowful bloodshed. (*The British Government and Jihad*, pg 5).

Then he made a plea to the Ameer of Afghanistan (and I might add here that it is indeed remarkable that the presence of radical militant jihadists manifested in Afghanistan in the 1980s, the same era it was declared a criminal offence for Ahmadi to practice Islam openly). Again I quote:

Indeed, one approach comes to my mind and that is, that the Ameer of Kabul, whose awe among Afghani people is so great that an example of it is not found in any previous Ameer of the Afghanis, should gather together Islamic scholars and debate this doctrine of *jihad*. Then, through the Islamic scholars inform the common people of their erroneous behaviour in the matter of *jihad*. Rather he should get some magazines written in the Pashto language by the Islamic scholars of this country and publish those widely. I am sure such action shall have great impact on people, and the passion, which ignorant Muslim priests have spread among the masses, will gradually decrease. **Certainly, it will be a great misfortune for the subjects of the Ameer if he does not pay atten-**

tion to this necessary reform. The final result of this is that the government, which chooses to remain silent on such religious opinions of the Muslim priests, will be in trouble ultimately. Because these days it is the habit of these Muslim priests that, on a trivial religious difference, they declare a person or a sect to be a heretic. Then their religious opinions such as those regarding jihad against the unbelievers are proclaimed against these persons and sects too. In such a state of affairs even the Ameer cannot remain secure from such a religious decree. (*The British Government and Jihad*, pgs 5, 17,18).

Is this not what is happening today in the Muslim world and now spilling over into other peaceful countries too? Up until today the Muslim leaders and theologians do not know how to solve the problem that has now become completely out of control. At most, what we hear, are hypocritical outbursts that such acts have nothing to do with Islam, but then they preach the same twisted ideologies from their pulpits? Yet, it was Hazrat Mirza Saheb (may Almighty Allah be pleased with him) who told them what to do. They had to print articles and magazines stating the correct teachings of Islam about Jihad, etc. and disseminate it widely amongst the ignorant masses. In reality this is what the pledge is all about and that is to form a united fraternity with the Messiah to combat these erroneous teachings that have crept into Islam. This is the ***kum fa anthir - Arise and Warn!*** all over again, so vitally important in these latter days of the Messiah. There is no doubt that there will be saintly people even today and eloquent scholars that attract our admiration, but the mission of the Messiah is a special Divinely ordained mission which none other than the Holy Prophet (PBUH), himself, warned will need the support and attention of all Muslims in the latter days. He pointed to the Messiah as the only one that will save Muslims from the deadly ideological vortex that threatens to drown them by throwing them a spiritual life line and urging them to embark his Ark of light, guidance and stability.

***Kum fa Anthir - 'Arise and Warn!'*** is neither the command of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) nor that of the Messiah, but of Almighty Allah Himself. So obedience to the Holy Prophet and the Messiah to heed the call of ***Kum fa Anthir***, is to show obedience to Almighty Allah Whom we are answerable to in the end.

May Almighty Allah inspire us, guide us and protect us as we embark on this noble journey and help us to weather the obstacles and challenges that we come across with perseverance and patience in obedience to His command: ***Wa li Rabbika fasbir*** - And for the sake of thy Lord be patient! ■

## Individual Spiritual Reform

Means to Eradicating Transgression and Inequity  
in the World

By Maulana Muhammad Ali  
(Translated by Dr. Mohammed Ahmad)

[This article is a translation of a *Jumma* (Friday congregational prayer) Sermon delivered by Maulana Muhammad Ali on December 3, 1948, and recently translated into English by Dr. Mohammed Ahmad. In this article, Maulana Muhammad Ali addresses the issue of "Faith in God". In particular, he discusses the divine means of nurturing faith, the necessity of trials and tribulations to achieving true faith, and how faith is integral to eradicating transgression and inequity in the world. Maulana Muhammad Ali goes on to remind members the Lahore Ahmadiyya community that this notion of individual spiritual reform being the means to a prosperous humanity was at the heart of the message delivered by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement), and that the spread of this message is incumbent on each member of this community. Only then, he concludes, will we see a true reformation in the world, as was witnessed in the early days Islam.]

I bear witness that none deserves to be served besides Allah, and I bear witness that Muhammad is the servant and messenger of Allah. After this, I seek the protection of Allah from the accursed devil.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

*Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds  
The Beneficent, the Merciful,  
Master of the day of Requital.  
Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help.  
Guide us on the right path,  
The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favours,  
Not those upon whom wrath is brought down, nor those who go astray.  
(Holy Quran 1:1-7)*

There are many constructive forces in the world, the most potent of these being the power of faith. People think of it as being very easy to acquire and perhaps for this very reason also consider it to be very weak. However, when we study the life of prophets and the righteous we discover that the power responsible for bringing civilization and morality to its present level is indeed the power of faith.

### **New approaches regarding Jesus in Christian world**

Convalescing from my recent illness while not being able to do much else, I had the opportunity to study a book titled, “The Rise of Christianity.” It is a coincidence that the book was sent to me by Doctor Muhammad Abdullah<sup>1</sup> during this period of recovery and I have read most of it. In this book authored by the Bishop of Birmingham, a new approach has been taken to study the life of Jesus the portion of the bible attributed to him and his teachings. This research has been presented to the Christian world. Although I am unable to gauge the popularity of this book, the copy I have received is from its third printing within a year’s time.

Details of this research are quite extensive. I only want to inform you that it has challenged the commonly held notions regarding Jesus. These include his divinity, doctrine of son-ship, his teachings in the bible or the idea that the disciples of Jesus have either written some of the books of the bible or that they are based upon their narratives. All of these assumptions have been challenged in the book. It is also stated in regards to Jesus that the degree of divinity in him was only to the extent any mortal could have!

According to the author what is appealing about the teachings of Jesus is the great faith he had in God. The simple faith of any exalted human being but in a very potent form, this he says is the essence of Christianity - to engender a simple but strong faith in a God, Who answers our prayers. Not only believing that God is our Creator and Sustainer, but also believing that He will bring the world towards righteousness.

The world is steeped in the darkness of evil and transgression during the time of coming of every messenger. It is the mission of these prophets to bring people out of darkness and guide them towards the right path. This is accomplished by the strong belief that they have in the Most High God. The kingdom of God that Jesus promised in reality meant that people will have faith in God. Simple faith in God and in the precept that God, the Most High, gives guidance to His creation through His servants was the secret of success of Jesus and Christianity.

### **Essence of the teachings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad**

When we study the life of our Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, we discover that firm faith in God was also the essence of his teachings and the basis of his success. A faith that remained unshaken in the face of all opposition and against all adversaries.

“Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds,” is not only the first verse of the Holy Quran but also the

essence of Islamic teachings. In fact it shows us a reflection of his faith. All praise is for Allah Who is nurturer unto perfection of all the people, nations and of all creation. What is this nurturing unto perfection? It is their progression from the lowest to the highest stage of excellence. Seeds of this universal message are planted by the words, “praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.” It is this faith that gives you strength against those who oppose you. Nothing can stop you from affirming your belief in it. You know that when the Holy Prophet proclaimed his mission, the world was steeped in evil, inequity, transgression and rebellion against God. A solitary individual in the person of the Holy Prophet Muhammad stood up and claimed that God will deliver the world from these evil ways!

### **Three ways of God’s “nurturing unto perfection”**

We have been informed of three aspects of God’s nurturing unto perfection. The words, “Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds inform us that just as He nurtures us physically, He also creates the means to nurture us to spiritual perfection. Further on, three means of this nurturing unto perfection are mentioned. The first two, His Beneficence and Mercy are easily understood. The third, His being the Master of the Day of requital is a little harder to understand. *Al-Rahman* is the one who is merciful without any action on our part. This attribute refers to the sending of prophets and guidance for our spiritual nurturing. No deed on our part is done to deserve this guidance. It is His beneficence that He wants to nurture us unto perfection and hence creates the means for it. The other facet of this nurturing is His attribute of *Al-Rahim*. When man follows the guidance given to him, God manifests another facet of His Merciful dealings and nurtures the spiritual wayfarer to the stage of perfection.

### **Nurturing unto perfection of the non-compliant**

There is a third attribute that is His being the Master of the day of requital. This tells us that if you are disobedient towards God’s guidance, your Nurturing unto perfection will be done through punitive measures. It is commonly observed that when a prophet comes into the world, some accept his teachings while others reject them and are noncompliant. The attribute of ‘Master of the day of Requital’ tells us that those who failed to make spiritual progress as a result of their non compliance, God will bring about their spiritual progress and purification through remedial punishment. Some of the reports from the companions of the Holy Prophet refer to this in these words: “a day will come over hell when all its gates will be closed and there will be no one in it.” Another *Hadith* states that on the Day of Judgment when all have interceded, Allah the Most High will state: “The angels, prophets, believers and righteous have all interceded. Only the intercession of the

Benevolent and the Merciful remains behind. He will then take out a handful of people who have never done any good." Who can be left behind after God has taken out a handful!

Therefore remember that the words, "Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds," do not only reflect the physical but also our spiritual nurturing to the stage of perfection. Some will benefit from this nurturing in this life while others will have to enter hell in the hereafter to achieve salvation. Those who do not face hardship and grief by following the Divine guidance will be purified of their worldly impurities through chastisement in the Hereafter.

### **Benefit of facing difficulties**

The words, "Master of the Day of Requit," in fact point towards the benefit of having to face difficulties. Just as on the Day of resurrection, spiritual perfection of men will be brought about by being put through hardship. In this world also difficulties, whether they are as a consequence of the laws of Divine measure or a result of one's own actions, bring about the spiritual progress of man. Truth is that without trials and tribulations moral and spiritual development cannot reach completion. Illnesses, difficulties and grief are a means of man's spiritual growth. Another *Hadith* sheds light upon this principle. The Holy Prophet while visiting one of his companions who was suffering considerably from his illness, said: "There is no harm done; this illness by Allah's permission will be a source of spiritual purification for you." So remember these illnesses are not without purpose, there is within them some benefit for man. The body of man suffers but his spirit benefits from the suffering and is purified. Therefore, in the Holy Quran it is stated:

And We shall certainly try you with something of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits. And give good news to the patient, Who, when a misfortune befalls them, say: Surely we are Allah's, and to Him we shall return. Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord; and those are the followers of the right course. (2:155-157).

In truth, we should not become anxious because of these difficulties. Loss of property, life and illness is to be borne patiently. Becoming anxious, crying and wringing of hands is of no benefit. God says if my servant accepts what I send his way as a consequence of my law of Divine measure, give him the good news that my Mercy will descend upon him. Remember that our God is not such that if you accept difficulties that he has ordained for you that He is not pleased with you. On the contrary he sends abundance of His Grace and Mercy your way.

### **Purpose behind the worldwide prevalence of difficulties**

Everyone is familiar with difficulties the world is facing today. We talk about these in our daily conversations. These difficulties are not confined to me and you in person. They are not for any one nation but the whole world is engrossed in them. You cannot name one country that is not suffering as a result of these. The Holy Quran refers to this universal phenomenon in these words:

And there is not a town but We will destroy it before the day of Resurrection or chastise it with a severe chastisement. That is written in the Book. (17:58).

The world is facing these difficulties and hardships in accordance with a Divine plan. Why is it happening? And what is its underlying purpose? It is to serve as a reminder to the world that has forgotten the truth and severed its connection with God. God the Most High intends that with these difficulties and suffering and severe chastisement, He can make man draw towards Him so that he falls down in humility at His threshold. Only by following this path of humility can the world get rid of these difficulties.

### **These difficulties are a harbinger of a great spiritual awakening**

There is good news in these difficulties, though. Remember that they are meant to bring about a reformation in the world. If the condition of this world becomes such that there is no hope for its reformation and it has severed all connections with God, it will cease to exist. We are, however, given the good news that as a result of these difficulties there will be great spiritual awakening. The world will then come to understand that there is a God and salvation can only come through falling down in humility before Him. This is what the Promised Messiah (Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement), drew our attention to. He created a very strong belief amongst his followers that a spiritual awakening is about to come in this world and faith in God will be renewed once more. This is what he gave us. There is only one way of removing evil, inequity and discord. It is by generating faith in God and by inviting people to humbly bow down before Him.

### **The authority of the U.N.O. and its task**

One way to address inequity and dissension that is rife in the world today is through the efforts of the U.N.O. In the past also at the end of the first-world war, the League of Nations was formed with a similar intent. Its purpose was to eradicate inequity and sedition and prevent one nation from usurping the rights of others. This attempt was however not successful. Now after the second-world war, the United Nations assembly has been created. Its mandate is also to remove inequity and discord from amongst the nations. Eradicating evil and

transgression is not within its jurisdiction. How far is it going to be successful? This can be gauged by the progress it has made since its inception three years ago. There is no doubt that some progress has been made. It is however only to the extent that when a powerful nation suppresses a weaker one, the U.N. assembly puts its stamp upon it!

### **Need for an internal revolution**

The Reformer of this age (Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad) drew our attention to the notion that peace in the world is not possible until piety and guarding against evil is generated within the heart of man. He formed this organization with this intent in mind. It is not easy to understand this, but the truth is that God wants you (members of the Ahmadiyya Movement) to bring about a spiritual revolution and awakening in this world.

A difficulty and weakness however comes in the way. Spiritual revolution cannot be brought about unless there exists an overpowering desire and intent to bring it about. People who are worldly are consumed by the overwhelming desire to gain wealth. The Reformer of this age (Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad) drew our attention to keeping religion above our desire to acquire worldly gain. He wanted us to be profoundly passionate for the cause of religion. This has always been the overwhelming desire of the righteous and the reformers of this world, and it occupied the mind of the Holy Prophet so much so that the people said:

And they say: O thou to whom the Reminder is revealed, thou art indeed mad. (15:6).

These opponents of Truth said: ‘O you to whom the Quran is revealed, we do not accept what you say despite you being driven by your passion to reform us.’ His passion for reform was such that no form of opposition or obstacle could stand in its way. He was persecuted, verbally abused and imprisoned for the sake of this beloved cause but never did he refrain from preaching the truth. After being released from virtual confinement of the *Shibb-i-Abi Talib*, he headed towards the city of *Taif* that perhaps the people there might listen to him. They pelted and bloodied him with stones instead! But did this weaken his resolve in any way?

### **The great passion of the Holy Prophet’s companions**

Such firm resolution and faith was not just limited to the person of the Holy Prophet. He brought about a revolution in his lifetime. Those who accompanied him were also imbued with the same faith and determination. Their passion for faith propelled them from the confines of Arabia to carry the message of truth all over the world. Thus, within a century, Islam had spread from

the East to the West. This was due to the efforts of the Holy Prophets companions. It was their passion for the moral reformation of humanity that brought about this great revolution, a revolution unparalleled in the history of the world.

### **Fervor of faith of the rich contrasted with the poor**

This is the task that you (members of the Ahmadiyya Movement) have taken upon yourself. If you consider this as your success and truly have faith in it, then why is it that you lack the passion for it? I observe that people put their religion aside for very trivial concerns and run in pursuit of worldly benefit. They have passion for worldly gain but not for their religion. All the effort is made for acquisition of wealth. It is this wealth regarding which prophet Jesus said: “It is as difficult for the rich to enter into God’s kingdom, as it is for the camel to pass through the eye of the needle.” It seems impossible! Our Holy Prophet also said that the poor will enter heaven five hundred years before the rich. Affluence, wealth, luxury and comfort take one away from God. The more we acquire the further away we drift from Him. The more we perceive wealth as a blessing the greater a curse it becomes. The poor are passionate for their religion while the rich are lacking in it. ■

## **“Takfir” (Excommunication) in Contemporary Practice**

### **Part 1 - Introduction**

**By Dean Sahu Khan, Esq.**

[Mr. Dean Sahu Khan authored a book titled “Is Takfir (Excommunication) Permissible in Islam?” based on his thesis for a Masters in Arts degree in Islamic Studies from Charles Sturt University in Australia (for which he received “High Distinction”). That book is being published as a series of articles with the above-captioned title for *The Light and Islamic Review*. Mr. Sahu Khan is by profession a Senior Prosecutor with the Office of Director of Public Relations in Canberra. He is also the Chair of the Canberra Interfaith Forum and past, long-term President of the Australian branch of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement. In this series of articles, Mr. Sahu Khan assesses the concept of takfir (excommunication) from an Islamic theological perspective, then discusses the implications of this practice within a legal framework, and finally critically analyzes the motivations for this practice. Produced here is Part 1 of the series, which comprises a Foreword by the Executive Director of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture at Charles Sturt University, and the Introduction to the topic.]

### Foreword (by Rt. Rev'd Prof. Stephen Pickard)

Dear Sahu Khan has written an important book on the controversial and easily misunderstood topic of *takfir* (excommunication of a Muslim from the religion of Islam). The author offers the reader insights into Islamic theology and the debates that have surrounded this controversial topic from the 7<sup>th</sup> century. He states that with ‘the emergence of various sects and theological schools, *takfir* has been invoked to justify orthodoxy and, in extreme cases, as an excuse to mandate carrying out violence and killing of Muslims at the hands of other Muslims. Most significantly, the practice of *takfir* has been resurrected by certain extremist groups, such as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)’. He notes, following Professor Wole Soyinka that, ‘*I am right and you are dead* - has become the norm in conflicts in Muslim countries’. Such developments make it imperative to re-examine the concept of *takfir* particularly, as Dean notes, ‘the issues, consequences and reasons for making *takfir* are not only portraying Islam as an intolerant and violent religion, but they are also taking a toll on innocent lives’. Our author is very clear that the ‘consequences of making *takfir* result in nothing but destruction – spiritually, socially and physically. It is therefore essential to analyse the practice of making *takfir* in today’s context to identify the mindset of the individuals who declare them and also put it to the test of mainstream Islamic theology and law’. Dean has undertaken a careful and scholarly study of the subject and concludes ‘that it is wrong and dangerous to make *takfir*’

### Introduction

*Takfir* has been a controversial concept in Islamic theology from its beginnings in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, ever since the political strife between Ali ibn Abu Talib (d.661) and Mu’awiya ibn Abu Sufyan (d.680) (Khawarij, n.d.). It has generated great theological debate as well as much confusion among Muslims. With the emergence of various sects and theological schools, *takfir* has been invoked to justify orthodoxy and, in extreme cases, as an excuse to mandate carrying out violence and killing of Muslims at the hands of other Muslims. Most significantly, the practice of *takfir* has been resurrected by certain extremist groups, such as Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Professor Wole Soyinka warned, ‘*I am right and you are dead*’ has become the norm in conflicts in Muslim countries (Soyinka, 2004).

Abdullah bin Bayyah stated in his *fatwa* (Islamic legal pronouncement), “The fitna of *takfir*<sup>1</sup> is a *fitna* [divisions occurring in the Muslim community] that has brought down serious casualties upon the community, since it is a blind *fitna*, whose causes are obscure yet whose results are utterly devastating” (Rabbani, 2014). Violence in the guise of religion is rife in many Muslim

countries from Libya to Afghanistan. Social and political upheavals, combined with foreign intervention at best and invasion at worst, create disturbances resulting in a large number of deaths, summary executions and innocents killed in acts of terrorism.<sup>2</sup> While there are many factors involved in these conflicts, a significant justification for the killing of Muslims by other Muslims appears to stem from excommunication (*takfir*) from the religion of Islam. The prevalence and dangerous laxity with which this is done is a matter of great concern to Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Despite the seriousness of the issue, *takfir* seems to be mostly made at the whim of an individual, sect or a self-appointed Muslim leader who claims to have the licence, entitlement and religious authority to make *takfir* over and above the principles in Islamic theology and law. What is more significant is that there are people who erroneously and blindly follow these ‘leaders’. Therefore, the issue of *takfir* has to be appropriately addressed to highlight its theological shortcomings and attempt to understand pronouncements that have had and will continue to have significant implications for all. It will become apparent towards the end of this study that making *takfir* is in reality pre-empting the judgment of God.

The legality of making *takfir* in Islam requires engagement with radicals at theological and intellectual levels, as Pakistan’s Mufti Taqi Usmani suggested “we invite radical clerics to debate and dialogue. We should – we can win this debate” (Husain, 2014). To add to this approach, Abdullah bin Bayyah<sup>3</sup> emphasised the need for dialogue with groups such as ISIS and Boko Haram. He maintains they are misguided and need to be told not only that they are wrong, but why they are wrong and are therefore misreading religious doctrines. He said it is worth spending time having dialogue, because military action alone will not work. He argued, “The problem is that even if you defeat these ideas militarily by killing the people, if you don’t defeat the ideas intellectually, then the ideas will re-emerge.” It was in this sense he declared, “We must declare war [intellectually] on war, so the outcome will be peace upon peace” (Temple-Raston, 2014).

Study in this field is imperative since the issues, consequences and reasons for making *takfir* are not only portraying Islam as an intolerant and violent religion, but they are also taking a toll on innocent lives. The current crises involving, for example, ISIS, Al Qaida and Boko Haram exemplify the negative perceptions being created about the religion of Islam as a result of their malpractice of *takfir*. The consequences of making *takfir* result in nothing but destruction – spiritually, socially and physically. It is therefore essential to analyse the practice of

making *takfir* in today's context to identify the mindset of the individuals who declare them and also put it to the test of mainstream Islamic theology and law. There are a vast number of books and articles available on the subject matter of *takfir*. However, the issue is so current, significant and of concern, not only in the Muslim world but globally as well, that a revisit of this literature in the context of today's events is essential. Within the available literature, some of the makers of *takfir* give no reason for their actions, while others give reasons but they are not supported in Islamic theology.

Many prominent classical Muslim scholars, including Imam Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Tahawi (d.933), a *Muhaddith* (a scholar in hadith), Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d.1111), a master jurist and a theologian, and Taqī ad-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymiyyah (d.1328), an influential Salafi<sup>4</sup> Islamic scholar, did not condone *takfir*. These great theologians, jurists and renowned authors complement each other in condemning the pronouncements of *takfir*: Dr Khaled Abou El Fadl, an influential Islamic thinker from the modern age, while agreeing with those condemning *takfir*, reasoned his condemnation rather differently. He makes the bold suggestion that the Wahhabis<sup>5</sup> pronouncements of *takfir* on non-Wahhabis implies that those who became Muslims in the eyes of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH<sup>6</sup>) remained in *jahaliyya*<sup>7</sup> until the birth of Abdul Wahhab. Since, in the Wahhabi paradigm, the only measure of commitment to Islam is to follow and obey the Wahhabi ideology. If a Muslim disagrees with them, by definition, that Muslim is a heretic. This approach, Abou warned, was very dangerous and contrary to Islamic theology, as Muslims proudly claim, religiously maintain and correctly believe it was Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who guided and brought people out of the days of ignorance. Abou wrote "According to its adherents, Wahhabism is not a school of thought within Islam, but is Islam itself, and is the only possible Islam" (Abou, 2005, p. 74). This proposition is not supported by any of the provisions from the two primary sources, the Qur'an and Sunnah<sup>8</sup>.

This study brings to foreground that Islamic theology does not come into the equation for some makers of *takfir*. Therefore, in the absence of any religious support, it is difficult to support the proposition that *takfir* can be made in Islam. This study will establish that very stringent criteria and restrictions disallow the making of *takfir*. The purpose of this study, in the context of realities within Islam, is to replicate some of the teachings and discrepancies that exist in the application of what philosophers and sages teach, which is breeding a justification for violence. The issue of *takfir* has existed for a long time and people purportedly attempt to use theology to support their political ambitions or prove their

supposedly sectarian infallibility and sovereignty. The makers of *takfir* attempt to use theological rationalisation to justify their *fatawa* (plural of *fatwa*) in making *takfir*, but invariably without any support from the two primary sources, the Qur'an and Sunnah. This study therefore discusses and analyses whether this weapon of *takfir* is allowed in Islam.

This study follows a systematic review of literature and its critical analysis. The relevant data is organised within a theoretical framework defining the chapters of this paper. Since excommunication of Muslims is ultimately related to consideration of belief and disbelief, chapter 1 examines what is *iman* (belief) and *kufir* (disbelief), and the implications for making *takfir* within Islamic theology. Further, since *takfir* is usually justified on what people do and say, the discussion will include the notion of whether action is considered part of faith within Islamic theology. This discussion forms the basis for chapter 2, which discusses *takfir* within the Islamic legal framework. How did jurists deal with *takfir*? Does it have any place within the primary sources of Islam (the Qur'an and Sunnah) and what are scholars' legal conclusions on the act of making *takfir*? Having established the place of *takfir* in Islamic theology and law, chapter 3 critically analyses the rationale, evidence and reasoning of certain groups, organisations and their ideologues in justifying the practice of *takfir* in contemporary times. Ultimately, this paper argues that the contemporary practice of *takfir* is un-Islamic according to established Islamic theology and law. ■

#### Notes:

1. *Takfir* will be explained in chapter 2.
2. On 22 August 2014, CNN's Laura Smith-Spark (2014) reported that 191,369 men, women and children were killed in Syria between March 2011 and the end of April 2014. She added that at least 8,803 children were killed, including more than a quarter who were under 10 years old.
3. A specialist in all four traditional Sunni schools, a member of the Dublin-based European Council for Fatwa and Research, and ranked among the 500 most influential Muslims from 2009 to 2013 (Abdallah bin Bayyah, n.d.).
4. One who condemns theological innovation and advocates strict adherence to shari'a and to the social structures existing in the earliest days of Islam ("Salafism", n.d.).
5. A member of a Muslim sect founded by Abdul Wahhab (1703-1792), known for its strict observance of the Quran ("Wahabi", n.d.).
6. Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him
7. An Islamic concept of ignorance of divine guidance or referring to the condition in which Arabs found themselves prior to the revelation of the Quran to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).
8. Sunnah is literally the practices of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Hadith is his utterances but in this study the words will be used interchangeably.

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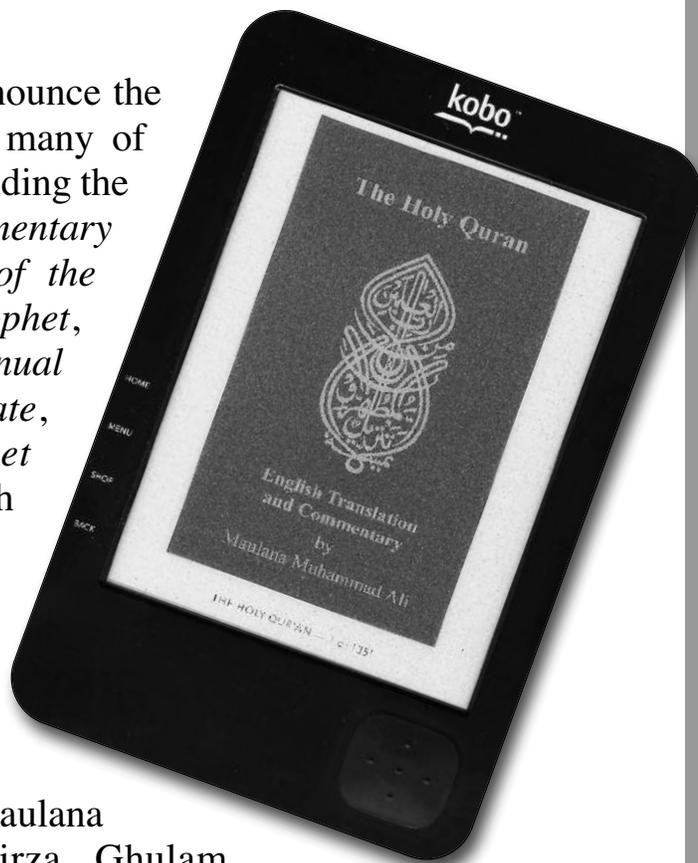
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