

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

The Light

AND

ISLAMIC REVIEW

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

January – March 2018

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

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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.

Unravelling the “Tangled Knot”

Cause and Effect of 450 Years of Manipulating Qur’anic Revelations (Part 1)

By Hans Drost

[The author, Mr. Hans Drost, is from the Netherlands. He is an ardent student of Islam for over 40 years, and particularly studies the literary works of Maulana Muhammad Ali. He has also assisted in various projects in which books by Maulana Muhammad Ali were translated from English into Dutch. In this article (Part 2 of 2), Mr. Drost continues to discuss the role of Quranic interpretation throughout Islamic history. He reviews the reasons for many unauthoritative understandings of Islamic principles as well as how reform movements have tried to address these failings. The article concludes with seven valuable criteria for studying and interpreting the Holy Quran.]

1.8 Lines of Thought

The saying that ‘those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it’ tends to be true. Not rectifying social, political and religious injustices, it imperils the present and jeopardizes the future. It is important for society to identify, analyze and correct past inequities in order to create enduring solutions.

In Western Europe, until the early 16th century, the Catholic Church controlled the civil, legal and political institutions. Martin Luther (1483–1546) was the first theologian to challenge the Church’s despotism in his ‘95 theses’ circulated in 1517. He asserted that the Catholic Church’s century–old doctrine was often at odds with the Bible’s teachings. He protested not only its religious dogma, but also its inherent corruption. In time, his followers in Germany, England and the Low Lands (Netherlands) became known as protestants. Freed from the Catholic Church’s religious, social and scientific restraints, these protestants triggered the industrial revolution. To fuel the insatiable appetite of the production engines, the race for raw material was on and colonization of the untapped regions of the world had begun.

Assuredly, the Catholic Church was instrumental in the propagation of the dark ages¹, its inflexible doctrine stifling social and scientific progress. Giordano Bruno was the last scientist to be silenced by execution and burned at the stake in 1600². His colleague, Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) was also condemned as a heretic. By recanting his findings, he avoided the stake but was kept under house arrest for the rest of his life. Overtime, science prevailed and gradually gained momentum

leading to the Renaissance/ Humanism (1275–1540), followed by the Enlightenment (1650–1800) and igniting the first Industrial Revolution (1700–1860)³.

Throughout the last 450 years, the Islamic State followed a much different path than that of Western Europe. The Islamic empires were mainly concerned with their blood line. To ensure the succession of a male heir, the Sultans and Mughals maintained harems of 20 or more concubines. This fostered an inherent destabilization of civil rule as multiple eligible heirs born of different females vied for positions of power at the expense of an efficient and stable government. Routine assassinations were the result of these continuous dynastic power plays. Since the Qur’anic revelations condemn killing other than in self–defense, the rulers pressured the clergy to find ‘justification’ for their lethal power struggles. Consequently, the clergy found ‘solutions’ by quoting ‘suitable revelations’ out of context, one of which resulted in ‘the verse of the sword’ (first part of verse 9:5). Even today, extremists utilize this misused verse in order to commit and justify ‘sanctioned’ atrocities and human rights violations. When reading verses 9:5 through 9:16 with the accompanying explanatory notes of Maulana Muhammad Ali, it is clear that verse 9:5 is only applicable to the very particular circumstances faced by prophet Muhammad at that time⁴.

Three other examples of religious texts and core interests altered to suit a political agenda:

1. The mosque

The many mosques the rulers built to reward the clergy for their collusion were merely large prayer halls calculated to exert a psychological hold over the population through strict religious dogma⁵. Traditionally, mosques were what today would be called ‘community centers’ with educational facilities, public health services, day care centers, law enforcement offices, public registrars as well as prayer rooms.

2. Fatwas in politics

Basically, a fatwa is a verdict without redress and handed down by judicial clergy dealing mostly in divorce cases and guardianships. The Al–Azhar–university provides courses specifically geared toward educating these judges. However, in the last 30 years, religious leaders have taken the concept of the fatwa and politicized it. Case in point, fatwas are used to condemn political adversaries by describing them as opponents of Islām. Thereby, the condemned are deprived of legal representation, judicial safeguards and the opportunity to appeal to a higher court.

3. Politicized Qur'anic texts

The Qur'anic text is used and abused in many areas of Muslim society, economically, politically as well as militarily. In clashes between opposing Muslim groups, both sides shout 'Allāh Akbar' while doing their best to annihilate each other. One politically motivated religious organisation is called 'Hezbollah' (party of God). The word 'hezbollah' is found in verse 58:22 and refers to the Day of Judgment (58:14) – when God decides our fate on the basis of our actions and deeds (good or bad according to the Qur'ān). Verse 6:162 has been altered to provide a slogan for dictators. In fact, it pertains to personal introspection meant to assuage the trials and tribulations of an oppressed population (verses 6:155–165).

By the 19th century, Islām was cemented in inflexible dogma at which time the population had been permanently indoctrinated by the political and religious establishments to accept the status quo. Prior to this time, scientific knowledge in the East far surpassed that of the West – a schism of approximately 400 years. This time period can be accurately calculated by comparing the advancements in medicine, hygiene and scientific discoveries at that time. If these advantages had not been buried in political and religious agendas, the East would have invented the radio by the year 1500!

1.8.1 Women in Patriarchal Societies

It is said that behind every successful man there is a great woman. Historically, women were not allowed to participate in male-dominated societies. It was presumed that they were incapable of rational thought, that they were emotionally unstable, guided by whims and prone to histrionics. In fact, powerlessness and the inability to control their own lives were the catalysts that defined these so called female characteristics. Until fairly recent, gender discrimination succeeded in banning women from political, religious and scientific participation effectively silencing 50% of the world's population.

Both in the East and the West (with rare exceptions) all rulers were male. Social, political and religious rules and laws rendered females ineligible for any position other than those allocated by men. There are several reasons for this 'illogical' discrimination. The main driving force for males was to maintain a position of power. Most men were (and are) unwilling to be subservient to a female. It was thought to be unnatural and against God's law.

It is worthwhile to note that whenever women were in a position of power, society tended to flourish and generally enjoyed long periods of peace and prosperity. Seven examples are as follows:

- a. Theodora I of Constantinople (500–548) was one of the first women to rise to power and became empress in 527.
- b. Mathilde of Canossa (1046–1115), nicknamed 'queen of the Vatican', changed politics in Europe.
- c. Hildegard (1098–1179) in Germany, wrote her book '*Know the Way*' in 1147. She understood the power of language. In 1165 she formed her own Benedict monastery.
- d. Melisende (1105–1161), queen of Jerusalem, and her son rebuild the Church of the Holy Sepulchre starting in 1129.
- e. Christine de Pizan of Paris (1364–1430) understood that education was the key to ignorance. She wrote poetry and one of the first women to publish a book called '*The City of Ladies*' in 1405.
- f. Elizabeth I (1533–1603) became queen of England and Ireland in 1559. Her accomplishments and achievements have given her the reputation of being the greatest monarch of England. Her reign is often referred to as the golden age. She patronized scholars and encouraged the arts, science and theatre (William Shakespeare).
- g. Other women in power through dynastic successions: Joanna II of Naples (1373–1435); Isabella of Castile (1451–1504); Mary of Hungary (1505–1558); Jeanne II of Navarre (1528–1572) and Catherine the Great of Russia (1729–1796).

In the West, as more women began to put pressure on male dominated societies, the patriarchal establishment responded with the witch hunts (15th–18th century). In the East, the Islamic world was also androcentric despite the fact that the Qur'anic revelations avouch equality. Seclusion, segregation and isolation through use of the veil and the purdah⁶ squelched any female political and economic ambition. However, some women did manage to make a difference, for example:

- a. Shagrat al-Durr (d. 1259), the only female sultan of Egypt (1250–1259), wife of sultan Aibak.
- b. Padishah Khatun (13th century), influential poet in Persia.
- c. Roxalana (d. 1558), the first woman Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent of the Ottoman Empire married in 1543.
- d. Nur Jahan (1577–1645), the 20th wife of Mughal Jahangir was a patron of the arts and instrumental in reforming Indian society.
- e. Tahiri (1817–1852), Persian poet. She wrote eloquent poems of love for God and was critical of the religious establishment. She even debated the clergy in public.⁷ Her powerful poem *The Morn of Guidance* reads as follows:

*Truly, the Morn of Guidance commands the breeze
to begin*

*All the world has been illuminated; every horizon,
every people
No more sits the sheikh in the seat of hypocrisy
No more becomes the mosque a shop dispensing
holiness ...
The world will be free from superstitions and vain
imaginings
The people free from deception and temptation
The carpet of justice will be outspread everywhere
And the seeds of friendship and unity will be
spread throughout
The false commands eradicated from the earth
The principle of opposition changed to that
of unity.'*

1.8.2 Reform Movements

By the 19th century, Islām had been reduced to a religion of ritualistic worship. Muslims in North Africa, the Middle East and India were now mere followers of the Sunnah. Instead of studying and teaching the essence of the Qur'anic text, the clergy (*ulama* and *mullahs*) reinforced a variety of the Sunnah's opposing and ambivalent, abstruse and ambiguous dogmas in order to maintain a readily available flexible approach to any political and religious ambition.

The British occupied Egypt (1882–1922) and India (1858–1947) during which time western observers studied and evaluated the East's civilizations. Finding that the population functioned more or less like robotic adherents of Muhammad through daily routines that centered on religious rituals without substance, they coined the names 'Muhammadans' and 'Muhammadanism'. They noted that religious instruction consisted of nothing more than repetitive references to *sin* and *death* while the spiritual message of the Qur'ān was ignored and in many instances not even understood by the clergy themselves.

During the British occupation of Egypt and India, Evangelical groups took the opportunity to preach and teach Christianity. This, together with the printed and published observations of western observers (orientalists), gave rise to two reform movements:

a. Reform movement under Muhammad Abdu

In Egypt, Abdu (1849–1905) was one of several Muslim scholars⁸ whose observation was twofold. He explained that the religion was called Islām and its followers Muslims. Then he went on to remark: "*I went to the West and saw Islām but no Muslims. I went to the East and saw Muslims but not Islām.*"

The intractable collusion between the political and religious establishments labelled any differences of opinion they considered a threat to their position of power as radical⁹. Passive criticism was overlooked as

long as it did not interfere with their religious and political agendas. Although Abdu blamed the resulting inflexible theological standpoints on the strict dogma of the past 350 years, he was able to deflect any censoring by focusing on prophet Muhammad's contemporary followers (*salaf* or *early generation*). He thereby managed to appease the clergy whose primary objective was to maintain and advance their exploitation of the enigmatic Sunnah. Later Ridha, an associate of Abdu, changed allegiance and supported the Wahhabi interpretations. By 1930, this reform movement stalled and later gave rise to Salafism.

b. Reform movement of AAIIIL

In India, Ghulam Ahmad Mirza¹⁰ (1835–1908) refuted the condemnation by Evangelists and certain Hindu sects who labelled Islām as "*primitive, crude and violent ideology.*" In general, the Muslim leaders were unprepared to respond to the criticisms. They lacked sufficient knowledge and were intellectually handicapped by inflexible doctrines as well as intractable misconceptions.

Mirza was a scholar with an extensive knowledge of history, most mainstream religions and contemporary world order. In 1880, he published his first books in Urdu: '*Al-Barāhīn-ul-Ahmadiyya Ala-Haqiqiyat Kitab-Ullah-Ul-Qurān wal Nabuwat-ul-Mahamadiyah*' or '*Discourse on the divine origin of the Holy Quran and apostleship of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam*' – *A compendium of arguments for the truth of the Holy Quran and Islam*. He wrote these books in order to provide 300 rational arguments in support of the divine origin of the Holy Qur'ān and the truthfulness of the prophet Muhammad.

The Arabic word *Ahmadiyya* means '*most-praising (God)*'. In the Qur'ān the name *Ahmad* denotes the prophet Muhammad¹¹, see verse 61:6 and corresponding footnote 61:6a by Maulana Muhammad Ali. In 1900, all religious organisations had to register for the 1901 census in British India. They were allowed to choose a name which was entered in separate columns on the census sheets. Mirza chose Muhammad's second name Ahmad and registered the organisation under the name of *Muselman Firqa Ahmadiyya* or *Muslim Group Ahmadiyya*.

In 1906, Mirza wrote in his will that the Society was to succeed him and not any one individual. In 1914, the Society split into two groups¹² and consequently Mirza's close associates¹³ moved from the city of Qadian to Lahore where they founded the *Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam (AAII)* now known as the *Ahmadiyya Association for the Propagation of Islam in Lahore (AAIIL)*. They adhered to the reformer Mirza's original teachings and produced a vast amount of

invaluable literature both in Urdu and English. This led to the first English translation, publication and explanation of the Qur'ān by Maulana Muhammad Ali (1917), the first Muslim scholar to publish the Qur'anic revelations in their proper historic perspective.

Both reform movements were attacked on all fronts by the *religious-political complex (RPC)*. However, no court case brought against them was ever successful. But in the 1970's, the section of the Movement that remained in Qadian (Ahmadiyya Muslim Community or *AMC*) was officially declared a 'non-muslim minority' by the Pakistani parliament. 'Shrewdly', the *RPC* made no distinction between the two movements (*AMC* and *AAIIL*). This resulted in the discrimination, persecution and even assassination of the supporters of both movements (mainly in Pakistan, Kashmir, Indonesia and Guyana).

1.9 Spirituality

One important result of the *AAIIL* reform movement was the renewed focus on spirituality, largely ignored over the past 450 years¹⁴. Among other virtues, the Qur'ān addresses morality, integrity and accountability.

The following verses describe the three stages of the soul's development¹⁵:

- Verse 12:53: The *nafs ammārah* is the animal stage.
- Verse 75:2: The *nafs lawwāma* is the conscience.
- Verse 89:27: The *nafs mutma'innah* is the spirituality stage, the one embracing 'the junction of the two rivers' and the path to monotheism while keeping *Gog* and *Magog* at bay.

Life without spirituality is like a river without water. The Qur'ān is the well from which a thirsty soul can drink (verses 17:85–89 and 4:82)¹⁶. One spiritual word in the Qur'ān can paint a thousand pictures and feed a million hungry minds.

The verbal revelations revealed to Muhammad were communicated and memorized by his followers. Verbal accounts can be as important as written ones, however they tend to be less reliable. Ultimately the Qur'ān is a spiritual Book. Its words describe a multi-layered approach about characteristics that involve two important considerations:

- The written word is amplified by verbal recitations.
- Translation of the Qur'ān should not only involve a linguistic but also a spiritual rendition in order to fully understand its meaning.

1.9.1 Contemporary Reformers

Even though several reform movements tried to institute a positive change over the last 30 years, they also were silenced by the same inflexible standpoint of the *RPC*. Because the persecution was unrelenting, some of

the reformers had to flee to the West. Consequently, most of them now live and work in Europe and the United States.

The main focus of the reformers centers on the written word of the Qur'ān and not on the cryptic verbal accounts of the Sunnah and the Hadith. They advocate that the Islamic establishment needs to condense the five or six publications of the Sunnah and Hadith into a single bundle of ancillary information. Whenever there is any discrepancy between the interpretation of the Qur'anic revelations and the Hadith, the Qur'ān prevails. The same is true of the word 'holy'. Case in point, no one has ever heard of the 'holy' Hadith.

Many things can be described in terms of 'right' or 'wrong', but these words cannot be used in discussing or interpreting the Qur'anic texts which are meant metaphorically. Despite the incredible amount of information available through television, radio and the internet, there remains a huge gap between the unplugged *RPC* and the progressive reform movements¹⁷. So far, any attempt to reform the religious bias of the *RPC* has been futile, difficult and dangerous. As long as most Muslims do not question their leadership, change will be impossible. In countries where the *RPC* has control, any criticism or disagreement are met with swift and decisive action. The goal of establishing an era of enlightenment, cooperation and wisdom can only be accomplished by starting at 'the beginning of the two rivers' and by shedding the shackles of indoctrination in order to embark on the path of spiritual and social awareness. This can be accomplished as follows:

- Relinquish the duplicitous creed and convene on a search for the truth. Attain insight through education and wisdom through experience.
- Reform the financial institutions gridlocked in monopolies which eliminate competition and depress the economy.
- Do not ascribe personal responsibility to any government agency or military establishment.
- Pressure news organizations to abandon the practice of sensationalism for financial gain.

1.9.2 Summary

The *RPC's* agenda is encased in a vacuum, an impenetrable airless cocoon that abides by the practices of the past as evidenced by:

- Verbal and physical intimidation.
- Widespread discrimination of religious minorities.
- Judicially sanctioned punishments like flogging and stoning.
- Pervasive suppression of women's rights.

This is the driving force behind fundamentalism, the engine of the extreme right's political agenda that

manipulates religious doctrine in order to achieve political goals.

The Qur'anic revelations warn the faithful against the abuses of the clergy, known as 'doctors of law':

- a. Verse 3:79 states that those with knowledge of the religion must not say: "*Be my servants besides God's*" but "*Be worshippers of the Lord because you teach the Book and because you study it*".
- b. Verse 9:34 states "*..., surely many of the doctors of law and the monks eat away the property of men falsely, and hinder them from God's way*".

1.10 "The Tangled Knot" and the Qur'an

Over time, all monotheistic religions have experienced a similar commingling of divine disclosures, scriptural texts and glorified verbal accounts. Another similarity was the time frame within which these religious oral accounts were documented. It appears that this was inspired by the propensity of the Greek and Roman societies (400 BC – 300 AD) to chronicle meaningful information.

Judaism was the first monotheistic religion to record their oral traditions (Aggadah) and in the span of 1000 years (200–1200 AD) they composed the Talmud. The Christians, based on the teachings of the Jewish prophet 'Isa (Jesus), chronicled the bulk of the New Testament between 900–1200 AD and this sparked the building of many New Testament churches. Islām did not experience a process of humanism and reform like Judaism and Christianity. But they did record the Sunnah and the Hadith (1250–1750) as well as the Shari'ah. Under the direction and influence of the *Religious Political Complex (RPC)* the Sunnah, Hadith and Shari'ah were extensively intertwined with the Qur'anic revelations, resulting in a difficult to unravel enigmatic 'tangled knot'.

The solution to unravel this 'tangled knot' is by identifying and isolating the influence of the Sunnah and the Hadith. Several reform movements have tried and failed. The following two points outline the difference between these movements and the reformer Mirza:

- a. Most reformers used the Qur'ān as a means to an end, a law unto itself, to be scrupulously followed without emotion or creativity. This approach tended to lead to the conclusion that the Qur'anic interpretations (tafsir) were acceptable only by including the Sunnah.
- b. In contrast, Mirza used the Qur'anic text as a 'starting-point'. He included not only its spiritual message but also its inherent flexible doctrine which allowed for the inevitable changes in social evolution, economic advancements and scientific developments. Several verses (6:155, 10:37, 17:89, 25:33

and 54:22 and 40) support this concept. In addition, through study and discussion, it becomes apparent that they also constitute a guide for equality, justice and world peace.

One of the important goals of the political and religious establishments was to find and implement 'universals' or 'universal values' that would appease the population and keep them in line with the RPC's respective agendas. Only within the last 60 years has the desire to follow one's individual path to happiness emerged. It is important to note that individuality¹⁸ creates diversity which in turn is the key to a thriving society.

The following seven points are a short overview to help the reader study the Qur'ān, thereby following God's dictates instead of the strict dogmatic principles and rituals enforced by the religious and political elite. In the end, nothing seems truer than the admonition that 'those who are not governed by God will be governed by tyrants'.

The seven points are arranged as follows:

1. Each verse, with its references to historical events, can only be fully understood by studying the entire section in which it appears.
2. There are no contradictions in the Qur'anic text (verse 4:82).
3. The Quran is largely a spiritual and metaphorical Book.
4. The revelations were recorded in divine and not in chronological order (see verses 25:32, 17:106 and 15:9).
5. Laws are not the only foundation of a stable society, it must also include a 'moral compass' as outlined by the following mandates:
 - "*Vie one with another in virtuous deeds.*" (5:48).
 - "*Mercy takes precedence over punishment.*" (10:54–60).
 - "*... those who have no desire to exalt themselves in the earth nor to make mischief. And the good end is for those who keep their duty.*" (28:83–88).
 - "*And believe in ... that which was revealed before thee ...*". (2:4).
6. In principle, the Qur'ān can be divided as follows: Chapter 1 is its essence, chapter 112 is its conclusion and everything in between explains the rest of the text. To fully understand its quintessence, one should also study the historical references in each revelation.
7. The Qur'ān tends to outline minimum requirements

for certain religious devotions like prayer and fasting. The problem arises when the clergy dictates the length and times of these devotions solely to maintain psychological control of the population.

It is a fact that both the Qur'ān and God's messenger Muhammad have no part or parcel in the unfortunate changes, deviations and modifications of these and other subjects. ■

Endnotes

1. *The Protestants were instrumental in the proliferation of the printing press, invented around 1445. This gave the population free access to the written word. The Catholic Church retaliated by banning books critical of its teachings. A 'censoris' was appointed to each Province who inspected and censored suspected books. The punishment for publishing and/or possessing banned books was to be beheaded or burned at the stake.*
2. *After the year 1600, heretics condemned by the Inquisition (13th through 19th century) were no longer burned at the stake but excommunicated instead.*
3. *The industrial Revolution began in England. Around the end of the 18th century, Samuel Slater brought new manufacturing technologies to the U.S. In 1793 the mechanical cotton gin, invented by Eli Whitney (1765-1825), replaced the cotton industry's labor-intensive farm work. Modernization of other industries, due to advances in science, quickly followed (1860).*
4. *After making several agreements with the Muslims to defend Medina, some of the Arab tribes violated the treaties.*
5. *A Sunni Muslim, adhering to the Shafi'i rule of law will not attend a mosque in which the majority of Muslims follow the Hanafi rule of law. With regard to these two rules of law, the differences are inconsequential but result in creating division instead of unity through diversity.*
6. *Although Hinduism refers to the human mind, consciousness and the soul, it also excluded women through use of the purdah.*
7. *She appeared in public without a veil. This was condemned by the clergy as a provocation and 'defiled' men, women and God. In 1852 she was sentenced to death as a heretic at which time she proclaimed:
"You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women!"*
8. *Among them: Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897), Abdul Rahman al-Kawakibi (1855-1902), Al-Tahir ibn-Ashur (1879-1973) and Rashid Ridha (1865-1935).*
9. *Although the clergy paid lip service to reforms in education, the judiciary, local government and the military establishment, they embraced the fatalistic view that all of life's ordeals were the will of God. In the end, they managed to keep control and in practice nothing changed.*
10. *This is the western way of writing his name. In general, he is known as Mirza Ghulam Ahmad.*
11. *The name Muhammad means 'the most praised one'. The name Ahmad denotes 'the bringer of peace and harmony in the world'.*
12. *Mirza's son gained control of the reform movement in 1914 and claimed to be the successor of his father, whom he proclaimed to be a prophet. He reduced the reform movement to a puritanical sect, ruled by spiritual manipulation and self-righteous ideology. This movement is known as Ahmadiyya Muslim Community (AMC), first based in Qadian and later, after independence, in Rabwa.*
13. *Among them: Maulana Muhammad Ali (1874-1951), Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din (1870-1931), Dr. Basharat Ahmad (1876-1943) and Maulana Abdul Haq Vidyarthi (1888-1977).*
14. *During the last 450 years the clergy did little or nothing to understand or teach the spiritual meaning of the respective religions. All they did was transform the 'liturgical' languages into 'magic words' and declared Sanskrit (Vedas), Hebrew (Torah), Arabic (Qur'ān) and Latin (Bible) a dead language.*
15. *See also footnotes 12:53a, 75:2a, 89:30a and the introductory note of chapter 75 by Maulana Muhammad Ali.*
16. *See also explanatory notes 17:85a, 88a and 89a by Maulana Muhammad Ali.*
17. *In the Athenian Melian negotiations as described by Thucydides, the author of the 'History of the Peloponnesian War', the Athenian Ambassador remarked: "You know as well as we do that right is a question that only has meaning in relations between equals in power. In the real world, the strong do what they will and the weak suffer what they must."*
18. *Individuality is a positive concept which allows for the development of ingenuity, aptitude, resourcefulness and encourages compassion and spirituality. Self-centeredness, greed and arrogance lead to a loss of spirituality. The revelations provide the balance between individuality and spirituality, see verses 22:77-78. We must be aware not to allow modesty to turn to vanity, resourcefulness to indifference and dedication to fanaticism (zealotry). See verse 25:67. Individuality enriches society and creates a stable civilization.*

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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)

Book Review: Qur'an in Conversation

By Barbara P. Early, MSW, PhD, LCSW

[This article is a book review of “*Quran in Conversation*” by Michael Birkel and was published in the *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* (Vol.36, Iss. 1-2, 2017) as part of a special issue on “Islam and Social Work”. The author, Barbara P. Early is a retired Associate Professor and Assistant Dean at The Catholic University of America, National Catholic School of Social Service. Dr. Early, with precision and eloquence, captures the premise and essence of book well. And, as was intended by the book, she applies the rich diversity of thought presented in “*Quran in Conversation*” to her field of expertise as an opportunity and tool for practitioners to develop a deeper understanding of Islam and American Muslims. The issue of the periodical in which this article appears may be viewed online at: www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15426432.2017.1305239?scroll=top&needAccess=true].

The Call for Papers for this special issue of the *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* sought to produce an issue that will help social work practitioners, educators, and researchers gain a deeper understanding of the Islamic belief system that is shared by so many of our colleagues, clients, and students. There is no better way for people who are strangers to come to a depth of understanding of the beliefs of each other than through conversation. Professor of religion at Earlham College and member of the Quaker faith tradition, Michael Birkel, engaged in conversation with over 20 North American Muslim scholars—Muslims living their faith in a non-Muslim culture. The conversations centered on passages of the Qur'an that the scholars had selected to discuss and interpret in conversation with their non-Muslim interlocutor.

The effort culminated in the book, *Qur'an in Conversation*, that itself becomes a conversation with its readers—presumably non-Muslims—who are initially strangers. Birkel introduces the contributions of the Muslim writers as “spiritual hospitality” that offers readers the opportunity to consider what it might be like to be guests in the house of another faith, not necessarily as potential converts but as respectful visitors who can stand firmly rooted in their own convictions and yet meet others at the boundaries between them that both separate communities and still somehow join them. (p. 3)

It is within this “spiritual hospitality” that conversations about a faith turn strangers into friends. This book

review will present a handful of those scholars and their chosen passages in the hopes that the reader will be drawn to read the remainder.

Birkel begins his book with a variant of a familiar saying, “A little Scripture is a dangerous thing” (p. 1). He states that the goal of anyone's relationship to scripture involves dual tasks. The first is to discern the central message conveyed by the scripture as a whole; thus, any specific passage must be understood within that broader message. The second task is to assimilate the interpretation of specific passages within the commentary of a community of good will. Birkel says,

To read a sacred Scripture is to read in company because a holy text is accompanied by centuries of commentary. Reading Scripture with meticulous care within a community of faith brings the reader into conversation with that lively history of interpretive possibilities. (p. 38)

These dual interpretive tasks guide members of one faith in approaching the scripture of others. In this time of interreligious tension and even Islamophobia, non-Muslims would be wise to avoid criticism of passages of the Qur'an when they hear only pieces of it without the broader context of its central message. Additionally, isolated bits of scripture can only be properly interpreted in conversation within a community of people of good faith, though of a different faith. The Muslim scholars and leaders in this book become for the reader a contextual community of good will within which to probe the depths of the passages and enlighten the view of non-Muslim readers in how the chosen passages reflect the central message of the Qur'an.

Most fundamentally, any conversation about Scripture must take as central themes the nature of God, the nature of God's creation (particularly humankind) and the nature of the relationship between the two. Ovamir Anjum, holder of the Imam Khattab Chair of Islamic Studies in the department of philosophy at the University of Toledo, may surprise Western readers with what he says crystallizes the central message of the Qur'an. That is the short but powerful phrase that makes up its first chapter, The Opening, “*Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim*,” or “In the name of Allah who is most merciful and ever merciful.” Anjum suggests that when one says these few words, there begins a conversation with God that encompasses wonderment about God, creation, and our relationship to the Creator,

The first thing you hear about the being that you are in is that it is good. You hear that we are going to begin to know in the name of Someone, about whom you know nothing except that He is most merciful and always merciful. So there is some goodness, something compassionate about the world which is a very opti-

mistic thing. (pp. 7–8)

Anjum contrasts this Qur’anic view of God with the Greek concept that pervades the Judeo-Christian tradition. While in the Greek view God is jealous, punitive, and competitive with humankind, the Qur’an begins with (and endlessly repeats) the compassion and mercy of God toward his creatures.

Fazeel Khan is a civil rights attorney and spokesperson for the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement of renewal in Islam. He describes the movement’s understanding about Islam “as a tolerant, rational, peaceful, and liberal faith” (p. 148). That characterization is, unfortunately, the polar opposite of what many non-Muslim Americans think of Islam—sadly reinforced by international terrorist attacks and American political campaigns. Khan notes that Jesus was sent to revive the spirit of the Jewish faith that was being practiced too ritualistically. Similarly, the *mujaddid*, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, founder of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement, plays that role in this century for Muslims. Ongoing change and development within Islam also brings a message for non-Muslims, challenging them to a deeper understanding of their own faith beneath its concrete and observable exteriors. One example Ahmad used spoke with great clarity to Muslim and non-Muslim alike. Khan, says it well:

We’re all on this journey toward perfection, and most of us are not going to reach there in this lifetime, but this is a training ground for us for the hereafter. We don’t perceive heaven and hell to be two physical places that you go to afterwards, one very pleasant, one very hot. Rather heaven and hell are conditions or states that people find themselves in. (p. 155)

He explains that sin is detachment from God, and that detachment is a state of hell, “This is what hell is. It’s a state of your soul” (p. 156). Clearly, this is a rather liberal interpretation of heaven and hell, but with it, Khan challenges the non-Muslim to reflect on her or his faith through Khan’s understanding of Islam beyond the observable. He says, “Islam is a religion that’s based less on rituals and more on the cultivation of one’s soul” (p. 157).

Sohaib Sultan, author and first full-time Muslim chaplain at Princeton University, continued the theme of dynamic development of faith. Sultan chose Sura Luqman (Sura 31) as his passage to characterize the externals of tradition as metaphor for the internal development of the soul. The Sura reiterates a common theme within the Qur’an, that the Qur’an provides, “a guidance and mercy for those who do good.” Sultan notes that typically such moral guidance has been seen

as a means of separating groups of people who do good from groups who do not, more specifically and ominously to separate Muslim believers from those whom they perceive to have rejected the faith. Sultan suggests that we read this separation not as a battle between faiths, but as a battle within each of us, “There is an element within me that is searching and striving to be God conscious; there is an element within me that is withholding itself from the truth” (p. 98). It is this introspective internal message that cautions him against speculating whether an external other is a believer or a rejecter but rather urges him to strengthen his own internal capacity to be a right vessel and guard against the temptation to be pulled away from God.

Then, as did Fazeel Khan, Sultan applies this metaphorical method to the Qur’an’s often frightening literal descriptions of heaven and hell. He says,

The greatest pleasure is being in a state of everlasting closeness and intimacy with God, and the greatest suffering is being distant, removed, far away from God. The Qur’an is using these descriptions to explain that this is what it feels like, not that this is necessarily what is going to happen to you, but this is what it feels like. (p. 99)

Again, Sultan argues that the message is an internal one, citing 31:10, “We sent down water from the sky, with which We made every kind of good plant grow on earth: all this is God’s creation. Now, show Me what your other gods have created.”

Sultan explains the meaning of the passage as a potential preference for one’s lower passions to God’s teachings, and that these passions become our idols. Shifting the focus from external idols to those that are within is a powerful process in the development of the soul.

Social workers may have particular interest in the internalized idolatry that was further developed by another contributor to the book who requested anonymity due to remaining fear of her abusive former husband. In the chapter entitled, “Freedom from Pharaoh,” the writer tells of her physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Ultimately, it was through the voice of the Qur’an that she recognized her situation as abusive and through that voice she found her way out. The writer’s husband defended and she initially accepted his abusive behavior as consistent with the infamous “beating verse” (4:34) that has been interpreted to justify a husband mildly punishing a rebellious wife. But it was not the beating verse that the author chose as the focus for her conversation. Rather, she cited the response of Pharaoh’s sorcerers to Pharaoh’s revenge-soaked threat to mutilate and kill them. To this they said simply, “And so we have already returned to our Lord” (7:125). It was

this verse that provided the victim the key to her prison door. The abused wife's epiphany came through realizing that she too must return to her Lord, privileging the requirements of Allah over those of her husband. Reflecting the central message of the Qur'an—that there is no god but God—the victim recognized her submission to her husband as idolatry, "It was not until I began to experience my victimization as a form of idolatry that I was able to set myself free" (p. 214).

Once again spiritual growth is reflected in the capacity to internalize ostensibly external actions and conflicts. Such a maturity of faith is neither available nor even important to everyone. There are those who can only make their way through life under the guidance of rigid rules and literal truths. Indeed, moral and cognitive theorists argue that the thought capacity of most of humanity has simply not developed beyond literalism. But for those whose gifts include the capacity to see layers of meaning and the blessings of conversations within a community of good will, scripture opens up. While much in the Qur'an as well as the Bible has been liberated from literalism through careful interpretation, understanding of patriarchy has proved stubbornly resistant to efforts to modify. Asman Barlas, professor of politics at Ithaca College, provides in her extensive exploration of Abraham's near sacrifice of his son, Isaac, a strikingly nonliteral interpretation of a familiar narrative typically thought to reflect patriarchy. She acknowledges that Islamic tradition views Abraham's obedience to God and Isaac's obedience to Abraham as supportive of traditional patriarchy. However, to Barlas, it represents the opposite. She introduces her reading of the Abraham narrative with,

Literalism is not the core of faith. Divine will requires interpretation; it is not immediately self-evident. No interpreter can claim infallibility. These are crucial reminders at a time when so many Muslims are given to textural literalism, when they perceive reason and the exercise of the mind as a hindrance to faith, and when male hubris has reached such heights that a handful of men can arrogantly claim to know the truth as it is with God. (p. 56)

Barlas separates herself from Christian feminists who argue that patriarchy takes its authority from the view of God as father, a metaphor totally absent in Islam. As a Muslim feminist, her critique of patriarchy begins with recalling that Abraham defied the religion of his own earthly father, submitting only to God. Central to the Quranic version of the Abraham narrative but absent from the Biblical one, Abraham could submit to the will of *his God* to sacrifice Isaac only with the consent of *his son*,

Without that consent, the story of his near sacrifice of his son would have proved little more than the omnipotence of fathers in patriarchies ... in order for God's will to be done, believers must submit to it voluntarily. And, since God is not father, one cannot view God's rule, or monotheism, as a divine endorsement for fathers' rule, which is patriarchy. (p. 60)

All three Abrahamic religions struggle in contemporary times with an overbearing patriarchy. Barlas presents her critique of patriarchy within the Qur'an's central message. She also does so within a community of good will, which for her is a community of feminist scholars within Islam. Her complex and nuanced critique of patriarchy would strike a literalist as absurd, but hers is an example of how believers must listen carefully, consider with an open mind within the central message of scripture and the company of thoughtful exegetes.

And, finally, Mohammad Hassan Khalil, a member of the religious studies faculty at Michigan State University, emphasizes in his chapter that there are no strangers in the eyes of God. He writes of a conclusion he made upon contemplating the ramifications of what he clearly sees as God's limitless mercy towards Muslim and non-Muslim alike that is expressed in various passages of the Qur'an. He says to Birkel,

All we're really left with is positive ambiguity ... but with that positive ambiguity you see everything differently. So, for example, when I look at you, the first thing that comes to mind isn't "non-Muslim." Of course you're non-Muslim, but now the first thing I think is, "fellow human being." (p. 37)

Indeed, we are all "fellow human beings" created intentionally by a loving and merciful God specifically to have and express the capacity to worship him.

At the beginning of this remarkable book, Michael Birkel set the stage for a conversation between Muslim scholars and non-Muslims with, "At times, when one's conversation partner from another faith speaks deeply from the particularity of his or her own religious tradition, it can sound an echo from one's own." (p. 14). For social workers who value the rich diversity of the faith traditions among their colleagues, clients, and students, *Qur'an in Conversation* offers them a deeper understanding of Islam while strengthening the foundation of their own faith through the echoes of these illuminating conversations about the Qur'an. ■

Celebrating the Sanctity of Human Life

Eid ul Adha Khutba (Sermon)

By Ebrahim Mohamed

[This article is an abridged version of an Eid ul Adha Khutba (Sermon) delivered by Ebrahim Mohamed, President of the South Africa Branch of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement, in Cape Town on September 1, 2017. In this Khutba, Mr. Mohamed relays the key features observed at Eid ul Adha, including remembering the life of Prophet Abraham, studying the story of the great trial placed before him and the significance of the practice of animal sacrifice today, and performing the annual pilgrimage (hajj). But most importantly, Mr. Mohamed does so by explaining the deep spiritual meanings and significances underlying these narratives and observances, thereby making them relatable and practicable.]

And proclaim to men the Pilgrimage (*Hajj*): they will come to thee on foot and on every lean camel, coming from every remote path. (Holy Quran 22:27)

Assalamu Alaikum Wa Rahmatulahi Wa Barakatu:
Peace be unto you and Mercy of Allah and His Blessings be upon you.

Today is known as *Eid ul Adha*, also referred to as *yaum al-nahr* which literally means “the day of sacrifices”. Normally on this day which comes towards the end of the *Hajj* (i.e. the pilgrimage to Makkah), the fifth pillar of Islam, animals are sacrificed to commemorate and honor the great spirit of sacrifice shown by the Prophet Abraham, on whom be peace, when he was ready to sacrifice his own son Ishmael in obedience to a Divine command (Holy Quran 37:102). However, when he was about to execute the command, he received the assurance from on High that he had fulfilled the sacrifice; and the sacrifice of animals fit for human consumption such as sheep, goats, camels etc. were introduced. Hence animal sacrifices form a prominent feature of the devotions attributed to the *Hajj* thereby putting an emphatic end to human sacrifices that were common in the ‘Abrahamic Age’.

Prophet Abraham – his background, faith and contributions to civilization

The Prophet Abraham is commonly known as the ‘Father of Nations’ and well-known for his leading role in the establishment of pure monotheism in the world. He had two famous sons who were both prophets. The eldest was Ishmael, born of Hagar, and the second,

Isaac, born of Sarah. The dynasty of Prophet Abraham stretches over many generations which were blessed with many great prophets such as Ishmael and Isaac already mentioned, Joseph, David, Solomon, Moses, Aaron, Jesus, and the universal and last prophet Muhammad (s). The Prophet Abraham, like prophets before him, was a vital link in the progression of the universal religion of ‘Islam’, which means ‘Peace’ through complete submission to Almighty God. The Holy Quran tells us:

He has made plain to you the religion which He enjoined upon Noah and which We have revealed to thee, and which We enjoined on Abraham and Moses and Jesus – to establish religion and not to be divided therein...- (42:13)

In his English translation of the Holy Quran, Maulana Muhammad Ali comments as follows on the said verse:

Even so early did the Quran announce that the religion preached by the Prophet was not a new religion, but, so far as its basic principles were concerned, it was the same religion as preached by Noah and Abraham and Moses and Jesus. The basic principle of Islam – entire submission to One God only – is, in fact, the basic principle of the common religion of humanity.

Although Judaism and Christianity emerged out of the progeny of Abraham, the faith of Abraham was ‘Islam’. The Holy Quran puts his position into perspective as follows:

Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was (an) upright (man), a Muslim; and he was not one of the polytheists (3:67)

Here his description as ‘a Muslim’ means he was one who completely submitted to the ‘will of Allah’; and this is how we come to know the noble prophet Abraham.

Abraham lived approximately 2000 years BC. He came from the city known as UR, about seven hundred miles from the ancient city of Babylon in Mesopotamia, held by many historians as the cradle of civilization. UR was located near the modern town of Nasiriya in the far southern region of what is known today as Iraq. He lived at a time when idol worship and human sacrifices were rife. His countrymen in Mesopotamia believed in four different Gods, hewn out of marble or stone. In honour of these lifeless Gods they built towers and effigies. Elaborate rituals accompanied human sacrifices to satisfy these supposed bloodthirsty Gods. He later migrated to Canaan, which comprised what is today known as Israel, Palestine, Lebanon and parts of Syria

and Jordan.

Abraham played a leading role in laying the foundation of Islam brought to perfection by Almighty Allah through the final prophet to humankind, the Prophet Muhammad (s) as indicated in the Holy Quran:

This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favour to you and chosen for you Islam as a religion. (5:3)

Abraham was a forerunner in the struggle against polytheism, the worship of tyrannical Gods whose anger could only be appeased by human sacrificial offerings. On one occasion he, at great risk to his own life, destroyed the stone idols of his father and fellow country-men, leaving only one big idol untouched. When questioned who the culprit was who destroyed their prized idols, he challenged them to ask the one that was left standing, thus proving the 'lifeless' nature of their Gods and introducing them to the one and only Living, Loving, Merciful, Caring God, Lord of all the worlds. Assisted by his son, Ishmael, they laid the foundation stones of pure monotheism. The Holy Quran refers to this as follows:

And We enjoined Abraham and Ishmael, saying: Purify My House for those who visit (it) and those who abide in (it) for devotion and those who bow down (and) those who prostrate themselves (2:125)

And when Abraham and Ishmael raised the foundations of the House: Our Lord! Accept from us (2:127)

The 'House' in these verses is a reference to the *Ka'bah* in Makkah regarded by many as the first house of worship of the 'One True God' on earth and thus we find it referred to in the Holy Quran as *Beit ul Atiq*, 'the Ancient House'- (22:29; 22:33). The *Ka'bah* is thus symbolic of pure, unadulterated 'monotheism', the bedrock on which Islam is based.

The abolition of human sacrifices

Another great contribution made to civilization by Prophet Abraham was his celebratory role in the abolishment of the foul practice of 'human offerings'. Under Divine instruction he introduced an entirely new meaning to the concept of sacrifice. He championed what can most probably be seen today as ground breaking 'human rights' activism i.e. the abolition of human sacrifices. Under Divine Guidance, he entrenched what all Muslims celebrate today and that is the creation of a pronounced awareness of the "*sanctity of human life.*" He came to understand that the up-offering of his son Ishmael only meant that he was to play a great role in laying the foundation of a futuristic New World Order

of Peace in the form of the Religion of Islam.

The true significance underlying the 'substitute' animal sacrifices

The Holy Quran explains the significance of the sacrifice of the animals at the end of the *Hajj* in the following verses:

And 'for every nation We appointed acts of devotion that they might mention the name of Allah on what He has given them of the cattle quadrupeds ... (22:34)

Neither their flesh, nor their blood reaches Allah, but to him is acceptable observance of duty on your part (22:27)

Eat of them and feed the contented one and the beggar (22:36)

The universal law of cause and effect tells us that everything we do has a consequential effect. Therefore it is important that the devotions that we perform during the *Hajj* should not be done in a ritualistic manner. The animal sacrifices are meant to impress on us the need to sacrifice our own bestial natures that prevent us from reaching out and drawing closer to Allah. This is the underlying significance of the Arabic term *qurban* used in connection with the sacrificial offerings of *Eid ul Adzha*. The animal sacrifices evoke feelings of humility and compassion in us and we soon realise what a great opportunity is afforded to bring some relief to famine stricken countries such as Yemen and war ravaged Iraq and Syria nearby. Regardless of politically driven tensions in the region, authorities should allow those in charge of the distribution of the meat unhindered access to the poor and needy. The Holy Quran warns:

O you who believe, violate not the signs of Allah, nor the Sacred Month, nor the offerings...And let not hatred of a people – because they hindered you from the Sacred Mosque incite you to transgress. And help one another in righteousness and piety, and help not one another in sin and aggression ... (5:2)

This verse is as relevant today as it was in the early days of Islam. It appropriately lays down a code of conduct which the modern world, beset by strife and division, is sorely in need of. As a consequence of the violence in the territories in close proximity of Makkah, millions have already been killed, displaced and orphaned. On days like today when we celebrate the 'sanctity of human life,' Muslims should use the occasion of the *Hajj* gathering to collectively condemn such barbaric acts of violence especially those 'Muslim on Muslim killings' which can be summarily ended if all Muslims sacrifice their own bestial tendencies and heed

the call of the Holy Quran:

And kill not your people (4:29)

Let not hatred of a people...incite you to transgress.

And help one another in righteousness and piety,
- and help not one another in sin and aggression.

And keep your duty to Allah. Surely Allah is severe in requiting (evil) (5:2)

Let it thus be known that we loudly condemn all killings of innocent people regardless of what nationality they might be; especially all suicide bombings. The Founder of the Ahmadiyya Society in Islam, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, warned of the dire consequences that would befall the Muslims if they violated such commandments of the Holy Quran as read out above. It is thus indeed sad to note how young boys and girls are led to believe that acts of 'suicide' and 'mass murder' are sanctified as pious under the guise of 'jihad' and 'martyrdom'. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad pointed out that such acts were totally against the teachings of the Holy Quran. The sooner the perpetrators realise that these are blatant criminal acts and have nothing to do with Islam, the better. What these poor children should be taught is that self-destruction or suicide is a very grave sin in Islam, and that the 'preservation of human life' is a duty of every Muslim, young or old. They should be taught that the true definition of a 'martyr' in Islam is one who is killed whilst fighting an aggressive

enemy, or one who dies while being actively engaged in a struggle to 'save and preserve lives' including their own, and not one who sets out aggressively with the sole aim of destroying himself and others in the process. Thus, we declare on top of our voices that it is the 'abolition of human sacrifices and the preservation of the lives of humankind' that we celebrate today.

Hajj – a practical proof of peaceful co-existence of diverse nations.

The *Hajj* teaches us to live in harmony and at peace with each other regardless of differences in social status, language, colour, and differences of religious and political points of view. The Holy Quran makes it quite clear:

The months of the pilgrimage are well known; so whoever determines to perform pilgrimage, therein there shall be **no immodest speech, nor abusing, nor altercation in the pilgrimage**. And whatever good you do, Allah knows it. And make provision for yourselves, the best provision being to keep one's duty. And keep your duty to Me, O men of understanding (2:197)

Once again, emphasis is laid on our duty to Allah of which the upkeep of basic ethical and moral codes of conduct that underpins a spirit of brotherhood and creates an atmosphere of peace and harmony is a major part. That such harmony is achieved in a gathering of over two million devoted worshippers from different backgrounds and countries every year with limited policing and security; in stark contrast to the racial and

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religious hatred and hostilities that plague communities across a large part of the rest of the world, is indeed a miracle. This is the standing miracle that the Prophet Abraham, his wife, Lady Hagar, his son, Prophet Ishmael, and his distant descendant, the ‘seal of the prophets’ Muhammad Mustapha (s) gave to the world. Moving together as one, millions of worshippers declare over and over:

Labbaik Allahumma Labaik. Labbaik La Sharika Laka Labbaik. Innal Hamda, Wan Ni'mata, Laka wal Mulk La Sharika la.

[Here I am at Thy service O Lord, here I am. Here I am at Thy service and Thou hast no partners. Thine alone is all Praise and all Bounty and Thine alone is the Sovereignty. Thou hast no partners.]

This is an indication of the mindset of the pilgrim as he sets out to gain nearness to Allah, not like a hermit cut off from the world, but together, in the company of fellow brothers and sisters in faith. Indeed! Almighty Allah does not live in Makkah, His presence is felt in our very hearts. The Holy Quran says:

We are nearer to him than his life-vein (50:16)

The human heart is our *ka'bah* which needs to be purified of all idols, such that weaken our faith in the Almighty; our prejudices; our hatred; our greed; our lusts - everything low and sordid that harden our hearts and tear society apart.

Secular benefits of Hajj

Although the primary focus of the Pilgrimage is on the strengthening of the spiritual attributes of the pilgrim, the occasion affords an ideal opportunity for seeking solutions to society's temporal needs as well. The Holy Quran states:

It is no sin that you seek the bounty of your Lord (2:198)

Viable trade relations can be sought and problematic matters confronting the Muslim nations and the world at large can be addressed. Issues such as lack of unity terror-driven ideologies, senseless rebellion, poverty, illiteracy, lack of jobs and job skills, drug and human trafficking, etc. should be given serious attention. We have yet to see wealthy Muslim nations joining hands and visibly addressing these issues on a global scale and showing proof of what successes they have achieved in this regard. What we do still see is large-scale wastage of wealth on the construction of high rise buildings that serve no useful purpose, and funding *madrassas* that breed extremism. Nay it is time that these nations use their wealth for the benefit of society as a whole regardless of race, colour or creed and instead build schools, universities, hospitals, orphanages, and above all ‘pro-

claim’ the lessons of the *Hajj* to all and sundry. And what better way to do this than to engage in the propagation of the Holy Quran. This was the plea of our beloved Prophet (s) on the day of *Arafat* and this is what the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement stands for - the peaceful propagation of the Holy Quran.

Maulana Muhammad Ali and the English Translation of the Holy Quran

This month (September), 100 years ago, the English translation of the Holy Quran by Maulana Muhammad Ali was first published. It was the first English translation by a Muslim scholar that was published and distributed on a large scale to Western countries. Scholars have praised its remarkable, comprehensive commentary that addresses most of the misconceptions and false allegations made against Islam by both errant Muslim scholars and Western critics. The Al Azhar University showed great interest in an Arabic version of the commentary and thus our USA Jamaat arranged for the necessary translation into Arabic. We pray that this work will bring about the much-needed enlightenment of the Holy Book for our Arab communities. We appeal to you all to support us in the dissemination of this translation of the Holy Book to all and sundry by sacrificing regular donations for this effort. One way to do so is to sponsor a Quran and donate it to a deserving person and encourage others to do likewise. Do this as often as possible. Note that the transformation of people is not in our capacity and within the scope of our duty, that is the work of Almighty Allah for He alone knows the hearts of people; however, Maulana Muhammad Ali stated if you give someone a Quran, the Quran will do the work by itself.

We wish you a blessed Eid and may Allah reward you, protect you, and keep you on the path of light and guidance. ■

Al-Asr (“The Time”): Means for Spiritual Progress

**Jummah Khutba (Friday Sermon)
from May 7, 1920**

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

[This article is an abridged version of a *Jummah Khutba (Friday Congregational Prayer Sermon)* by Maulana Muhammad Ali from May 7, 1920 translated from Urdu to English by Dr. Mohammed Ahmad. In this *khutba*, Maulana Muhammad Ali discusses the shortest chapter of the Holy Quran – *Surah Al Asr (“The Time”)*

– and explains the breadth of knowledge and wisdom that may be gained from it. Although only three verses long, this chapter provides a comprehensive lesson on the purpose of life and the particular steps required in order to attain it.]

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.

By the time! —

Surely man is in loss,

Except those who believe and do good, and exhort one another to Truth, and exhort one another to patience. (Holy Quran, “Al-Asr”, Chapter 103)

Unique Characteristic of the Holy Quran

Although *Al-Asr* is a very short chapter of the Holy Quran, it comprehensively explains the subject matter within it. This is characteristic of all chapters of the Holy Quran. Each one contains a specific subject and reveals its meaning perfectly. The great Imams have recognized the comprehensive nature of the subject discussed in this chapter. Imam Shafi has remarked that if it were the only chapter revealed, it would suffice for the guidance of mankind. It is related that the companions of the Holy Prophet would recite this chapter when they would part from one another. This shows how well they understood its significance. They had a much better understanding of the truth contained in these words than the present-day exponents who spend much time and effort investigating trivial points and subtleties.

Four stages of Spiritual Development

What is so distinctive about this chapter that it is given such importance? The words “Surely man is in loss, except those who believe and do good, and exhort one another to Truth, and exhort one another to patience” identifies four stages of spiritual development. Absent any of these four stages, man cannot achieve the goal of excellence.

The first stage is that of belief. Belief means acceptance of truth. The second stage is doing of good. In other words, putting into practice what the tongue has acknowledged and the heart has accepted. The third stage is conveying the truth to the rest of humanity. The fourth stage is remaining patient and steadfast in the face of difficulties that arise due to this effort. If we ponder over it, these four stages are not only the way to achieve excellence in religious but also our worldly undertakings. They may also be described as:

1. Acceptance of a principle.
2. Putting it into practice.

3. Informing others about it.

4. Remaining patient and persevering in adversity.

First Stage: Belief (or Firm Faith)

The first stage is belief. The question arises, belief in what? The most important part of this concept is the Quranic injunction of “belief in the Unseen.” In other words, belief in God, Who is the Great Unseen, the One Who we are unable to perceive with our limited faculties. We cannot see, hear or feel Him, and our physical senses are helpless in perceiving His Hidden Being. The reason for this is that God is Infinite, while man has limitations. How can the one with limitations comprehend the Infinite? Our human faculties are simply incapable of giving us complete knowledge of God.

Last night there was a discussion about the phenomenon of auditory revelation (*ilham*). And an argument was made that such revelation is not from an external source but from a voice from within the human mind, a phenomenon that can be exercised through human effort. The Brahmu sect amongst the Hindus adhere to this belief. The Naturalists among the Muslims also hold the same view. The truth of the matter is that if one does not accept an external source of revelation, one cannot prove the existence of God with certainty. Believing revelation comes from within (as opposed to from an external source) also does not facilitate the strengthening of one’s faith. For example, people who adhere to this view fail to fully appreciate how the prophets prevailed in the face of great difficulties and disappointments. It was their firm faith, which emanates within the hearts of only those who are familiar with the sweet and indelible taste of divine revelation. The revelation that prophets received strengthens their belief in God, and without this revelation this level of firm faith in God, the Great Unseen, does not develop. The strength of conviction possessed by these individuals in the face of great trials and failures cannot be matched by those persons who deny divine revelation. They cannot compare in this regard. Mere intellect and reason cannot foster faith in God to such a perfected state. In fact, such faculties can sometimes impede that progress. Divine revelation leads us to that stage of faith in God from which one never waivers. And developing a firm conviction in the existence of God is the requisite first stage of our spiritual development.

The Second Stage: Doing Good Deeds

The second stage is the doing of good deeds. Without belief, good deeds cannot result. People may do good out of fear of others, whether friends, relatives or social groups. Many people do not lie or steal for fear that getting caught would make them look bad in front of others. Such people do good out of fear for “those whom they take as gods besides Allah”, as the term is used in

the Quran. When they are alone, however, they are not cognizant of doing good for the sake of doing good deeds.

It should also be remembered that a righteous action is that which produces a good and beneficial result. Some deeds may appear to be good, but their consequences are harmful. A righteous action is not what appears pleasing but what produces good results.

And, there are numerous types of good deeds. Every aspect of human life entails thousands of opportunities for engaging in good deeds. In this regard, the Holy Quran has laid down two basic principles that form the root and foundation of righteous deeds. They are: 1) the keeping up of prayer, and 2) spending out of what We have given them (as stated in Holy Quran 2:3). These are the foundation stones for one's self development and the development of others. They are the sources of beauty of character (*husn*) and good morals (*ehsan*). The purpose of good morals is to develop the human soul, and prayer fosters this development to a state of perfection. Prayer actually leads to the goal of self-development. If one is unable to develop his or her own self, he or she cannot foster the spiritual development in others. That is why the Holy Quran always mentions prayer first and then obligatory charity thereafter. Prayer provides for the sustenance of the human soul and its ability to achieve perfection. And establishing a connection with God through prayer is what produces moral qualities. The stronger this bond is, the greater is the nurturing and growth. Piety and good morals are manifested by developing a connection with Allah, and this connection is further developed by being good toward all human beings.

After the "keeping up of prayer", the Holy Quran then emphasizes "spending out of what We have given you". This is a lesson on developing empathy for humanity. Our spiritual faculties are like a seed, and when nurtured can grow into a tree. Prayer by itself cannot confer much benefit unless the human faculties are employed in the service of humanity. Prayer generates the seed of goodness and facilitates the growth and beauty of the human soul, wherefrom good deeds flourish. For example, many individuals say little, but people derive great benefit from them. This characteristic is developed through prayer and by establishing a relationship with Allah. Prayer is in fact a sort of spiritual ascension (*miraj*) of the believer.

After prayer, the corollary part is "spending out of what We have given you". Islam does not prohibit earning or saving wealth or making investments. However, it lays special stress on "spending in the way of Allah". In other words, the wealth you have is not really yours but belongs to Allah, and you should always be pre-

pared to spend it in Allah's way.

The Third Stage: Promoting Truth

The Holy Quran has not ended the path of spiritual development with only having belief and doing good deeds. It also requires us to convey to others the truth we accept and practice. It states, "And exhort one another to Truth, and exhort one another to patience".

Exhorting one another to truth is not confined to those who lead the prayers or to the scholars only. In fact, everybody should exhort one another to truth. The nation in which such individual exhortation no longer exists is indeed unfortunate. Until the scholars are held to account by individual members of the society, they cannot uphold the standards of truth. The plight of a nation is indeed sad where there is no one to point out its erroneous ways.

It is narrated in a Hadith that, "A believer is a mirror image of another believer". Meaning, a believer can detect another believer's faults. Nor is there any fault in pointing out such wrongs. But to do this we have to acquire knowledge. Without knowledge such exhortation is not possible. So, what type of knowledge is needed? We can turn to the words of the prayers of the Holy Prophet for the answer.

The Holy Prophet's prayers are fascinating. If one were to research his supplications, he will discover that each one of them presents an excellent aspect of his character. One of his prayers about knowledge states: "O' Allah benefit me from the knowledge you have given me." As knowledge without applying it is useless, this prayer is for one's acquired knowledge to be put into practice so that benefit may be derived from it. This prayer is then followed by the words: "And give me knowledge that is a source of benefit to me", as people can waste a lifetime acquiring knowledge of things that are useless.

There is a Quranic prayer: "My Lord, increase me in knowledge" (20:114). The meaning being, give me knowledge that does not end and always continues to progress. No one should think that they no longer need to seek knowledge. It is the birth-right of every human being to acquire knowledge. He who does not seek knowledge belies the purpose of his creation.

Now, I have shortcomings. And the remedy for my shortcomings is in your hands. But without knowledge it is not possible for you to rectify them. By acquiring knowledge, you become a source of strength for me. The position I am in demands excellent qualities. At times I find myself falling short of these. The means for correcting me is in your hands. It was Hazrat Abu Bakr regarding whom the Holy Quran states: "Then as for him who gives and keeps his duty, And accepts what is

good (92:5-6). When he was chosen Caliph, he addressed the people in these words: “Help me if I am right, correct me if I am wrong.” Similarly, have you not heard of the old lady who corrected Hazrat Umar regarding the permissible amount of dowry? Each one of you should therefore become a source of blessing for me. Seek knowledge of the Holy Quran and Hadith and become familiar with the life history and character of the Holy Prophet. Knowledge is a treasure and a source of great strength.

Some people may believe that they have already gone through the Holy Quran two or three times, so there is no sense in repeating this again and again. But people who have achieved spiritual excellence have read the Quran numerous times. It is said of Imam Shafi, that he studied the Quran three hundred times to research one particular issue. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad also read the Holy Quran a multitude of times. Whenever he wrote on a subject, he always researched the entire Quran and would cite to it. You should follow this practice and not tire of it. Is the Holy Quran and prayer something to be tired of? We are facing great difficulties. There is a great need for supplications and for exhorting each other. Such exhortation strengthens us.

The Fourth Stage: Promoting Patience

The fourth stage of spiritual development is referred to in the Quranic words “And exhort one another to patience”. Patience is the moral strength required to achieve something of benefit. It is also required to face the adverse circumstances that are inherent in the process of achieving something of benefit. Good morals do not develop without patience. The Holy Quran recognizes the excellence of the quality of patience with the statement, “give good news to the patient” (2:155). So bear the hardships that come your way, whether in accepting the truth, putting it into practice, or spreading the message. If you cannot bear such adversity, you cannot succeed.

See how comprehensive the lessons we learn from this small chapter of the Holy Quran are? Accept the truth; practice the truth; spread the truth; and bear adversity with conviction and patience. This is a tremendous message. The venerable companions of the Holy Prophet did not engage in seeking unnecessary subtleties and trivial analysis of the Quran. They, however, understood the importance of these words and would recite this chapter when they would part from one another. This is why I brought it to your attention today.

May Allah, the Most High, give me and you the strength to work in His way! Whenever you do something good, don't count your accomplishments. Give

your wealth in God's way, even your life, but never utter a word of complaint. Do not say that you became poor and without any means due to spending in Allah's way. What you spent was your duty. Do not put God under an obligation for what you did. As Allah, the Most High, says, “Rather Allah lays you under an obligation by guiding you to the faith, if you are truthful” (49:17).

The person who thinks he has accomplished all he needs to do fails to make progress. Until you realize your weaknesses, you cannot improve. This is not a time for pretentious behavior or reminding others of their indebtedness to you. It is a time to suffer in the way of Allah and be pleased. Such a time came upon the noble companions when they were digging the trench and lifting baskets full of earth upon their heads. While undertaking the arduous task they cried out:

O Allah! There is no happiness but the happiness of the Hereafter; O Allah! have mercy on the Refugees and the Helpers

You should also find such contentment in facing your difficulties.

The Second Sermon

I am pleading before you like a beggar. Consider me one, and fulfill my petition. The Holy Quran says:

And him who asks, chide not (93:10)

My request is that you set a good example. Each one of you can accomplish great works. For God's sake, take up these responsibilities. Do not think that the worldly life is all there is. Be concerned about the Hereafter. Our religion at this time is facing great adversity and suffering. If you want to progress from this state, come towards the Holy Quran. Alas! The Muslim nation has drifted afar. Our only recourse is prayer. Let us pray together.

Our Lord, punish us not if we forget or make a mistake. Our Lord, do not lay on us a burden as Thou didst lay on those before us. Our Lord, impose not on us (afflictions) which we have not the strength to bear. And pardon us! And grant us protection! And have mercy on us! Thou art our Patron, so grant us victory over the disbelieving people. (2:286)

O Allah! Exalt Muhammad and the true followers of Muhammad as Thou didst exalt Abraham and the true followers of Abraham; surely Thou art Praised, Magnified. O Allah! Bless Muhammad and the true followers of Muhammad as Thou didst bless Abraham and the true followers of Abraham; surely Thou art Praised, Magnified. ■

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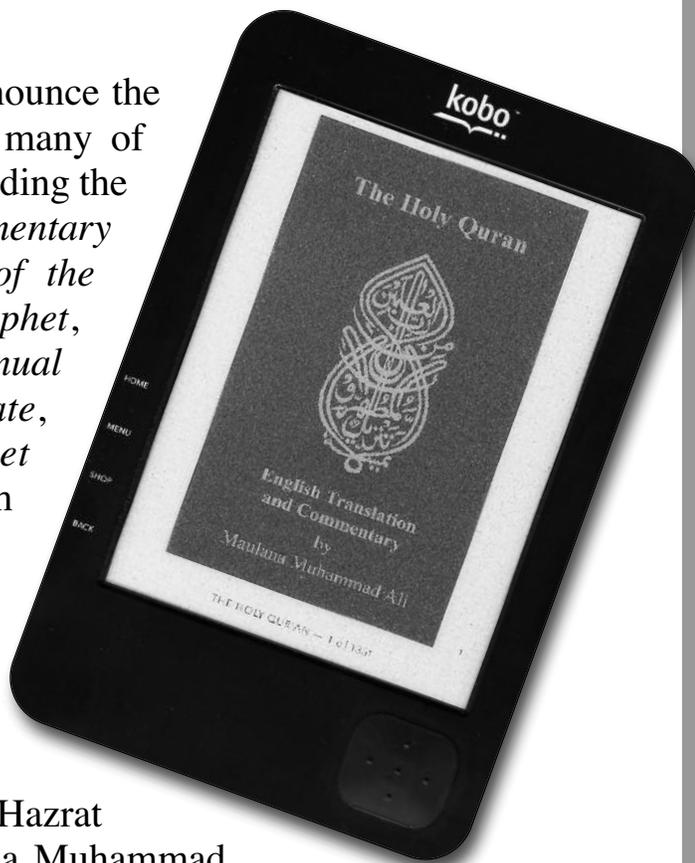
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