

“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

July – September 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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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:

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U.K.	Canada
Holland	Fiji
Indonesia	Germany
Suriname	India
Trinidad	South Africa
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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.

The “Woking Gang”: Political Activities of British Muslims 1905-1920

Selections from Honors Thesis
(Georgetown University)

By Katherine Cienkus

[This article comprises selections from the Introduction and first chapter of the honors thesis submitted by Katherine Cienkus to the Department of History at Georgetown University. This paper introduces British Muslims in the greater context of the Muslim world during the beginning of the twentieth century, and looks at individual influential British Muslims and their activities through their contextualized backgrounds. Prominent throughout this paper is the influence of Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, the Woking Muslim Mission, and the Islamic philosophy of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement (as disseminated through The Islamic Review). The full paper is available online at the following link: <https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/bitstream/handle/10822/1050484/Cienkus%20final%20thesis.pdf?sequence=1>.]

Introduction

In 1914, Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, the imam of the Woking Muslim Mission, and a recent British convert to Islam, Lord Headley, took a photograph together. Kamal-ud-Din commented, “His Lordship had his photograph taken with me. He hopes that by publishing this photograph we can dispel Rudyard Kipling’s notion that ‘East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,’ and show that the Prophet of Arabia has brought together the East and the West.”¹ A 2013 Centenary Booklet created by The Shah Jahan Mosque, formerly the Woking Muslim Mission, featured this quote on the cover page. The modern mosque members who compiled this booklet have a historical self-consciousness, a realization that the significance and implications of Kamal-ud-Din’s quote at their tiny mosque in Surrey was revolutionary then, and still relevant today.

One hundred years later, a sense exists among the members of the Woking Muslim Mission that their predecessors were unique, not only in the Muslim world, but also in the budding analysis of imperial British history itself. That legacy continues to inform Woking identity today. Their predecessors defied stereotypes and categorization: many were white British Christians who converted to Islam, and attempted to be bridge-builders between Christianity and Islam, advo-

cates for imperial citizens to London. The version of Islam they espouse reveal their complex identities: in 1961, fifty years between the founding of the mosque and the Centenary booklet, the Mission published a book named *Islam Our Choice*, filled with the testimonials of over 150 European and American converts to Islam. Their words contained glowing appraisals of Islam’s “practicality,” and how it is, “the religion of common sense.”²

This approach of characterizing Islam as a “common sense” faith was typical of the Muslim reformers of the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries at the time of the foundation of the Woking Muslim Mission.³ The Muslim missionaries coming from India in the early 1900s, converting Christians in England, explained Islam as “common sense” because of its seemingly apparent similarities to Christianity, and its lack of complex doctrine. Thus, a consistent theme in each convert’s testimonials was the connection of Islam to Christianity, and how, as a convert in *Islam our Choice* purports, “a Muslim is never considered a true votary of Islam within its pale if he does not believe in Moses, Jesus and the other prophets ... Hence one can frankly say that the nearest religion to Christianity among all the religions in the world is Islam.”⁴ Though written in 1961, these lines are almost verbatim what Lord Headley wrote after his 1913 conversion, that, “Islam is the religion of grand simplicity; it satisfies the noblest longings of the soul, and in no way contravenes the teachings of Moses or Christ.”⁵

Most surprisingly to modern readers, on the last page of the book, the Woking Muslim Mission listed their guiding principles as, “Jesus as a Venerated Divine Teacher,” “Universal Human Rights,” “Equality of the Sexes,” and a “Democratic Way of Life,” among others.⁶ For those who hold stereotypes of Islam, ones that in Said’s Orientalist framework would include exoticism, lack of progress, and fanaticism, these acclamations would seem shocking and unIslamic. Therefore, the rhetoric connecting Islam to Christianity that members of the WMM used in 1913 has been reiterated by the Woking Mission and Literary Trust over the past century as a testament to their distinct role in British history and as pioneers of Islam in the West. Yet the mosque’s members in 1961, and even in 2017, based their claims on the ideas that were fundamental to their founders in 1913.

This thesis focuses on eight individuals who were politically active Muslims residing in England during World War I, all of whom associated with the Woking Muslim Mission. World War I and globalization connected to the British Empire brought into contact British Muslims in London with elite British converts to Islam,

creating a particular moment of British Muslim political identity that defied sectarian differences. The members of the Woking Muslim Mission were a disparate group consisting of British Christian converts, politically active South Asians, Africans, Ottomans, and seamen. In many ways, they were representative of the diversity of Muslims around the Empire. Yet, they strategically forsook these differences in order to create a distinct British Muslim identity. They used their social and political connections within England, networks facilitated by the British Empire, and colonial and democratic institutions to speak their mind. Therefore, in order to inject nuance into the typical narrative of the British wartime environment, one must listen to the wider social and religious groups within England, such as British Muslims. Their self-conscious rhetoric reflects the multitude of challenges to identity facing British citizens, including the meaning of British citizenship at the end of empire, race, religion, loyalty, and the status of the Muslim world.

...

The main goal of this thesis is to return voice and autonomy back to the domestic British Muslim population as a group that aimed to be active participants in a government which attempted to dictate policies that affected their identities and loyalties through their exclusion. In this narrative, Muslims in Britain were active participants in the public sphere, many of whom realized that the best way to advocate for their interests was through the democratic process: speaking with government officials, disseminating pamphlets, and creating community. The history of Muslims in domestic Britain before and during World War I displays how they reconciled their “temporal and spiritual worlds.”¹³

In sum, this thesis will argue that members of the Woking Mission Mosque were increasingly politically active throughout World War I due to their religious affiliations with Islam, which caused them to question their dual-identity as Muslim and British in light of the war against the Ottoman Empire, the last Islamic empire free from European control as of World War I. This politicization caused an “odd set of bedfellows”¹⁴ to coalesce around key causes, including the British Government’s treatment of its Muslim subjects, its lack of intervention to protect Muslim populations around the world, and the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the heritage British Muslims of varying ideological backgrounds and purposes in London allied with elite British Christian converts to Islam, creating a distinct moment of British Muslim political identity that strategically attempted to influence foreign policy and defied sectarian differences. The Introduction places British Muslims in the greater context of the Muslim world during the beginning of the twentieth century,

including modernist movements such as the Ahmadiyya Movement and pan-Islam. Chapter 1 will look at eight individual influential British Muslims – Khwaja Kamalud-Din, Syed Ameer Ali, M.H. Kidwai, Duse Mohamed Ali, Lord Headley, Marmaduke Pickthall, Abdullah Quilliam, and Lady Evelyn Cobbold – and track their conversions to Islam through their contextualized backgrounds. Chapter 2 explores their transition to politics and attempts at political organization, as well as their differences that hindered effective cohesion once World War I began. Finally, Chapter 3 brings this background together to examine one of their most high profile attempts to change British foreign policy, the Balfour Declaration. In the end, British Muslims had many internal and external forces working against them; namely the newness and complexity of their British Muslim identity, in-fighting, negative public and governmental opinion, and British wartime aims that conflicted with their goals. However, in the years leading up to and during World War I, British Muslims developed a political consciousness that led to a previously unexplored period of cohesive British Muslim identity centered around religion, an identity not explicitly formulated again in England for decades.

...

The South Asian community first began analyzing Muslims in their own right but by looking at Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Indian Muslims. In *South Asian Resistances in Britain, 1858 – 1947*, Ahmed and Mukherjee look at the South Asian community in London as viable members of the British community during this time period, migrating to attend university, for economic opportunities, and involving themselves in politics.²⁵ However, even within increasing scholarship on South Asian migration and contributions to Great Britain, the focus has been on Sunni South Asian Muslims, and sects such as Sufis and Ahmadi have been neglected.²⁶ The Ahmadi, a movement coming out of India in 1889 by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1836-1908), were crucial in organizing Islam in England right before World War I, helping to create the distinct British Muslim identity mentioned above; they were later subsumed within larger South Asian migration after World War I.²⁷ However, recently scholars such as Eric Germain and Ron Geaves have begun to look at the Ahmadi networks and their impact on British Islam in the preWWI and interwar periods.²⁸

...

Chapter 1: Mosques, Members, and Converts

...

Most of the British and American public alike are hardly aware of Muslims in Britain before World War

II, let alone Christian converts. This is especially surprising when noting that in 1914, the British Empire had the largest population of Muslims in the world.⁴⁵ The historiographic challenges highlighted above resulted in the only recent analysis of British conversion to Islam throughout the twentieth century, with British Muslims viewed as a distinct identity group outside of immigration or nationality mainly in the twenty first century. Since Muslims in England were paired with “coloured” or “South Asian” histories, ethnic categories subsumed Muslims and analyzed them vis-à-vis race relations, rather than through a religious lens.⁴⁶ In light of the categorization of Muslims by ethnicity, the appearance of “white,” even upper-class, British Muslims at the turn of the twentieth century does not easily fit into commonly understood narratives of Muslim life in England. The conversion of British Christians before World War I is an anomaly, and thus attracted great interest in the last five years from scholars such as Jamie Gilham, Humayun Ansari, and Ron Geaves. Fortunately, many of the relevant individuals left behind political and personal writings that explain their motivations and conflicts. The rediscovery of the voices of the converts and their allies’ paints a picture of identity politics within Britain that clearly demonstrates that individuals were grappling with the questions of how to live as Muslims in Western culture during this era.

While still small, by 1924, there were around 10,000 Muslims residing in England, 1,000 of which were converts, while in the Empire at large some estimates point to over 100 million Muslims.⁴⁷ The trend of British conversions in the first half of the twentieth century was the strongest from 1905-1925, petering out quite rapidly after that until increasing again after World War II. The question, then, is what forces led to an influx of British converts to Islam around World War I? Some possible explanations for the increase in conversion that this chapter explores are disillusionment with the West during World War I, the influence of the Ahmadi missionary networks, desire for a new world order that was counter-cultural to Western European Christianity, and increased contact with Muslims through globalization and travel. This thesis cannot analyze every conversion and the undoubtedly complex personal motivations of conversion for the thousand men and women converted by 1924. The richest written sources remaining are from the British elites who converted to Islam at this time, namely Lord Headley (1855-1935), William Henry Quilliam (1856-1932), Marmaduke Pickthall (1875-1936), and Lady Evelyn Cobbold (1867-1963).⁴⁸ Their source base gathered in England and through online databases includes pamphlets from their political societies, articles written to various newspapers and in the *Islamic Review*, published books, personal and public

letters, and events, such as lectures and sermons. This thesis is especially concerned with these converts due to their engagement in political activity centered around the WMM during World War I. Further, the converts helped create a singular environment in the WMM, one that was elite-focused, nonsectarian, political, and practiced an upper-class “Christianized” Islam. The converts allied themselves in the mosque with an eclectic mix of Eastern sympathizers, Indian missionaries like Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, and pan-Islamists such as M.H. Kidwai. Further research could assess the lives of less privileged converts, as well as what Muslims in the Ottoman Empire, India, and Africa thought about these converts and the policies for which they advocated.

The Woking Muslim Mission propagated a progressive form of Islam and facilitated these conversions. In the 1880s, Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din met and joined Mirza Ghulam Ahmad’s Ahmadiyya movement in Lahore. The Ahmadiyya movement can be best understood as a reaction to the increased Christian proselytism in the Muslim world, combatting the “evangelical Orientalism” exemplified in periodical such as *The Moslem World*.⁴⁹ Therefore, according to Aydin it, “used evangelism, construed as nonviolent jihad, to disseminate a version of Islam they considered genuine and universal.”⁵⁰ Ahmad died in 1908, and the Ahmadiyya movement split into two groups. The minority Lahori group – Kamal-ud-Din’s branch – decided to stay in the Sunni Orthodoxy and send missionaries abroad.⁵¹ Leaving his barrister practice, Kamal-ud-Din established the WMM in 1913 shortly after coming to Great Britain.⁵² The period of intense conversion activity coincided with Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din reinstating the WMM and attaining the support of a few high profile converts right before the start of the war. Kamal-ud-Din hoped that British Christians would be receptive to his portrayal of Islam as progressive, modern, tolerant, and non-sectarian. To some Christian converts, these aspects were especially appealing, as they were trying to escape what they were increasingly seeing as hypocritical and dogmatic Western Christianity, related to Victorian-era Britain and World War I. Therefore, the conversions were very much connected to developments in the Muslim world, such as pan-Islam, the Ahmadiyya movement, as well as London acting as a facilitator for the diverse strains of thought around the empire.

...

Here, the influence of Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din and Ahmadi missionaries on the trajectory of British Muslim identity and organization is clear. Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din instituted what became the Woking Muslim Mission, the main hub of British Muslim activ-

ity during World War I.⁶⁷ Kamal-ud-Din was an eminent lawyer and Islamic scholar from Punjab, who had converted to the Ahmadiyya sect of Islam, a reformists and progressive strand originating in India in the 1880s.⁶⁸ Once he moved to London, he immediately saw the need for a Muslim center closer to the city and subsequently purchased the land rights from Leitner's son in 1913. This initiative had the backing of an Indian donor, Shah Jahan, and was renamed the Woking Muslim Mission just in time for the beginning of the World War I.⁶⁹ In 1913, similar to the LMI's *The Crescent* and *The Islamic World*, Kamal-ud-Din started the *Muslim India and Islamic Review*, renamed the *Islamic Review* in 1914.⁷⁰ This periodical was influential in reaching an audience of British Christians that had little understanding of Islam.⁷¹"

...

As previously mentioned, Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, a lawyer from India who immigrated to London in 1913 and set up the WMM proved instrumental to the involvement of the other three Muslims from different ethnic and religious traditions. Kamal-ud-Din was able to make the WMM non-sectarian in the Muslim world through preaching his Ahmadi version of Islam that stressed unity over division in the Muslim world.

...

With the context of the status of Islam in Britain from 1891-1913, starting with the establishment of the Liverpool Muslim Institute by Abdullah Quilliam, and moving into the establishment of the Woking Muslim Mission with Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, an Ahmadi Muslim missionary, at its head, it is now possible to examine the societal conditions that made the environment ripe for the conversion of elite British Christians. These include the destructive force of World War I, contact with the progressive form of Ahmadiyya Islam, and the circulation of periodicals such as the *Islamic Review* that could reach a wider audience who had little prior contact with Islam.

...

Further, contact with pan-Islam and Indian missionaries, most specifically the WMM imam Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din and his progressive Ahmadiyya strain of Islam, had a profound impact on the type modern and progressive Islam promoted in England. However, though the WMM propagated Ahmadiyya Islam, and the converts followed that strain of progressive Islam, most converts were not aware of the Ahmadi roots and thought themselves as a part a general strain of Sunni Hanafi Islam.⁹⁵ Along with revitalizing the mosque, Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din started the *Muslim India and Islamic Review* the journal of the mosque, that ultimate-

ly ran from 1913 – 1967.⁹⁶ The role of the *Muslim India and Islamic Review* (its title until 1914 when it became the *Islamic Review*) cannot be undervalued; it was a subscription-based paper, the mouthpiece of the mosque, spreading an idealized version of Islam, conversion, and the status of the Muslim world. The periodical was in English, another differentiating and influential factor that let it reach a wider European audience, since most press about Islam and the Muslim-world was in Arabic and Hindu at the time. One of the journal's main purposes in Kamal-ud-Din's eyes was to challenge misrepresentation of Islam by showing the compatibility of the religion with British life.⁹⁷ He did this in a manner reminiscent of Quilliam by connecting Islam and Christianity, and attempting to break down prejudices. In this way, Kamal-ud-Din hoped to make a name for himself as a skilled and moderate defender of Islam.⁹⁸ Converts themselves even admitted the periodical influenced their conversion. For example, convert Charles Buchanan-Hamilton, a Deputy Surgeon-General in the Royal Navy, purportedly wrote right before his death, "I have read the article 'Islam My Only Choice,' and I have decided to join your faith."⁹⁹

What, then, was said in the *Islamic Review* that proved so convincing that it could cause grown men, born and raised with British Christian values and notions that were seemingly antithetical to Islam and "the East," to convert to an exotic faith? The particular aspects of the Woking Muslim Mission and Ahmadiyya Islam help shed light on this matter. The *Islamic Review* tried to display Islam as rationalistic, showed both the continuities and criticisms of Islam and Christianity, and focused on practice and unity over theology and sectarianism.¹⁰⁰ This appealed to converts who became attracted to the perceived simplicity and practicality of Islam. A good example, indicative of many other converts at this time, is Khalida Buchanan-Hamilton, wife of the Royal Navy General Charles William Buchanan Hamilton. She converted after reading the *Islamic Review* and published a short book entitled *My Belief*, where she spoke to her views on the superfluity of the saints and Prophets in Christianity; rather, "It is only the power at the source that should be called God, and not the agencies that are subordinate to it."¹⁰¹

Once World War I began, with the Ottoman Empire as enemy, British Christians began to view Muslims with renewed suspicion, but Kamal-ud-Din was still convinced that, "no other book but the Quran, therefore, will meet the demand of our time."¹⁰² In this vein, he believed that if he presented Islam in its true state, the public would be sympathetic to it and desire to convert.¹⁰³ His goal, according to Jamie Gilham, was to, "present Islam as a secure, progressive, tolerant moral force in the face of increasing materialism and secular-

ity,” in British society.¹⁰⁴ One can clearly see where this rhetoric appealed to somewhat disenfranchised and searching souls of Cobbold, Headley, and others. However, Kamal-ud-Din’s portrayal of Islam in this manner did not occur in a vacuum, but must be viewed in the context of the Muslim reformers out of India at the time, a fact Gilham overlooks. ■

Endnotes:

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26. Ron Geaves, *Islam and Britain: Muslim Mission in an Age of Empire* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 2.
27. Geaves, *Islam and Britain*, 5.
28. See Eric Germain, “Southern Hemisphere Diasporic Communities in the Building of an International Muslim Public Opinion at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 27 no. 1 (2007): 126-138.; Ron Geaves, *Islam and Britain: Muslim Mission in an Age of Empire* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).
45. Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World*, 82.
46. Ansari, *The Infidel Within*, 9.
47. Shah Jahan Mosque. <https://www.shahjahanmosque.org.uk/> (accessed November 7, 2017).
48. William Henry Quilliam went by many names throughout his life. He changed his name to Abdullah Quilliam after his conversion, and again to Henri de Léon when he returned to London from the Middle East in 1913. Abdullah Quilliam will be his most frequent name in this thesis.
49. Eric Germain, “The First Muslim Mission on a European Scale: Ahmadi-Lahori Networks in the Inter-War Period,” in *Islam in Inter-war Europe*, eds. Nathalie Clayer and Eric Germain (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 90.
50. Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World*, 75.
51. Germain, “Southern Hemisphere Diasporic Communities,” 134.
52. Ahmadiyya Isha’at Islam Lahore, “The Woking Muslim Mission,” accessed October 4, 2017, <http://www.woking-muslim.org/>.
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69. “The Shah Jahan Mosque, Woking,” *Making Britain Database*, accessed November 7, 2017, <https://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/shah-jahan-mosque-woking>.
70. Aziz, *Woking Muslim Mission Centenary*, 3; Wartime censorship necessitated the renaming of the periodical to not include India.
71. Germain, “The First Muslim Mission on a European Scale,” 93.
95. Gilham, “Marmaduke Pickthall and the British Muslim Convert Community,” 57.
96. Khawaja Kamal-ud-Din was involved with the *Islamic Review* even after he ceased being imam of WMM until his death in December 1932.
97. “Islamic Review,” *Making Britain Database*, accessed November 7, 2017, <https://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/islamic-review>.
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99. “A Declaration,” *Islamic Review*, vol 23 (February 1935), 41.
100. Shearmur, “The Woking Mosque Muslims,” 169.
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102. Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, “Islam My Only Choice,” in *Islam our Choice*, ed. S. A. Khulusi. 2nd ed. (Woking, England: The Woking Muslim Mission and Literary Trust, 1961), 328.
103. Aziz, *Woking Muslim Mission Centenary*, 5.
104. Gilham, *Loyal Enemies*, 129.

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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)

Islam and the West

Speech at Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies

By His Royal Highness, Prince Charles

[This article is a transcript of a speech delivered by Prince Charles of Wales at the Oxford Center for Islamic Studies on October 27, 1993. In this speech, Prince Charles focusses on the disconcerting level of disconnect between the West and the Islamic World and the need for re-evaluating the barriers to mutual understanding in the modern interdependent world in which we live. The prevalent discord, he argues, is often based on subjective and predisposed perceptions of history and non-nuanced views of prevailing customs in relation to authoritative religious tradition. Appreciating commonality as well as the contributions of others, he further posits, is crucial to advance in a positive direction. Although 25 years have passed, the balanced and reasoned approach so well articulated by Prince Charles in this speech is even more relevant and necessary today than when first delivered.]

Ladies and gentlemen, it was suggested to me when I first began to consider the subject of this lecture, that I should take comfort from the Arab proverb, 'In every head there is some wisdom'. I confess that I have few qualifications as a scholar to justify my presence here, in this theatre, where so many people much more learned than I have preached and generally advanced the sum of human knowledge. I might feel more prepared if I were an offspring of your distinguished University, rather than a product of that 'Technical College of the Fens' - though I hope you will bear in mind that a chair of Arabic was established in 17th century Cambridge a full four years before your first chair of Arabic at Oxford.

Unlike many of you, I am not an expert on Islam - though I am delighted, for reasons which I hope will become clear, to be a Patron of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. The Centre has the potential to be an important and exciting vehicle for promoting and improving understanding of the Islamic world in Britain, and one which I hope will earn its place alongside other centres of Islamic study in Oxford, like the Oriental Institute and the Middle East Centre, as an institution of which the University, and scholars more widely, will become justly proud.

Given all the reservations I have about venturing into a complex and controversial field, you may well ask why I am here in this marvellous Wren building talking to you on the subject of Islam and the West. The reason is, ladies and gentlemen, that I believe wholeheartedly

that the links between these two worlds matter more today than ever before, because the degree of misunderstanding between the Islamic and Western worlds remains dangerously high, and because the need for the two to live and work together in our increasingly interdependent world has never been greater. At the same time I am only too well aware of the minefields which lie across the path of the inexpert traveller who is bent on exploring this difficult route. Some of what I shall say will undoubtedly provoke disagreement, criticism, misunderstanding and, knowing my luck, probably worse. But perhaps, when all is said and done, it is worth recalling another Arab proverb: 'What comes from the lips reaches the ears. What comes from the heart reaches the heart.'

The depressing fact is that, despite the advances in technology and mass communication of the second half of the 20th century, despite mass travel, the intermingling of races, the ever-growing reduction - or so we believe - of the mysteries of our world, misunderstandings between Islam and the West continue. Indeed, they may be growing. As far as the West is concerned, this cannot be because of ignorance. There are one billion Muslims worldwide. Many millions of them live in countries of the Commonwealth. Ten million or more of them live in the West, and around one million here in Britain. Our own Islamic community has been growing and flourishing for decades. There are nearly 500 mosques in Britain. Popular interest in Islamic culture in Britain is growing fast. Many of you will recall - and I think some of you took part in - the wonderful Festival of Islam which Her Majesty The Queen opened in 1976. Islam is all around us. And yet distrust, even fear, persist.

In the post-Cold War world of the 1990s, the prospects for peace should be greater than at any time this century. In the Middle East, the remarkable and encouraging events of recent weeks have created new hope for an end to an issue which has divided the world and been so dramatic a source of violence and hatred. But the dangers have not disappeared. In the Muslim world, we are seeing the unique way of life of the Marsh Arabs of Southern Iraq, thousands of years old, being systematically devastated and destroyed. I confess that for a whole year I have wanted to find a suitable opportunity to express my despair and outrage at the unmentionable horrors being perpetrated in Southern Iraq. To me, the supreme and tragic irony of what has been happening to the Shia population of Iraq - especially in the ancient city and holy shrine of Kerbala - is that after the western allies took immense care to avoid bombing such holy places (and I remember begging General Schwarzkopf when I met him in Riyadh in December 1990, before the actual war began to liberate Kuwait, to

do his best to protect such shrines during any conflict), it was Saddam Hussein himself, and his terrifying regime, who caused the destruction of some of Islam's holiest sites.

And now we have to witness the deliberate draining of the marshes and the near total destruction of a unique habitat, together with an entire population that has depended on it since the dawn of human civilisation. The international community has been told the draining of the marshes is for agricultural purposes. How many more obscene lies do we have to be told before action is actually taken? Even at the eleventh hour it is still not too late to prevent a total cataclysm. I pray that this might at least be a cause in which Islam and the West could join forces for the sake of our common humanity.

I have highlighted this particular example because it is so avoidable. Elsewhere, the violence and hatred are more intractable and deep-seated, as we go on seeing every day to our horror in the wretched suffering of peoples across the world - in the former Yugoslavia, in Somalia, Angola, Sudan, in so many of the former Soviet Republics. In Yugoslavia the terrible sufferings of the Bosnian Muslims, alongside that of other communities in that cruel war, help keep alive many of the fears and prejudices which our two worlds retain of each other. Conflict, of course, comes about because of the misuse of power and the clash of ideals, not to mention the inflammatory activities of unscrupulous and bigoted leaders. But it also arises, tragically, from an inability to understand, and from the powerful emotions which, out of misunderstanding, lead to distrust and fear. Ladies and gentlemen, we must not slide into a new era of danger and division because governments and peoples, communities and religions, cannot live together in peace in a shrinking world.

It is odd, in many ways, that misunderstandings between Islam and the West should persist. For that which binds our two worlds together is so much more powerful than that which divides us. Muslims, Christians - and Jews - are all 'peoples of the Book'. Islam and Christianity share a common monotheistic vision: a belief in one divine God, in the transience of our earthly life, in our accountability for our actions, and in the assurance of life to come. We share many key values in common: respect for knowledge, for justice, compassion towards the poor and underprivileged, the importance of family life, respect for parents. 'Honour thy father and thy mother' is a Quranic precept too. Our history has been closely bound up together.

There, however, is one root of the problem. For much of that history has been one of conflict; 14 centuries too often marked by mutual hostility. That has given rise to an enduring tradition of fear and distrust, because our

two worlds have so often seen that past in contradictory ways. To Western schoolchildren, the 200 years of the Crusades are traditionally seen as a series of heroic, chivalrous exploits in which the kings, knights, princes - and children - of Europe tried to wrest Jerusalem from the wicked Muslim infidel. To Muslims, the Crusades were an episode of great cruelty and terrible plunder, of Western infidel soldiers of fortune and horrific atrocities, perhaps exemplified best by the massacres committed by the Crusaders when, in 1099, they took back Jerusalem, the third holiest city in Islam. For us in the West, 1492 speaks of human endeavour and new horizons, of Columbus and the discovery of the Americas. To Muslims, 1492 is a year of tragedy - the year Granada fell to Ferdinand and Isabella, signifying the end of eight centuries of Muslim civilisation in Europe.

The point, I think, is not that one or other picture is more true, or has a monopoly of truth. It is that misunderstandings arise when we fail to appreciate how others look at the world, its history, and our respective roles in it.

The corollary of how we in the West see our history has so often been to regard Islam as a threat - in medieval times as a military conqueror, and in more modern times as a source of intolerance, extremism and terrorism. One can understand how the taking of Constantinople, when it fell to Sultan Mehmet in 1453, and the close-run defeats of the Turks outside Vienna in 1529 and 1683, should have sent shivers of fear through Europe's rulers. The history of the Balkans under Ottoman rule provided examples of cruelty which sank deep into Western feelings. But the threat has not been one way. With Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, followed by the invasions and conquests of the 19th century, the pendulum swung, and almost all the Arab world became occupied by the Western powers. With the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Europe's triumph over Islam seemed complete.

Those days of conquest are over. But even now our common attitude to Islam suffers because the way we understand it has been hijacked by the extreme and the superficial. To many of us in the West, Islam is seen in terms of the tragic civil war in Lebanon, the killings and bombings perpetrated by extremist groups in the Middle East, and by what is commonly referred to as 'Islamic fundamentalism'. Our judgement of Islam has been grossly distorted by taking the extremes to be the norm. That, ladies and gentlemen, is a serious mistake. It is like judging the quality of life in Britain by the existence of murder and rape, child abuse and drug addiction. The extremes exist, and they must be dealt with. But when used as a basis to judge a society, they lead to distortion and unfairness.

For example, people in this country frequently argue that Sharia law of the Islamic world is cruel, barbaric and unjust. Our newspapers, above all, love to peddle those unthinking prejudices. The truth is, of course, different and always more complex. My own understanding is that extremes are rarely practised. The guiding principle and spirit of Islamic law, taken straight from the Qur'an, should be those of equity and compassion. We need to study its actual application before we make judgements. We must distinguish between systems of justice administered with integrity, and systems of justice as we may see them practised which have been deformed for political reasons into something no longer Islamic. We must bear in mind the sharp debate taking place in the Islamic world itself about the extent of the universality or timelessness of Sharia law, and the degree to which the application of that law is continually changing and evolving.

We should also distinguish Islam from the customs of some Islamic states. Another obvious Western prejudice is to judge the position of women in Islamic society by the extreme cases. Yet Islam is not a monolith and the picture is not simple. Remember, if you will, that Islamic countries like Turkey, Egypt and Syria gave women the vote as early as Europe did its women - and much earlier than in Switzerland! In those countries women have long enjoyed equal pay, and the opportunity to play a full working role in their societies. The rights of Muslim women to property and inheritance, to some protection if divorced, and to the conducting of business, were rights prescribed by the Qur'an 1,400 years ago, even if they were not everywhere translated into practice. In Britain at least, some of these rights were novel even to my grandmother's generation! Benazir Bhutto and Begum Khaleda Zia became prime ministers in their own traditional societies when Britain had for the first time ever in its history elected a female prime minister. That, I think, does not necessarily smack of a mediaeval society.

Women are not automatically second-class citizens because they live in Islamic countries. We cannot judge the position of women in Islam aright if we take the most conservative Islamic states as representative of the whole. For example, the veiling of women is not at all universal across the Islamic world. Indeed, I was intrigued to learn that the custom of wearing the veil owed much to Byzantine and Sassanian traditions, nothing to the Prophet of Islam. Some Muslim women never adopted the veil, others have discarded it, others - particularly the younger generation - have more recently chosen to wear the veil or the headscarf as a personal statement of their Muslim identity. But we should not confuse the modesty of dress prescribed by the Qur'an for men as well as women with the outward forms of

secular custom or social status which have their origins elsewhere.

We in the West need also to understand the Islamic world's view of us. There is nothing to be gained, and much harm to be done, by refusing to comprehend the extent to which many people in the Islamic world genuinely fear our own Western materialism and mass culture as a deadly challenge to their Islamic culture and way of life. Some of us may think the material trappings of Western society which we have exported to the Islamic world - television, fast-food and the electronic gadgets of our everyday lives - are a modernising, self-evidently good, influence. But we fall into the trap of dreadful arrogance if we confuse 'modernity' in other countries with their becoming more like us. The fact is that our form of materialism can be offensive to devout Muslims - and I do not just mean the extremists among them. We must understand that reaction, just as the West's attitude to some of the more rigorous aspects of Islamic life, needs to be understood in the Islamic world.

This, I believe, would help us understand what we have commonly come to see as the threat of Islamic fundamentalism. We need to be careful of that emotive label, 'fundamentalism', and distinguish, as Muslims do, between revivalists, who choose to take the practice of their religion most devoutly, and fanatics or extremists who use this devotion for their political ends. Among the many religious, social and political causes of what we might more accurately call the Islamic revival is a powerful feeling of disenchantment, of the realisation that Western technology and material things are insufficient, and that a deeper meaning to life lies elsewhere in the essence of Islamic belief.

At the same time, we must not be tempted to believe that extremism is in some way the hallmark and essence of the Muslim. Extremism is no more the monopoly of Islam than it is the monopoly of other religions, including Christianity. The vast majority of Muslims, though personally pious, are moderate in their politics. Theirs is the 'religion of the middle way'. The Prophet himself always disliked and feared extremism. Perhaps the fear of Islamic revivalism which coloured the 1980s is now beginning to give way in the West to an understanding of the genuine spiritual forces behind this groundswell. But if we are to understand this important movement, we must learn to distinguish clearly between what the vast majority of Muslims believe and the terrible violence of a small minority among them - like the men in Cairo yesterday - which civilised people everywhere must condemn.

Chancellor, ladies and gentlemen, if there is much misunderstanding in the West about the nature of Islam,

there is also much ignorance about the debt our own culture and civilisation owe to the Islamic world. It is a failure which stems, I think, from the straitjacket of history which we have inherited. The medieval Islamic world, from Central Asia to the shores of the Atlantic, was a world where scholars and men of learning flourished. But because we have tended to see Islam as the enemy of the West, as an alien culture, society and system of belief, we have tended to ignore or erase its great relevance to our own history.

For example, we have underestimated the importance of 800 years of Islamic society and culture in Spain between the 8th and 15th centuries. The contribution of Muslim Spain to the preservation of classical learning during the Dark Ages, and to the first flowerings of the Renaissance, has long been recognised. But Islamic Spain was much more than a mere larder where Hellenistic knowledge was kept for later consumption by the emerging modern Western world. Not only did Muslim Spain gather and preserve the intellectual content of ancient Greek and Roman civilisation, it also interpreted and expanded upon that civilisation, and made a vital contribution of its own in so many fields of human endeavour - in science, astronomy, mathematics, algebra (itself an Arabic word), law, history, medicine, pharmacology, optics, agriculture, architecture, theology, music. Averroes and Avenzoar, like their counterparts Avicenna and Rhazes in the East, contributed to the study and practice of medicine in ways from which Europe benefited for centuries afterwards.

Islam nurtured and preserved the quest for learning. In the words of the tradition, ‘the ink of the scholar is more sacred than the blood of the martyr’. Cordoba in the 10th century was by far the most civilised city of Europe. We know of lending libraries in Spain at the time King Alfred was making terrible blunders with the culinary arts in this country. It is said that the 400,000 volumes in its ruler’s library amounted to more books than all the libraries of the rest of Europe put together. That was made possible because the Muslim world acquired from China the skill of making paper more than 400 years before the rest of non-Muslim Europe. Many of the traits on which modern Europe prides itself came to it from Muslim Spain. Diplomacy, free trade, open borders, the techniques of academic research, of anthropology, etiquette, fashion, various types of medicine, hospitals, all came from this great city of cities.

Medieval Islam was a religion of remarkable tolerance for its time, allowing Jews and Christians the right to practise their inherited beliefs, and setting an example which was not, unfortunately, copied for many centuries in the West. The surprise, ladies and gentlemen, is the extent to which Islam has been a part of Europe for

so long, first in Spain, then in the Balkans, and the extent to which it has contributed so much towards the civilisation which we all too often think of, wrongly, as entirely Western. Islam is part of our past and our present, in all fields of human endeavour. It has helped to create modern Europe. It is part of our own inheritance, not a thing apart.

More than this, Islam can teach us today a way of understanding and living in the world which Christianity itself is the poorer for having lost. At the heart of Islam is its preservation of an integral view of the Universe. Islam - like Buddhism and Hinduism - refuses to separate man and nature, religion and science, mind and matter, and has preserved a metaphysical and unified view of ourselves and the world around us. At the core of Christianity there still lies an integral view of the sanctity of the world, and a clear sense of the trusteeship and responsibility given to us for our natural surroundings. In the words of that marvellous 17th century poet and hymn writer George Herbert:

‘A man that looks on glass,
On it may stay his eye;
Or if he pleaseth, through it pass,
And then the heaven espy.’

But the West gradually lost this integrated vision of the world with Copernicus and Descartes and the coming of the scientific revolution. A comprehensive philosophy of nature is no longer part of our everyday beliefs. I cannot help feeling that, if we could now only rediscover that earlier, all-embracing approach to the world around us, to see and understand its deeper meaning, we could begin to get away from the increasing tendency in the West to live on the surface of our surroundings, where we study our world in order to manipulate and dominate it, turning harmony and beauty into disequilibrium and chaos.

It is a sad fact, I believe, that in so many ways the external world we have created in the last few hundred years has come to reflect our own divided and confused inner state. Western civilisation has become increasingly acquisitive and exploitative in defiance of our environmental responsibilities. This crucial sense of oneness and trusteeship of the vital sacramental and spiritual character of the world about us is surely something important we can re-learn from Islam. I am quite sure some will instantly accuse me, as they usually do, of living in the past, of refusing to come to terms with reality and modern life. On the contrary, ladies and gentlemen, what I am appealing for is a wider, deeper, more careful understanding of our world; for a metaphysical as well as a material dimension to our lives, in order to recover the balance we have abandoned, the absence of which, I believe, will prove disastrous in the long term. If the

ways of thought found in Islam and other religions can help us in that search, then there are things for us to learn from this system of belief which I suggest we ignore at our peril.

Ladies and gentlemen, we live today in one world, forged by instant communications, by television, by the exchange of information on a scale undreamed of by our grandparents. The world economy functions as an inter-dependent entity. Problems of society, the quality of life and the environment, are global in their causes and effects, and none of us any longer has the luxury of being able to solve them on our own. The Islamic and Western worlds share problems common to us all: how we adapt to change in our societies, how we help young people who feel alienated from their parents or their society's values, how we deal with Aids, drugs, and the disintegration of the family. Of course, these problems vary in nature and intensity between societies. The problems of our own inner cities are not identical to those of Cairo or Damascus. But the similarity of human experience is considerable. The international trade in hard drugs is one example; the damage we are collectively doing to our environment is another.

We have to solve these threats to our communities and lives together. Simply getting to know each other can achieve wonders. I remember vividly, for instance, taking a group of Muslims and non-Muslims some years ago to see the work of the Marylebone Health Centre in London, of which I am Patron. The enthusiasm and common determination that shared experience generated was immensely heart-warming. Ladies and gentlemen, somehow we have to learn to understand each other, and to educate our children - a new generation, whose attitudes and cultural outlook may be different from ours - so that they understand too. We have to show trust, mutual respect and tolerance, if we are to find the common ground between us and work together to find solutions. The community enterprise approach of my own Trust, and the very successful Volunteers Scheme it has run for some years, show how much can be achieved by a common effort which spans classes, cultures and religions.

The Islamic and Western world can no longer afford to stand apart from a common effort to solve their common problems. One excellent example of our two cultures working together in common cause is the way in which the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is working with Oxford University to set up a research centre into schizophrenia for an organisation called SANE, of which I am Patron

Nor can we afford to revive the territorial and political confrontations of the past. We have to share experiences, to explain ourselves to each other, to understand

and tolerate - and I know how difficult these things are - and to build on those positive principles which our two cultures have in common. That trade has to be two-way. Each of us needs to understand the importance of conciliation, of reflection - TADABBUR is the word, I believe - to open our minds and unlock our hearts to each other. I am utterly convinced that the Islamic and the Western worlds have much to learn from each other. Just as the oil engineer in the Gulf may be European, so the heart transplant surgeon in Britain may be Egyptian.

If this need for tolerance and exchange is true internationally, it applies with special force within Britain itself. Britain is a multi-racial and multi-cultural society. I have already mentioned the size of our own Muslim communities who live throughout Britain, both in large towns like Bradford and in tiny communities in places as remote as Stornaway in Western Scotland. These people, ladies and gentlemen, are an asset to Britain. They contribute to all parts of our economy - to industry, the public services, the professions and the private sector. We find them as teachers, as doctors, as engineers and as scientists. They contribute to our economic well-being as a country, and add to the cultural richness of our nation. Of course, tolerance and understanding must be two-way. For those who are not Muslim, that may mean respect for the daily practice of the Islamic faith and a decent care to avoid actions which are likely to cause deep offence. For the Muslims in our society, there is the need to respect the history, culture and way of life of our country, and to balance their vital liberty to be themselves with an appreciation of the importance of integration in our society. Where there are failings of understanding and tolerance, we have a need, on our own doorstep, for greater reconciliation among our own citizens. I hope we shall all learn to demonstrate this as understanding between these communities grows.

...

Before I go, I cannot put to you strongly enough the importance of the two issues which I have tried to touch on so imperfectly this morning. These two worlds, the Islamic and the Western, are at something of a crossroads in their relations. We must not let them stand apart. I do not accept the argument that they are on course to clash in a new era of antagonism. I am utterly convinced that our two worlds have much to offer each other. We have much to do together. I am delighted that the dialogue has begun, both in Britain and elsewhere. But we shall need to work harder to understand each other, to drain out any poison between us, and to lay the ghost of suspicion and fear. The further down that road we can travel, the better the world that we shall create for our children and for future generations. ■

Lessons on the Quran

Chapter 12 (Joseph),

Section 7 (Joseph Cleared of False Charges)

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 each 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 7 of Chapter 12 of the Holy Quran, which concerns the story of Prophet Joseph being cleared of false charges. In addressing this section, points are presented relating to possible alternative significances to the reference of the "prison" and how the three inmates may be metaphors for the three stages of spiritual development.]

Today we will be discussing Section 7 of Chapter 12. To start, I wanted to comment on how this chapter, thus far, illustrates for us the lesson that when dealing with spiritual concepts, they aren't always to be taken literally, but rather their significance lies in some underlying meaning that provides some practical lesson. And this is shown to us in this chapter by way of presenting the interpretations of visions and dreams.

We were given the example of a dream that Hazrat Yusuf had, when he was in his youth, of the stars and the sun and the moon making obeisance to him. And, as we discussed, the meaning of the dream is not that these celestial bodies would bow down to Hazrat Yusuf, but rather that Hazrat Yusuf would progress to great spiritual heights, and that he would be a source of spiritual light to humanity.

We were also given the example of a vision that the King had about the future of his kingdom. And the Quran relays the interpretation of the King's vision given by Hazrat Yusuf – that the seven fat kine devoured by the seven lean ones and seven green ears of corn and seven other dry ones, refer to the conditions of harvest that would be forthcoming.

And we were given the example of the dreams of the two youths who were in prison with Hazrat Yusuf, about their eventual destiny. And the Quran again relays the interpretation given by Hazrat Yusuf of their dreams – that the one prisoner would be delivered and would serve the king and the other would not be delivered but rather would be crucified.

And I was thinking that the story about Hazrat Yusuf going to prison itself can be thought of in a metaphorical

way that provides us with a practical lesson. And that being that life itself can be viewed as a prison of sorts, because we are spiritual beings living in a physical world. Our spiritual essence is constantly being challenged by our physical or animal desires. So in this sense, this material world is like a prison for a spiritual being, and a person is only truly free when he or she progresses to the spiritual life in the hereafter. And, like the two youths with Hazrat Yusuf in prison, in this life one can devote his/her life to being like a *butler* in service to others, or like the *baker* who is described as carrying bread on his head (as if having material gain always on his mind). And the lesson is that in this prison of life, one is delivered if they engage in service to others. And, on the contrary, by focusing on material gain only will lead to one's spiritual demise.

The other thought that came to my mind is that these narratives about interpretation of messages (whether a dream or a vision or even revealed words) shows that although divine blessings may be granted to all (even those who are not spiritually elevated people), only those who are of a very high spiritual rank have the spiritual insight to decipher the true meaning of those messages. And this is shown by the fact that although true dreams and visions were granted to the King and the two prisoners, only Hazrat Yusuf had the ability to understand its true significance. And this lesson can be applied not only to dreams and visions, but also to the messages given to humanity in divinely revealed scriptures. The Quran, for example, is accessible to everyone, and much emphasis is given by Muslims to memorization of the entire scripture, but the true meaning of the revelation is not apparent to all. And this brings to light the importance of the role of *mujaddids* (and other saintly figures) who are commissioned to educate people about those teachings which the masses find confusing and misinterpret.

Now turning to Section 7, we left off in the previous section with Hazrat Yusuf explaining the King's vision about the future of his kingdom, something others were unable to do for the King. And this section starts with v. 50 which states:

Verse 50

And the king said: Bring him to me. So when the messenger came to him, he said: Go back to thy lord and ask him, what is the case of the women who cut their hands. Surely my Lord knows their device.

After being informed of Hazrat Yusuf's interpretation of his vision, the King calls for Hazrat Yusuf. And, Hazrat Yusuf's response is consistent with the stance he took which caused him to land in prison in the first place. For him, this was not about just finding a way to

get out of prison. Rather, it was about standing for the truth. So, he tells the messenger who was sent to him by the King to go back and inquire about the allegations that were made about him. For Hazrat Yusuf, clearing his name of the false charges was more important than simply securing an exit out of prison.

And, I'll just add that we see the word "rasul" being used here for an ordinary messenger. Obviously it is meant in the literal sense of the word, as one who conveys a message, and not in the sense of Islamic terminology (as a divinely appointed messenger). And this shows that Almighty Allah uses terms in different ways – sometimes in a literal manner, sometimes in a metaphorical manner, and sometimes a term is used in a way that is intended to have a very specialized meaning. And this is the point that Hazrat Mirza Sahib would make in his repeated explanations of why the word "rasul" or "nabi" may be found in the revelations he received or in some of his writings. The point being that Almighty Allah uses different significances of words in the Quran itself, so the same broad understanding and contextualization should be employed when reading the writings of saintly persons as well.

Verse 51 and 52

(The king) said: What was your affair when you sought to seduce Joseph? They said: Holy Allāh! We knew of no evil on his part. The chief's wife said: Now has the truth become manifest. I sought to seduce him and he is surely of the truthful.

This is that he might know that I have not been unfaithful to him in secret, and that Allāh guides not the device of the unfaithful

Here we are told that the women who cut their hands substantiated Hazrat Yusuf's position and the chief's wife also confessed to her wrongdoing and admitted to Hazrat Yusuf's innocence. And Hazrat Yusuf again confirms that his intention was to establish the truth and clear his name of the false charge of being unfaithful.

This story of Prophet Joseph taking this stand, and preferring prison in furtherance of a greater cause, is something we've seen replicated in some form by others, who by doing so greatly influenced humanity for the better. In particular, we have seen this in civil rights struggles – the struggle for equal rights of people – over the past century. In America, Martin Luther King, Jr. was imprisoned for protesting the institutionalized racism against blacks. He orchestrated peaceful protests knowing the consequences, and preferring being imprisoned for a greater cause. Muhammad Ali preferred being convicted and sentenced to prison than participating in a war that he felt was unjust and contrary to the teachings of

his faith, which resulted in him losing 3 years of his career in which he was at the height of his dominance in the sport of boxing. And Nelson Mandela is another example, of a person choosing prison (which lasted 27 years in his case) in furtherance of his struggle against apartheid in South Africa. And there are many other examples. But the lesson we can take away from this is how giving up one's freedom for a greater cause, the cause of truth and justice, can ultimately not only free the person from injustices but also have a profound effect on freeing others in terms of restoration of rights.

Verse 53

And I call not myself sinless; surely (man's) self is wont to command evil, except those on whom my Lord has mercy. Surely my Lord is Forgiving, Merciful.

Here, Hazrat Yusuf says that he doesn't call himself sinless, which is the type of response given by saintly people. We have a similar example of Prophet Jesus in the Gospels declining being called "good" and goes on to explain how only Almighty God is "good". This is a characteristic of the humble nature of those individuals who reach a high spiritual stage.

Now, the part which states "surely man's self is wont to command evil" is understood as describing the lowest stage in the spiritual progression of man. Maulana Muhammad Ali concisely explains this in his commentary of this verse:

Man's self is here called *ammārah*, i.e. *one wont to command evil*. It is, in fact, the lowest stage in the spiritual growth of man. It is what may be called his animal self; low desires and animal passions rule the mind of man and he is capable of doing any evil without feeling any pangs at all. He submits to his carnal desires like the brute. The next stage is called the *lawwāmah*, which is referred to in 75:2 as the *self-accusing spirit*, when the slightest departure from the path of rectitude at once rouses the pangs of conscience. The third stage is the stage of perfection — the *muṭma'innah*, or *the soul at rest*, when it is in perfect peace, having attained the goal of perfection; see 89:30a. Those who have attained the second stage in the spiritual advancement and those who have attained the goal of perfection are spoken of as *those on whom my Lord has mercy*.

Understanding the characteristics of these 3 stages of spiritual progress, I think, can provide further insight into the story of Hazrat Yusuf and the two youths being in prison (relayed over the past couple of sections). It seems that one can view the 3 prisoners (the 2 youths

and Hazrat Yusuf) as representing the 3 stages of spiritual progress.

First, the fact that the other 2 prisoners are “youths” aligns with the notion that the first 2 stages are periods of development. The baker (who seems to be consumed with material gain, having bread on his head as if worldliness is only on his mind) seems to align with the lowest stage (that of “*ammarah*”). And, as the story tells us, living a life in this stage doesn’t end well (he ends up being crucified). The butler, though, is delivered. And he seems to align with the second stage (that of “*lawwamah*”). The characteristics attributed to him is that he serves others, but is forgetful (as he forgot to tell the King about Hazrat Yusuf as Hazrat Yusuf requested), which seems to indicate one whose intentions are good and is on the right path but who has some weakness and has not mastered control over one’s self. And, of course, Hazrat Yusuf aligns with the stage of “*mutmainnah*” (or “the soul at rest”), where one is at complete peace, and is only concerned about the higher values of life, and not the eventuality of his physical station in this world, as was the case with the 2 youths.

Introducing this concept of the lowest spiritual stage (that of *ammarah*) at this juncture of the chapter, after the story of Hazrat Yusuf going to prison, seems to be a reminder that the *true prison* in a believer’s life is being a slave to his/her low desires and animal passions. Whether it is a base desire of jealousy and greed (like that of Prophet Joseph’s brothers), or a lustful desire for one who is not one’s spouse (like that of the chief’s wife), or possibly the desire for material gain consuming one’s life (like it seems the baker symbolizes), being a slave to one’s base desires is the true prison, and it is only by controlling those animalistic urges that one can set one’s self free.

Verse 54 through 56

And the king said: Bring him to me, I will choose him for myself. So when he talked with him, he said: Surely thou art in our presence today dignified, trusted.

He said: Place me (in authority) over the treasures of the land; surely I am a good keeper, knowing well.

And thus did We give to Joseph power in the land — he had mastery in it wherever he liked. We bestow Our mercy on whom We please, and We waste not the reward of the doers of good.

These verses relay the great accomplishment of Hazrat Yusuf’s journey in being steadfast through trials and tribulations, placing trust and reliance in Almighty Allah, and standing up for truth and justice. He is freed

from prison, not because of some deal or some other leverage used, but due to proving his innocence and being acquitted of the charges. And he received the ultimate vindication by being treated in a dignified and trusted manner, which is the only thing he wanted.

And we are told that he was placed in authority over the treasures of the land and that he had power to do as he liked. Now, if we are to continue to view the story in a spiritual sense, the significance of these verse can be understood as a believer becoming empowered and in control when mastering one’s lower desires. That reaching this stage of spirituality is the true treasure that a believer seeks as his or her accomplishment. And the next verse, verse 57, seems to allude to this.

Verse 57

And certainly the reward of the Hereafter is better for those who believe and guard against evil.

And the section ends with the lesson that that the goal is not to acquire worldly power and control on earth (i.e. treasures of the land), but rather to reach high stages of spirituality, which is the permanent reward. ■

Creating Happiness and Peace on Earth

Eid ul Fitr Khutba (Sermon)

By Ebrahim Mohamed

[This article comprises the Eid ul Fitr Khutba (Sermon) delivered in June 2018 by Ebrahim Mohamed at the Lahore Ahmadiyya Center in Cape Town, South Africa. In this Khutba, Mr. Mohamed explains the true significance of the holy month of Ramadan and the practice of fasting. Refraining from food alone is not the objective but rather, as he expounds, it is to ‘guard against evil’. And this objective to condition one’s self to control his/her desires and passions is not limited to the month of Ramadan; rather, it is an exercise during an entire month to help facilitate its implementation in every day of one’s life. Only a true moral transformation, he concludes, can create real happiness and peace on earth.]

I begin in the name of Allah, the Beneficent the Merciful

O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil. (Holy Quran 2:183)

All praise is due to Almighty Allah. We praise Him and we thank Him for this blessed day of Eid; a day of recurring joy that is celebrated at the end of the month of fasting.

The lesson we derive from the noble acts of devotion for the sake of Almighty Allah in the month of Ramadan is that only once humankind has reached the stage where they are in complete control of their lower passions of lust, greed and anger will lasting happiness abide on earth. The wisdom of our Creator in prescribing an effective remedy for the diseases of evil that plague our beings and societies at large is therefore indeed a great sign of His Mercy for humankind. The remedy is simple, fasting. And the objective? We are told: '*la alla kum tatta qoon*' ('so that you may guard against evil'). The abstention from food, though, is an effective, psychological discipline that makes man realize if in obedience to Almighty Allah he can stay away from what is otherwise lawful, how much more important is it for him to stay away from what is unlawful and evil in the sight of Allah. Fasting is thus a means to an end and that is the conquering of the evil within and without to quicken the growth of moral and spiritual qualities latent in all of us. This is the difficult part and not simply staying without food. Anyone can stay without food; even young children do it these days.

The staying without food part of the Ramadan ends today but not the 'staying away from evil.' It is thus imperative that we understand what *la allakum tattaqoon* (guarding against evil) really entail. It is hard continuous work. We cannot change our natures, but we can mould and guide ourselves into becoming beings of high morality. 'Guarding against evil' means we constantly have to work on our weaknesses and to do this effectively we must first accept the fact that we have all been created weak and not perfect. We are all made up of basic raw qualities and traits that need to be refined. Like Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, explained, you cannot change the nature of a person but you can teach him how to use his intrinsic nature for the moral good of humanity at large and not harm anyone. Teach him how to conquer his lust and turn it into the moral qualities of love, compassion and empathy for humankind. Teach him how to turn his anger into bravery and rather become a defender of the weak and righteous and not a murderer of innocent people. Teach him how to turn his greed into insatiable quests for doing good to all of humanity instead of robbing and depriving them of their rightful property and rights. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad wrote a highly acclaimed paper on the topic which he submitted at an international interfaith symposium in Lahore about a century ago, called the *Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam*. I recommend it highly if you are interested in this branch of knowledge.

So, transformation of the self, which is the aim and object of the fast, is hard work, but essential, for in the end it is the only hope we have of reaching lasting peace

and ever-recurring happiness on earth. If you feel this might be far-fetched, wishful thinking then let us ponder and reflect on the condition the world is in at present for a while. Then imagine a world where the forces of good over evil are dominant and triumphant; a world of controlled greed, controlled anger, controlled lusts everywhere. Imagine a world where the freedom to worship Almighty God is a respected human right free of persecution. Then imagine a world of tolerance; a world devoid of backbiting; devoid of superstitions and suspicions; devoid of envy and hatred. Imagine a world free of anger and killings, where human life is respected and where the striving for its preservation is zealously supported and applauded by every living soul on this earth and where even the slightest harm that might lead to its destruction are condemned in the loudest of voices with the contempt it deserves and duly punished with befitting punishments so as never to be repeated. Imagine a world free of lies, slander, corruption, defamations, and deliberate distortions of truth to malign others. Imagine a world free of ignorance in all its ugly shapes and forms that we come across daily, such as the bigotry, biases, prejudices, dogmatism, extremism, and fanaticism that creep up upon us all the time. Imagine a world where 'free thinking' and 'free expressions of thought' that uplift society, not such that defame and abuse the dignity and rights of others, prevail. Imagine a world where the principles of justice throughout the world, especially in morally depraved countries under majority Muslim governance, are based on the noble dictum of the Holy Quran:

O you who believe, be upright for Allah, bearers of witness with justice; and let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably. Be just; that is nearer to observance of duty. And keep your duty to Allah. Surely Allah is Aware of what you do. (5:8)

Then imagine a world free of greedy, ruthless profiteering by a handful of 'fat-cat' corporates and spoilt oligarchies bloated with ill-gained wealth and opulence to the misery of the masses. Perhaps then we might just be able to imagine a world free of all sorts of human abuses, human-trafficking, homelessness, poverty, hunger and uncontrolled diseases and drug addiction. Like John Lennon we can keep on imagining and like Martin Luther King we can keep on dreaming of a world united in brotherly love, peace, justice and ultimately ample sustenance and happiness for all. But one thing is for certain such a 'heaven on earth' will not simply fall from the sky onto our laps like the disciples of Jesus pleaded for. Nay, it has to be earned. Therefore, the Great Physician of the Universe, the *Rabbul Alameen* – our Lord, the Nourisher and Sustainer of all the worlds – has prescribed fasting as one of the means to achieving that end: *la alla kum tattaqoon* ('so that you may guard against evil').

Muslims these days, much like the Jews did after Moses, tend to approach their faith more in a ritualistic manner. Often more emphasis is put on the external aspects such as the abstaining from food and drink and not enough focus on the intended moral development that feeds the spiritual seeds of our souls. With the advent of Islam and the revelation of the Holy Quran, the means to obtain control over our base desires and passions that ignite evil have been made accessible to all of us. The prayer five times a day, the fast, the giving in charity, the pilgrimage are all devotions focused on generating humane, moral qualities within us. If it fails to do this then there is a serious problem with the manner these acts of devotions are performed. In fact, it would be a waste of time and effort. This unfortunately is the condition existent in most parts of the Muslim world today. Anyone can be taught to perform the prayer, to fast, to give zakaat and perform pilgrimage, but when it comes to sacrificing over-blown egos in order to put into practice basic ordinances of the Holy Quran on issues of justice and exercising even basic human rights, Muslims in general fail miserably. During the time of the Prophet (pbuh), the hypocrites used to pray, they used to fast etc., but they turned their backs on him at the most crucial time in his career.

Today, seems that Muslim nations have turned their backs on the Holy Quran. They recite it beautifully but are not prepared to implement its teachings in their daily lives. The *ulema* (religious scholars) is devoid and incapable of providing guidance; instead they engage in petty politics, fighting among themselves for status and positions of power over the vulnerable minds of weak followers unable to think for themselves and happy to be led like sheep to the house of mental, moral and spiritual slaughter. It is such behaviour that made the Holy Prophet (pbuh) plead to Almighty Allah:

‘... *Yaa Rabbi Inna Qoumit tagathoe haathal qurana mahjooran*’ (And the Messenger will say: My Lord, surely my people treat this Quran as a forsaken thing). (25:30)

The reality of the Holy Prophet’s forebodings has been highlighted by recent studies done by an Economist, Professor Hossein Askari. Prof. Askari conducted a study on how close to Quranic principles the economy, legal and governance, human and political rights, and international affairs of 152 countries in the world are structured. According to Professor Askari, what motivated his study was the apparent disconnect between the teachings of the Holy Qur’an and the practice of Islam in the Muslim World – much what the Holy Prophet (pbuh) feared. Prof. Askari states: ‘(The) indices provide a simple approach for Muslims to focus on the indisputable source of their religion – the Holy Qur’an – as opposed to pronouncements made by clerics, rulers,

the media and extremists, who all have their own selfish agendas.’. So, I gather, he would have, for example, looked at whether a country provides freedom of religion within the framework of the Quranic injunction ‘there is no compulsion in religion’ (2:256). And whether the justice system is based on a free and independent judiciary that upholds the principle of the Holy Quran that states

Be upright for Allah, bearers of witness with justice; and let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably. (5:8)

and

O you who believe, be maintainers of justice, bearers of witness for Allah, even though it be against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives — whether he be rich or poor, Allah has a better right over them both. So follow not (your) low desires, lest you deviate. And if you distort or turn away from (truth), surely Allah is ever aware of what you do. (4:135)

He would have considered governance that is inclusive and consultative (3:159). And, to address the social needs of the poor and disadvantaged, there are numerous verses in the Holy Quran to this effect. The following one stands out as capturing the true spirit that is expected to accompany these noble acts of benevolence:

It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteous is the one who believes in Allah, and the Last Day, and the angels and the Book and the prophets, and gives away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask and to set slaves free and keeps up prayer and pays the poor-rate; and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in the time of conflict. These are they who are truthful; and these are they who keep their duty. (2:177)

This verse is self-explanatory. Together with the other verses I have quoted on justice and freedom of religion, these are but a few that highlight the very high standard set by the Holy Quran with regard to all forms of human rights, justice, social welfare, etc., especially emphasising the spirit of selflessness (i.e. ‘doing it for the sake of the *muhabba* (love) of Allah’, free from insincere, empty ritualism).

Now, one would naturally expect that with such noble Quranic guidelines, Muslim governed countries would be amongst the top-ranking in Prof. Askari’s score sheet in the categories ‘Economy, Legal and Governance, Human and Political Rights, and International Affairs.’

(available at <http://islamicity-index.org/wp/latest-indices/>). However, it is with dismay that the opposite is true. Ranked at the top, based on an average score across all four categories, is New Zealand, followed by the Netherlands, Sweden, and Ireland, followed by 39 other non-Muslim countries with Malaysia the first Muslim country in the rankings at 43rd. The country with the highest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia ranked 74th, and Saudi Arabia, the custodians of the Holy cities, 88th with Iran at 134 and Pakistan a low 137. Since the Holy Quran lays so much emphasis on human rights, I was particularly interested in the ‘Human and Political Rights’ stats. First was Norway; Second Sweden; third New Zealand; followed by several other non-Muslim countries. Indonesia ranks 92, Saudi Arabia 110; Iran 132, and Pakistan at an almost rock bottom low 142nd out of 152 countries. What is shocking is the fact that these are countries that claim religious allegiance to the Holy Quran, which to me is sheer hypocrisy.

These results come as no surprise, though, for it is a known fact that in most of these Muslim countries you do not have the freedom to even speak out against any injustices, whether committed by the ruling authorities or the sacrosanct *ulema* without the fear of being jailed. In Pakistan, minority groups such as Ahmadis, for example, are declared non-Muslim by human agencies at the beck and call of bigots parading as clerics and, if you can believe it, jailed for practicing Islam. And let me remind you these are no longer the much dreaded, dark, medieval days of human history, this is the supposed enlightened 21st century.

Islam is the natural religion of humanity. It does not belong to Muslims alone. Thus, the Holy Quran says:

So set thy face for religion, being upright, the nature made by Allah in which He has created men. (30:30)

It thus comes as no surprise that fair-minded, rational people, although not of the Muslim community, would, perhaps unknowingly, adopt such sound, practical principles to be found only in the Holy Quran. It is, therefore, time that we stop looking for ‘Islam in Practice’ in the East for that is where the sun of Islam has set and rather turn our attention to the West for that is where it will rise according to an interpretation of a prophecy of our noble Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

All indications are that Islam is indeed on the rise in the West and it is very encouraging to see a host of enlightened folk emerging from among academics, religious scholars and ordinary folk, male and female, prepared to challenge the old order created by *ulema* still stuck in their narrow-minded, backward ideologies and practices. There is also an encouraging movement

towards the adoption of the Holy Quran as the undisputed primary source, and a slow but steady departure from the prominence given to the long overdue practice of blind subservience to flawed, outdated interpretations of the clerical fraternity. The clarion call ‘Back to the Quran’ by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad to the Muslims 100 years ago is slowly coming to fruition.

In 1917 when his first English translation of the Holy Quran came out, Maulana Muhammad Ali arranged for it to be shipped to the West in accordance with the wishes of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in his capacity as the *Mujaddid* - Reviver of the Faith - of the Age. It was the first properly bound and printed single volume of the English translation of the Holy Quran by a Muslim that reached the shores of Britain, Europe, Africa, the USA, and Egypt. It was this English translation that inspired the Nation of Islam in America and caused the likes of his namesake, Muhammad Ali the boxer, and many others turning to Islam. Give a man a copy of the Holy Quran and the Quran will do the work by itself, was the words of Maulana Muhammad Ali. How often do we not hear heart-warming tales of people who found faith simply by reading the Holy Quran? I would encourage everyone here to engage in this work. Start by buying one Quran and donating it to a friend, a stranger, an institution, or whatever, you decide. And who knows who might be touched by its inspirational teachings.

I would like to conclude with the following prayer by Maulana Muhammad Ali for the triumph of the true principles of Islam:

O God, unbelief is dominant over the world. Love of worldly things and wealth has taken hold of human hearts. Human beings are being led astray by possession of physical power, material resources and outward adornments. But, O God, it is Your promise that You shall make Islam triumph in the world. It is Your promise that after falling into the greatest deviation and wrongdoing people will again turn to You. Fulfill this promise of Yours today and let the truth overcome falsehood and let Islam triumph over unbelief.

O God, the armies of unbelief and misguidance are attacking with full force. Your strength in the past too has been manifested through weak human beings. Let it be manifest today through this small Jama‘at. We are weak, humble and sinners but we have a strong zeal to see Islam prevail over unbelief. Forgive us our faults, grant us protection, save us from stumbling, and be our helper and make this weak Jama‘at of Islam overcome the vast strength of unbelief. O God, make the Quran, Muhammad *Rasulullah* and Islam triumphant in the world, and wipe off the forces of unbelief and misguidance. ■

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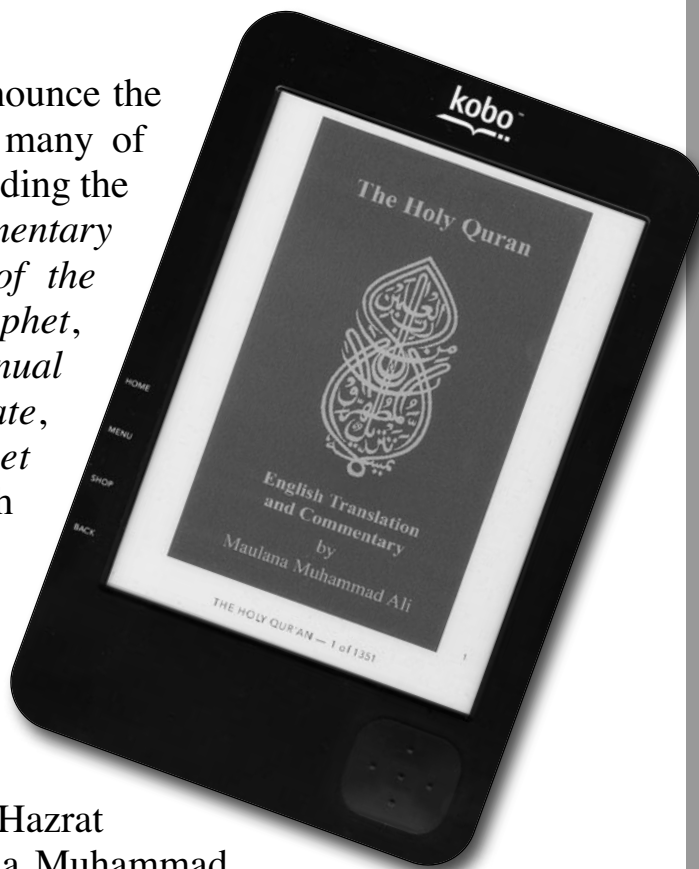
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