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Essential Message of Islam

Approved by al-Azhar al-Sharif, Cairo, Egypt

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Dedicated to the Prophet Muhammad pbuh

(May God's blessings and peace be upon him),
to whom the Qur'an was revealed for all humanity.

Muslim readers are encouraged to pronounce the benediction, ***Sallallahu 'Alaihi Wa Sallam*** (SAW) (rendition inserted above), each time they take or read the Prophet's name. They will then be fulfilling the Prophet's Sunna. This book spells out the benediction in the above first instance of the appearance of the Prophet's name, and leaves the Muslim readers to invoke it as they read through the work

"Will they not, then, ponder over this Qur'an? - or are their hearts sealed"? (al-Qur'an 47:24).

Endorsed And Introduced By:

Dr. Khaled Abou El Fadl

This book is endorsed and introduced by one of the most distinguished Islamic scholars, Dr. Khaled Abou El Fadl, who is the Alfi Distinguished Professor of Law at the UCLA School of Law, where he teaches International Human Rights, Islamic Jurisprudence, National Security Law, Law and Terrorism, Islam and Human Rights, Political Asylum and Political Crimes and Legal Systems. He was awarded the University of Oslo Human Rights Award, the Leo and Lisl Eitingер Prize in 2007, and was named a Carnegie Scholar in Islamic Law in 2005. He was appointed by President George W. Bush as the only Muslim on the Commission for International Religious Freedom, and also previously served on the Board of Directors of Human Rights Watch. Dr. Abou El Fadl has written 14 books (five forthcoming) and over 50 articles on Islamic law and Islam. His books have been translated into numerous languages including Arabic, Persian, French, Norwegian, Dutch, Ethiopian, Russian, and Japanese. In 2007, his book, "The Great Theft" was named as

one of the year's Top 100 Books by Canada's Globe and Mail. His book, "The Search for Beauty in Islam: A Conference of the Books" is a landmark in contemporary Islamic literature.

Introduction

By: Khaled Abou El Fadl

The Paradoxes of Islamophobia and the Future of the World

Every epoch of human history has suffered its share of jahl and jahiliyya. Jahl means ignorance, heedlessness, the lack of awareness, and even idiocy or foolishness, but with the clear connotation of the perverse, pernicious, the dark, foreboding, and inauspicious. In Islamic eschatology, it is common to refer to a people plagued by ignorance, injustice, cruelty, and hatred as a people living in a state of jahiliyya. Ingratitude, selfishness, and arrogance are all thought to be characteristics of jahiliyya as well as the prevalence of vice and inequity in any society. Jahiliyya, however, has been as entrenched in human history as the social ailments of bigotry, racism, hatred, and oppression.

But therein is the enduring and unyielding role of Islam—Islam is submission and surrender only to God. And it is resistance and rebellion against the personal jahiliyya of the iniquitous and uprooted soul, and against social conditions and structures that compel the sufferance of ignorance and hatred and that ultimately deny human beings the fair chance to come out to the light. The theology of Islam resists the state of jahiliyya by calling upon human beings to wage a relentless jihad in pursuit of enlightenment and against the oppressiveness of ignorance and against the social and political deformities and illnesses that spread in the absence of justice. The jihad against jahiliyya is a constant struggle to bring balance and peace to one's own soul, and to pursue balance and peace for one's society and for humanity. In other words, it is a jihad to bring justice within and without—for oneself and for all of humanity. This jihad is a never-ending effort at self-enlightenment as well as the pursuit of enlightenment at the communitarian and social level. In Islamic theology, a Muslim is in a state of constant resistance to the state of jahl and the disease of jahiliyya—in a sense, in struggling to submit to the Almighty, a Muslim struggles for liberation from and against falling captive to godlessness. Godness is not just a conviction or belief; it is a practice and state of being. And this state, which is quintessentially interconnected with beauty—with the attributes of divinity such as love, mercy, justice, tranquility, humility, and peace—is in direct antipathy to jahiliyya, which in turn is associated with the ailments suffered in a state of godlessness such as hate, cruelty, inequity, arrogance, anxiety, and fear.

As noted above, every time and age suffers from its share of jahiliyya but what is distinctive about the moral failures of our age is not their nature or kind. Indeed the moral failures of our age remain disparagingly similar to past ages. But what is different about our age is that while the moral failures remain the same, more than any other time in the past, these same failures—these jahiliyyas are more inexcusable and less and less understandable. Human beings continue to suffer from ignorance but our ability to

teach, learn, and communicate is better than in any previous age. We continue to suffer from hate, bigotry, and racism but our knowledge of human sociology, anthropology and history—our collective experiences as human beings make these failures less understandable, leave alone excusable, than in any other time in history. We continue to wage war and slaughter each other, but at the same time, our ability to kill and cause destruction is more lethal and dangerous than any other time in history. But our co-dependence on each other as human beings, and our increasingly interlinked world, in addition to the unprecedented dangers posed by our weapons make our constant resort to war and violence incoherent and incomprehensible, and definitely, less forgivable than in any other time in history.

In this age, the problem is not our technical abilities or our know-how—the problem is in our will, our sense of purpose, in our normative values, and indeed, in our very comprehension of humanness. Paradoxically, while our collective sense of the humane—our understanding of rights, denial, and suffering—has improved, and while our technical ability to protect rights or remove suffering has also been augmented, our ability to get beyond our isolation and limitations as individuals and to reach for the transcendental and perennial in what is human has deteriorated. In the modern age, our rational sense of the humane has increased but our spiritual grasp of the human has deteriorated. Perhaps this is why so many philosophers have described the modern age as the age of anxiety, restlessness, uprootedness, or groundlessness. Indeed the predicament of the modern age has been that while our intellectual capacities have sprung forth by leaps and bounds, our spiritual abilities, to say the least, have not. Our ability to access information about each other and to collect and organize data about our world has given us a greater sense of control and has raised our expectations as human beings but all of this has done little to raise our sense of consciousness. We can see more of our world and further into the universe than any other time in history, our failure to decipher and perceive the truth of reality, leave alone beauty, has only grown more intense and also inexcusable.

In Islamic thought, we tend to see religion and religiosity as fundamentally antithetical to jahiliyya and all the ugliness that it represents. There is no doubt that throughout human history religion has been a powerful instigator of change—in fact, religion has possessed the power of truly transformative moments in history. Not too many forces in history have had the power of religion to inspire, motivate, and inform. Moreover, many social theorists have recognized the positive, and in my view, necessary role that religion ought to play in remedying many of the ailments suffered in modernity. However, for any true believer—a believer who does not go through the affectations of belief but a person who has felt anchored, inspired, and empowered by belief—for the believer who because of his/her religious conviction was able to reach out for godliness, for the perennial, transcendental, sublime, and beautiful—for that kind of believer, there is no alternative to fending off the jahiliyya of modernity, or of any age for that matter, without the empowerment and the enlightenment of faith. It is precisely for the believer whose engagement with the Divine has translated into nothing but a sense of beauty, peace, balance, and mercy that a particular kind of jahiliyya is more offensive than all others.

This jahiliyya of which I speak is the jahiliyya that is instigated and perpetuated in the name of religion itself. It is when religion is usurped and turned into an instrument of hatred, bigotry, prejudice, ignorance, suffering, and ugliness. As a believer, this deeply offends me because more than ever before I feel that humanity needs the love, mercy, and light of God. To use religion to perpetuate a state of godlessness is to say the least offensive. But as a Muslim, the perpetuation of Jahiliyah in the name of Islam is more than offensive; it is an abomination—it is a complete breakdown in the logic and rationale of existence. As a Muslim, I think of this abomination as a fundamental and inherent contradiction in terms. The two cannot co-exist because the illuminations of God cannot co-exist with the darkness of jahiliyya. But I must admit that in the same way that I find the jahiliyya of those who hate in the name of Islam simply grotesque, I also find the very widespread and sadly trendy jahiliyya of Islam-hating, Islamophobia, and prejudice against Muslims to be no less disturbing.

By my training and education, I am accustomed to dealing with those who hate in Islam's name by challenging their convictions and arguments with theological and jurisprudential refutations. And for many years, I focused all my teaching and writing on challenging and deconstructing the beliefs and claims of Muslim bigots. However, Islam-hating or Islamophobia poses its own set of exceptional challenges—not only am I not trained to deal with the irrational rage of Islam-haters, in this day and age, Islamophobia leaves one with an intractable sense of despair and hopelessness.

Islam-hating enjoys a long and firmly established pedigree. Unfortunately, Islam-hating is a practice rich with tradition. Starting with the early Muslim challenge to the dominance and hegemony of the Persian and Byzantium superpowers around fourteen-hundred years ago, Islam has become the object of highly motivated socio-cultural processes that were hate-filled and hate-promoting. In response to the spread of Islam, an elaborate institutional practice was born in Christian societies, which was supported by a tradition of theological and ideological dogma and ignited by a web of political and social anxieties. The function performed by this institutional practice was, at least initially, defensive and reactive—it sought to contain the threat of Islam not only by promoting cultures plagued by a sense of siege but even more, by a sense of revulsion and outrage at the Muslim heathen. The same processes that constructed the archetypal Muslim who induced fear also nurtured a mythology of a culture at the brink of suffering God's wrath and damnation because of the Muslim heathen. Leading up to the beginning of the Western Crusades, narratives of piety and anti-heresy re-enforced without adequate private and public performances of outrage and disgust at the infidel (Muslim) society risked incurring God's vengeance, wrath, and even damnation. Some contemporary historians have argued that the very idea of the West—the very notion of the abode of Christendom, which was historically wedded to the institutions of Catholicism—as a unit defined by a coherent identity, cultural unity, and a basic set of shared political interests developed in direct response to the rise of the Islamic civilization. Feeling challenged, threatened, and also defeated, the West, with its reactively formed identity, perhaps had no choice but to develop narratives of fear and self-preservation directed against Muslims and Islam. In these narratives of fear, anxiety and obsession—narratives that

stereotyped, exaggerated, and demonized the Muslim as a symbolic construct, Islam is cast into the role of the eminent and everlasting threat, and the Muslim does not just embody the image of the enemy but is made into the proverbial bogeyman—the infidel whose very existence, leave alone the infidel's successes and victories, is a horrific blasphemy and outrage against God, King, and Church. In Feudalistic Europe, at a time when political dissent, blasphemy, and heresy were hardly differentiated, Islam was seen as an atrocity against God and majesty, the cause of Divine wrath and damnation.

It took the West, led by the Catholic Church, about four centuries of incitement and sacred rage to build-up the frenzy of intolerance and hate that would fire-up and sustain six-centuries of waves of Western invasions of Muslim lands known as collectively as the Crusades. Contrary to popular belief, the Crusades did not just target the holy land and Jerusalem, but included Andalusia, and eventually Granada, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and even the Eastern Orthodox Church of Constantinople. Eventually, the repeated invasions of the Crusaders were defeated, but not before leaving a trail of fear and hate that eventually culminated in the Ottoman invasions of Eastern Europe. However, hardly had the Ottoman invasions been repulsed and defeated, incidentally without much help from Western Europe, when a new chapter of religious bigotry and hatred had been perpetuated through the pseudo-religious culture of Western Colonialism and its brain-child movement, Orientalism.

As the de-colonization movement surged and nations gained the right to national liberation and self-determination, humanity seemed to be on the verge of unprecedented advancements in finally becoming united over core values, among them tolerance as a necessary and compelling moral and ethical virtue. Of course, I am not claiming that when nations and governments were busily adopting, ratifying, or affirming the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and many international human rights treaties—among other things, banning racial discrimination, religious bigotry, and gender inequality—that these governments actually meant to implement what they pledged themselves to do. The reality, especially from a Muslim point of view, is that the rise of the contemporary regime of human rights and humanitarian institutions and laws is replete with unresolved and perhaps irresolvable contradictions and paradoxical tensions. For Muslims emerging from the hypocritically enlightened and pathologically self-righteous but invariably exploitative and bloody dungeons of Colonialism onto a new age radiating with the glitter of principles such as the right to self-determination, national liberation, non-intervention, and the prohibition against the use of force, the world must have looked very promising but also confusing. The confusion was the by-product of the Cold War and the hypocrisies elicited by the logic of political realism and the doctrine of real-politik; and the confusion and bitterness grew with the reality of aggressive hegemony of contemporary imperialism. But from the very inception of the age of rights, or what I call the age of promises, the confusion started with the destruction of Palestine, the dispossession of Palestinians, and the re-occupation of Jerusalem by the Crusader reminiscent historical movement of “pilgrims from the West.” All of this had to cast doubt upon the credibility and integrity of contemporary ethical universalisms and their inclusiveness towards

Muslims. For instance, Muslims could not fail to notice the tension and irony in the fact that 1948, the year that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was passed, was also the year the Palestinians lost their homeland and the Israelis gained theirs. Nevertheless, regardless of the challenges and contradictions that confronted Muslims in the modern age, there is no question that as human beings moved through the 20th century and advanced towards the 21st, there were tangible successes in that, on principle, finally there was collective recognition of the wrongfulness and immorality of racism, ethnocentrism, bigotry, and religious and cultural intolerance, among other vices. Also even if just in principle, a collective recognition and admission was reached that all human beings are, at a minimum, entitled to life, security, and dignity. In other words, in the post-colonial era, and especially by the end of the Cold War, it looked like after centuries of creating and suffering so much man-made misery, at least there were concrete and tangible achievements—finally, human beings have learned something worthwhile.

This is exactly why religious bigotry is so distressing—it is an indication that after all, perhaps we have learned nothing. It is distressing to think that despite the horrendous history of senseless slaughter and persecution, humans do not develop higher states of conscientiousness or more reflective and balanced senses of being but only grow ever more sophisticated in obfuscating the difference between reality and dreams. The currently trendy phenomenon of Islamophobia and the lucrative business of Islam-slaming ominously condemn us to recycling history through the irrational processes of reciprocated hate. But it is much more than the fear of repeating history that is at stake here.

Today is not like yesterday, and tomorrow will be more different still. Muslims are no longer the representatives of a dominant civilization and are not co-participants in defining the norms of our lived world. No part of the Muslim world could be considered coherent units of integrated economic and political power as in the cases of Europe, Russia, China, or India, and Muslims leverage very limited actual power in their lived world. But according to the dogma of the modern world, wars of aggression and foreign occupation are no longer permitted, and unlike pre-modern barbarisms, people and individuals need not rely on their ability to leverage power because all human beings and all nations have rights. Indeed the very idea of rights—the *raison d'être* of humanitarian protections and immunities is founded on the notion of protecting the weakest elements of society—whether nationally or internationally, rights exist to protect those who are members of target groups or those who are members of groups that are in weak and insular positions, and therefore, unable to protect themselves. Today, the whole paradigm of world order and international law is founded on the notion that instead of the protection of force, the weak should be able to rely on the protection of principle or, alternatively, on principled protection. In other words, today's world is different than any other age because today there is authoritative legality in the world order and in principle, there is rule of law.

I am not so naïve as to believe that the United Nations is truly a parliament of democratic governance or that the Security Council implements international law

impartially and fairly or to think that most international legal obligations are applied fairly and impartially. But the gap between the reality and the ideal is what makes the contemporary condition so precarious for Muslims. There is not a single permanent member of the Security Council that is Muslim, and in this age, Muslims play a largely marginal role in governing or influencing global issues. In fact, the fate and well-being of most Muslim countries in the modern world depends on the good faith and fair-mindedness of the non-Muslim world powers towards Muslims—the opposite is not true.

Considering the distribution and structure of power in the modern age, much of the role of Muslims in today's world and much of what is done to and with Muslim nations is contingent on two critical presumptive premises: 1) The major powers that run the world today are no longer motivated by religious bias or rancour. Policy pursued by these world powers does not seek to promote or harm one set of religious beliefs over others, and does not favour or disfavour a people or nation because they belong to one religious tradition or another. Put differently, the dominant powers of the world do not govern in the name of Western Christendom, and their economic and political powers are not used to leverage the supremacy of the Judeo-Christian civilization, for instance, against others. 2) The decisions and policies of the dominant operative powers in today's world are based on rational choices and shared interests and not on historical, racial, religious bias or any other type of prejudice.

Among other things, these two presumptive premises fundamentally mean that religious wars have ended and that we live in a rationally driven world. Without the fulfilment of these two premises, the reality becomes that Muslims live in a world that they do not control, and more so, in a world in which they do not have much power, and they also live in a world in which they are very likely to become the targets, and considering their limited power, even victims of bigoted policies. Now, I think that it is rather obvious that these two premises are not perfectly fulfilled and indeed, can never be perfectly fulfilled. World powers that have near hegemonic influence on today's world are not immune to the numerous subjectivities that normally affect decision making. What is important, however, is not if these two premises are fulfilled but the extent to which they are fulfilled at any given time. For example, the rule of law and world order in the modern age is premised on the assumption of the illegitimacy and wrongfulness of racially biased policies but no one would seriously suggest that racism wittingly or unwittingly does not affect the subjectivities of policy makers. This, however, is one of the reasons that Islamophobia and Islam-hating is emblematic of the foundational failures of the modern age—policies that target or profile Muslims as a group, or that speak of the dangers of a Muslim cultural invasion of Europe, or that legitimate the denouncement and deprecation of the Islamic faith, very much like the institution and logic of Apartheid, undermine the fundamental structure of legitimacy in the modern age. In this regard, there are many reasons to be very concerned.

Policies that are founded on the presumed inherent dangers of Islamic theology or law; or policy makers who effectively legitimate religious bigotry by seeking the “expert” counsel of professional Islam-haters do nothing less than undermine the very logic that

provides structure and authoritativeness to order of this age. I emphasize that the problem is not the existence of discrete and surreptitious religious bigotry—the problem is the fact that this religious bigotry is rationalized, and legitimated; it is cleansed of all sense of shame or fault and then stated as a normative value: the truth that needs to be uncovered. Here, the evidence on the ground, so-to-speak, is shocking, deeply troubling and overwhelming. For example, since 2002, thousands of books published in the United States and Europe spewed sheer hateful venom against Islamic theology, law, and history. More troubling is the fact that many of these pseudo-intellectualized displays of bigotry became massive bestsellers in Western countries. The writers of these hate-filled tracts were endowed with star status in the West as they consistently appeared as authoritative voices on everything Muslim in the media and were integrated into positions of authority by being given various institutional roles either as advisors to governments, members of government, or references for specialized agencies within government. Part of the very widespread phenomenon of religious bigotry was the opportunistic and parasitical celebration and promotion of so-called native informants—people who fit the Muslim ethnic and cultural profile, claimed either that they are Muslim or used to be Muslim, and above all were willing to perform the dramatic role of the archetypal Muslim who gazes in the mirror only to discover his/her hideous ugliness (contrasted of course to the beauty of the non-Muslim other), and then overcome by tragic destiny, he/she plunges in cathartic self-flagellation (or more precisely, Islam flagellation), which comes to the entirely predictable realization that all the ugliness in the mirror after all is Islam's fault. Of course, for the bigoted, but paying, reader's ecstatic enjoyment, the native-informant climactically confesses Islam's sins and bombastically declares, lest it be damned, Islam and of course Muslims too, must repent! The classic and also the most indulgently obnoxious examples of this pornographically-oriented exploitation of non-religiosity, or perhaps anti-religiosity, are the money-raking books of Hirshi Ali and Irshad Manji.

What fuels the Islam-hating industry in the West is that many sincerely believe that they are reacting rationally to a cultural, political, and militaristic threat. But it is important to remember that every social movement that has demonized a feared and hated other has constructed its hate-narrative as an unpleasant but necessary defensive response to a perceived threat—whether real or imagined. The very nature of bigotry and prejudice is that they are paranoid reconstructions of reality—they grossly exaggerate a kernel of truth into an enormous lie. So, for instance, bigots do not imagine that Muslim terrorists exist but they imagine that terrorism is the prevailing reality of Islam.

What is especially troubling about Islam-hating is that it is a powerful indication that the West, which led the world into modernity, has been unable to overcome its own historically rooted religious prejudices and bigotry. Islam-hating and Islamophobia are among the few remaining sanitized and legitimate social pathologies in the West not because bigotry against Islam and Muslims is practiced or tolerated, but because it is affirmatively honoured and even glorified as part of the analytical discipline of national security and interest.

In some regards, Islam-hating and Islamophobia is fairly unremarkable because like all prejudices, it is rationalized from a defensive posture and it thrives in a fertile ground of misinformation and ignorance. But what is remarkable about this particular form of prejudice and bigotry is that despite its deep roots in history—although it was exploited in the past to rationalize and incite numerous acts of aggression and violence and although it continues to do so today, there is remarkable resistance in the West to acknowledging its existence or to coming to terms with the crimes committed because of it, leave alone to attempt to atone for its consequences. A person who openly advocates racism, for instance, or anti-Semitism will be seen as a pariah and an outlier to mainstream society. No mainstream publisher or media outlet will broadcast speech that is openly racist or anti-Semitic not because these social ills do not exist. They do exist! But there are social processes that shame, ostracize and hold accountable those who blatantly indulge these pathologies. The same is not true for those Islam or Muslim-haters. For example, intellectuals and policy makers are admirably frank about studying, admitting, and atoning for the Western legacy of anti-Semitism. Studies that document and analyze the pathology of anti-Semitism have emerged into a sophisticated critical discipline, and no serious intellectual would question whether anti-Semitism has been a recurring form of prejudice and bigotry in Western history. Logically, however, if one admits that anti-Semitism is a widespread social pathology that must be resisted and not encouraged, it would seem to follow that substantially the same position should be adopted in regards to anti-Muslim prejudice and Islamophobia. Put simply, one can hardly imagine any place or time in Europe where Jews were persecuted while Muslims were tolerated. Without exception, any time Jews were the target of persecution in Western history, this persecution included the archetypal representative of Islam of the time—whether that archetype was the Turk, Arab, Saracen, Morisco, or the Mohammedan. Moreover, as is well illustrated by the complex and problematic notion of a Judeo-Christian culture or civilization, the history of Jews in the West was a complex one—it ebbed and flowed and went back and forth between begrudging tolerance to outright persecution to eventual efforts at reconciliation and, at times, to atonement as in the Western guilt-ridden support for the Zionist movement. But the history of Muslims in the West has consistently ranged from slaughter to begrudging tolerance to extermination and eventually to total and unequivocal hegemony and domination. My point is that if examined from a historical logic, the reluctance, dead-silence, and quiet avoidance that confronts the Muslim victims of religious persecution in the West and that confronts researchers in the pathology of Islamophobia and Islam-hating is itself a shocking manifestation of the pathology. What is rather symptomatic of the deeply engrained prejudice is the continuous effort to justify Muslim suffering as an unfortunate but necessary cost for security, or to understate and minimize the existence of actual concrete and harmful results to the existence of such a prejudice. An example of this is the insistence on the part of some that the use of torture against Muslims in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere is not linked to deeply rooted prejudices as to the ego, pride, sexuality, religiosity, and body of a Muslim man or woman. Another common tactic that is actually symptomatic of the deep entrenchment of the problem is to admit that anti-Muslim prejudice exists but to minimize it as a passing condition instead of a

pathology with a stubbornly persistent history, or to dilute its particularity and distinctiveness by dismissively equating it to other prejudices and biases minorities suffered, and that in due time, defeated. The relatively muted response of the intelligentsia in the West at the widespread occurrence of civil rights violations against Muslims in the West, and also in reaction to the documented humanitarian violations and war crimes inflicted upon Muslims in several countries and contexts in the name of the war on terror is again a strong indication of the de-sensitization and suppressed consciousness of the West towards the presence and wrongfulness of anti-Muslim prejudices. Sadly, the West has managed to confront many of the demons of its history, but its fear of Muslims and hate of Islam is one demon that has proven too powerful to confront.

The one thing that the so-called war on terror has shown is the fragility of the Western ego, which as already explained, was inordinately shaped by its antithesis to Islam. After the terrorist attack of 2001 on the USA, it is truly remarkable how quickly so many intellectuals and policy makers were willing to abandon the arduous human labour that took human beings through two world wars, and that painfully created the structure of legitimacy for the world in the 21st century, only to revert back to the dichotomous paradigms of the good versus evil, the forces of light against the forces of darkness, the knights of Christendom versus infidel barbarians, the clash of civilizations, and ultimately, the satanic religion that is out to haunt the world with demonic forces. The fragility of the Western ego leaves one wondering: if murderous terrorist attacks can generate such a powerfully effective and lucrative hate culture in the enlightened West what could centuries of colonization, occupation, and brutalization produce in the Muslim world?

This, however, seems to me to be the wrong kind of question or at least, it seems to be a dangerous question. As the Qur'an consistently teaches, one injustice cannot justify another—in the same way that no amount of terrorism committed by people who affiliate themselves with the Islamic faith may possibly justify religious prejudice and bigotry, no amount of persecution or oppression may excuse or justify the harming or terrorizing of civilians in order to protest an injustice. I believe that the most rudimentary and basic moral order would recognize that if injustice is reciprocated by further injustice, we do not somehow miraculously end up with a just situation or with justice achieved. But this itself points to a quintessential affinity between all acts of terrorism—no matter the trappings, the ugliness remains the same. Whether terrorism is committed by a particular group holding a person hostage in order to win certain concessions, or by an army holding a population hostage in order to force submission to its will, the moral quality of the act is the same. This, of course, is in moral theory alone; reality is very different. In legal theory, for instance, the rich and the poor are treated according to the same standards of justice—although an ideal, it is seldom fulfilled. Nevertheless, the ideal must remain the normative yardstick and the failures of reality must never be treated as normatively correct.

This is precisely why I find Islamophobia and Islam-hating so unsettling—it is not a concession to reality while upholding the ideal; it is a corruption of reality while

deforming the ideal. Islam-hating is extreme in its ugliness because it stands everything on its head; it twists and distorts the space that Muslims are pushed into occupying in the modern age. If it is allowed to persist then the whole Muslim experience since Colonialism becomes nothing but a deceptive fantasy. This prejudice does not only mean the failure of the ideals upon which modernity was built; and a regression to the exploitatively religious wars of the Crusades and counter-crusades, but worst of all, it means that religion will be denied the role of the medicinal healer to the jahiliyya suffered in this age.

Among its endlessly circular and incoherently inconsistent long list of wrongs, Islamophobia rationalizes the continued victimization of disempowered people by dreaming-up conspiracy theories in which the offenders pretend to be the victims. It claims that because Muslims are plagued by paranoid conspiracy theories, Muslims have a weak grasp of reality, but simultaneously, Islamophobes imagine every Muslim with a pulse to be a co-conspirator in a massive plot for world domination. Islamophobes smugly declare that Muslims do not have cultural commitments to human rights and self-servingly, announce that any commitment to human rights by a Muslim culture is not authentic, and therefore, insincere. By the same logic, Shari'a is denounced as fundamentally inconsistent with human rights, but at the same time, any jurisprudential doctrine consistent with human rights cannot be an authentic part of Shari'a. This circular logic goes on and on: Islamophobia perpetuates violence and many abuses against Muslims by claiming that Muslims are not really victims because Muslims are inherently violent; it re-affirms its lies by accusing every challenge to its hate-filled view of Muslims to be a lie. It justifies the disproportionate and indiscriminate slaughter of Muslims as moral and just while contently claiming that Muslims lack a just war tradition. Islamophobes preach hate against Islam because by definition Islam only teaches hate. Islamophobes will gloat about how they belong to cultures that cherish the idea of liberty but as a matter of course, will denounce any Muslim movement that claims the right to self-determination or that demands the right to live free of foreign occupation. Islamophobes will accuse of Muslims of despotism and of being incapable of practicing democracy but at the same time, they will seek to exclude Islamic parties from participation in democratic governance. Similarly, Islamophobes will vigilantly support the right of Christian parties or Christian organizations to be actively engaged in the political field and will defend Jewish religious parties calling for the application of Jewish law as a necessary part of the exercise of democracy. Meanwhile, they transform a bogeyman labelled political Islam into the embodied reincarnation of fascist ideology. Islamophobes pretend to honour the right to freedom of belief but spew nothing but venom at those who believe in Islam as their spiritual and moral system of guidance. Sadly, however, as is the case with most prejudices and biases, the problem is not the absence of reasoning or the paucity of accurate information. Most prejudices and biases persist because of the lack of moral will—the will to adopt conscientious and ethical positions towards others, especially those who because of habit or interest we have a reason to hate.

For those who have the moral will, the book I introduce here will prove to be an invaluable reference source on the Islamic faith. For those who do not wish to be participants in the perpetuation of religious bigotry and hate, this book will provide an accurate, thoughtful, and reliable introduction to Muslim beliefs and practices. I wish we lived in a world in which this book would become a standard reference source for students of religion who are interested in an accurate introduction to the religion of Islam. The best thing I can say about this book is that it is the product of a labour of love that lasted for more than a decade. The authors do not offer a personalized view of their own religiosity; they explain in a very straightforward and accessible fashion what mainstream Muslims believe in and especially, what the Qur'an itself teaches. Non-Muslims will understand why well over a billion people call themselves Muslim and also how Islam inspires Muslims to deal with and improve upon the world in which they live. Indeed this book manages to translate the Muslim vision or the way that Islam heals the ailments of humanity in the current age and every age. Readers who wish to learn the theological and moral dogma of Islam will find this book indispensable. But this book is not just an informative tool for the fair-minded and interested reader. This book is an educational tool for both Muslims and non-Muslims—it is an authoritatively reliable text to teach young Muslims, or even Muslims who never had the time to study the Qur'an, or the fundamentals of their religion. The book is written with the kind of balance and fair mindedness that makes it equally valuable for Muslim and non-Muslim students of Islam. The least I can say about this text is that it was written by two ethically conscientious and principled Muslims in order to share their religion with every ethically conscientious and principled reader in the world. They must be heard.

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19/10/2002
Signature

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Muhammad Abulaylah of al-Azhar University - whom one of the authors personally met in Cairo (1997) with the first English draft, insisted on the need to attaining a high level of perfection. His suggestions precipitated in the deletion of some superfluous commentaries leading to a consolidation and improvement of the work, which in the initial stage lacked focus and scholarship. Sheikh al-Saeed Gharseldin of al-Azhar Academy (Canada) presented the improved draft to the office of Sheikh al-Azhar (1999), Cairo and actively helped its subsequent improvement, and inclusion of the Arabic script, through to its authentication and approval to proceed with the publication (2002). Dr. Jeffrey Lang (of the University of Kansas, USA, a contemporary Islamic scholar) read the final draft back-to-back (2000), and made encouraging comments that inspired the authors to press on with the work with their selfless zeal. Dr. Louay Safi, Director of Publications of the International Institute of Islamic thoughts, supported the work and offered to sponsor its publication if required (2003). Muhammad Arif critically screened the drafts in progress dating from the inception of the work (1993), and assisted in checking the verse numberings, cross references, and in detecting obvious flaws, and in the development of arguments and inferences as presented in the work. Tareque Mahmood Khan combed through the work minutely and detected flaws, and 'gaps' leading to finer and vital improvements in some of the chapters. Ashrafuddin Ahmed, a conservative Muslim of the older generation engaged in Qur'anic studies for over a decade went through the entire draft and gave a green signal. The work has also benefited from a computer based indexing exercise that one of the authors had conducted and published as this work was in progress.

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Glossary

Transliteration Notes:

1. Reference material: A Glossary of the Qur'an, Aurnag Zeb Azmi, New Delhi 2003.
2. Rendition of verses and transliterated Arabic terms are italicized, while those normally adapted in English (Qur'an, Hadith, Shari'a, the Prophet's Sunna, Sura, Ka'ba), are in Roman, capitalized, and the terminal silent 'h' where present is omitted

3. Extra-literal typographic symbols such as dots and over bars are avoided except for i) indicating the Arabic ayn (‘) - such as in ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattab, ‘Uthman Ibn ‘Affan, and ii) the Arabic hamza or the glottal stop (‘). The names of historical figures adapted in English, such as Umar, Uthman, Ali are, however, typed as such, except when giving their full Arabic names.

A.H. [After hijrah]: Islamic calendar (Lunar, 360 day-year), beginning the year, the Prophet migrated (did hijrah) from Mecca to Medina. It was introduced some 17 years after the Prophet’s death (by Caliph Umar) and the dates of all the preceding events were allocated backwards and represent the best judgment of the historians of the era.

x : y: Classical numbering of Qur’anic verses. ‘x’ refers to the Sura (chapter) number, and ‘y’ refers to the ayah (verse) number.

- An underline under the Sura (chapter) number denotes the Medinite origin of the verses based on the generally agreed chronology of the revelation.

ahl al-kitab: ‘People of the Book’, notably, the Jews and Christians, and in a broader sense all religious communities who had received divine scriptures before the Qur’anic revelation.

ayah (pl. ayat): The text of the Qur’an is made up of ayat (pl. form of ayah) – more than 6000 altogether. The Qur’an also connotes this word with a ‘sign’ or ‘message’ of God, depending upon usage.

din: In the generic sense, religion; though the Qur’an also connotes it with judgment, divine law, law of the land, obedience or devotion, faith, and moral responsibility.

hadith: As a generic term hadith (pl. ahadith) is an account or narration that embodies a model or normative behavior or practice (sunnah).

Hadith: The accounts or narration in the form of sayings of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh that were put together from oral accounts in circulation more than two hundred years after his death. The accounts are popularly referred to as ‘traditions.’ The earliest and most authentic of compilations is known as Sahih al-Bukhari - after the name of its compiler.

hajj: Muslims’ yearly pilgrimage to the Ka’ba in Mecca.

Halal: Lawful, whether in food, in earning livelihood, or in other pursuits of life.

Haram: Normally connoted with ‘prohibition’ - such as Qur’anic prohibition against grave crimes, usury, swine’s flesh etc; the Qur’an also connotes this word and its other roots with ‘sacred’ or ‘binding’.

hijrah: Literally, ‘migration’, the term is the popular shortened form of ‘after hijrah’ (See A.H. above).

jihad: An ongoing struggle to face the hardships and challenges of life, and to overcome the social, moral, material, intellectual and spiritual deprivations of the community.

Ka’bah [Ka’ba]: The cubicle shrine in Mecca that was originally built by Abraham and is regarded as the most sacred structure (house) in Islam.

kitab: A book, divine writ, or a scripture. When used for the Qur’an or other revealed scripture in the text, it is capitalized, such as, ‘People of the Book’ for ahl al-kitab. [See above]

khalifah: A successor, heir, deputy or a viceroy. Its anglicized form is Caliph

kufr: Willful rejection or denial of any self-evident or irrefutable proposition. The Qur'an refers to its recalcitrant audience by the plural noun forms **kafirun**, **kafirin**, which, for want of any appropriate English counterpart have been rendered as disbelievers or deniers as appropriate. The Qur'an also connotes kufr with canceling or effacing something (29:7, 47:2), being thankless or ungrateful (17:27, 76:24).

mu'min: One who has embraced the true faith; any believer in one God.

muslim: Anyone who submits his will and purpose (orients himself or herself) to God. It is capitalized in the text when specific to the followers of Islam (the Muslims).

muttaqi (pl. **muttaqin**, **muttaqun**): One who practices Taqwa (See definition below.)

salah (pl. **salat**): The daily ritual prayer of the Muslims. The word and its other roots (SLH) also connote peace, protection, blessings etc.

Shaytan [Satan]: In the Qur'anic discourse Satan is the personification of man's evil impulses - intrinsic to his nature or externally induced that drive him to defy the divine/universal moral tenets inspired in him as recipient of some of God's breath, tempts him to commit evil.

Shari'ah [Shari'a]: A divinely ordained way or path covering all facets of life.

Shar'ia law/Shar'iat: By definition, it is the Islamic law derived from the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet by use of reasoning, analogical deduction and consensus. In practical terms, it is a juristic tradition based on the discourses and traditions left by the jurists of different law schools of Islam.

SAW: Acronym for the Arabic benediction for the Prophet ('May God's blessings and peace be upon him')

surah [Sura]: Each chapter of the Qur'an is called a Surah (pl. Surat/Suras). There are 114 Suras in the Qur'an

sunnah: As a generic term, sunnah (pl. sunnat) means a normative or model behavior, or proven example or path, for others to follow.

Sunna: Denotes a sunnah that is specific to the Prophet Muhammad pbuh.

Taqwa: Piety, God consciousness, or heedfulness to God's commandments, and in a broader sense, compliance with one's universal social, moral, and ethical responsibilities, with faith in God and the Last Day.

'ulama (pl. form of 'alim): Religious scholars of Islam.

wudu: Ritual washing of hands, feet, face and symbolic mopping of head before performing a prayer (salah).

zakah: The term zakah, and its different roots and plural form, zakat, are used in the Qur'an with the dual connotation of 'spiritual purification', and 'care and concern for humanity.' Traditionally, its plural form, zakat is however translated in a restrictive sense as charity.

Zakat: The compulsory charity that the Muslims having income in excess of a threshold level are required to pay.

Preface

The Arabic Qur'an

For Muslims the word over the Qur'an is the infallible Word of God - a divine litany of unparalleled beauty and grandeur. They read, recite and memorize the Qur'an – partly

or even wholly, to please God, to experience the transcendent, and to seek peace and tranquility. However, they seldom make any attempt to study the Qur'an to comprehend its message. There is a tradition that "one who discusses about the Book of God, (the Qur'an) makes a mistake, even if he is correct."¹

The non-Muslim scholars of Arabic in the Christian West also acknowledge the extraordinary literary merit of the Qur'an,² but they often find its contents confusing and even alienating. Even secular Arab Muslims reading the Qur'an out of context may find it very challenging. This is due to some unique features of its text as summarily illustrated below.

The Qur'an engages a wide range of subjects and themes, which, barring a few exceptions, appear repeatedly either in their entirety, or in bits and pieces across the text, without any apparent order or organization. Thus, diverse themes may be interwoven in the same paragraph without any logical order.³

The Qur'an is an oratorical discourse with God as the speaker. However, God's mode of address shifts from first person singular and plural forms (I and We) to third person singular: He, Your Lord, al-Rahman(the Benevolent). It also constantly switches between its addressees: thus, a passage may open with an address to the Prophet, but the subsequent verses may be addressed to his followers, the People of the Book (Christians and Jews), the pagans, the disbelievers who persistently denied the revelation, and humankind in general.⁴

The language and style of the Qur'an also changes abruptly. Sometimes it is very clear and precise, sometimes it is condensed and elliptic, and sometimes it is highly context-specific. Besides, some of the Qur'anic passages, especially those from an early period of the revelation have a cosmic perspective, and are deeply mysterious, while others evoke God's transcendence and are profoundly mystical. There are many evocative passages in the Qur'an where "what is left unsaid is as important as what is said,"⁵ and the reader is left wondering what the Qur'an really means by such and such example or pronouncement.⁶

Moreover, the Qur'an evolves the various elements of its broader message in stages, and therefore, reading any passage in isolation can be highly misleading.

Thus, the Arabic Qur'an can be very challenging and can even disorient and misguide a casual reader, not aware of its subtleties, nuances and various contexts. However, the Qur'an leaves sufficient clues for the reader to help comprehending its guidance and broader message. Thus, the Qur'an affirms that it contains some clearly stated verses that form 'the essence of the Book' (3:7).

"He is the One who has revealed to you (O Muhammad,) the Book which contains (some) clear verses that (form) the essence of this Book, while others are allegorical. As for those with perversity in their hearts, follow that which is allegorical seeking confusion and seeking an interpretation. No one knows its interpretation, except God. Those, who have knowledge, say: 'We believe in it; it all comes from our Lord;' yet none is mindful of this, except the prudent"(3:7).

Furthermore, the Qur'an spells out its role and credentials, loud and clear, luring the seekers of knowledge and challenging his intellect to probing it. Thus, it claims to be:

- A book of wisdom⁷ that is made clear and distinct,⁸ with all kinds of illustrations,⁹ and explanations.¹⁰
- An Arabic recital (Qur'an) for those who have knowledge, and use their reason.¹¹
- Guidance and mercy for those who believe in God,¹² and who do good.¹³
- Guidance for the heedful (muttaqi) ;¹⁴ and truth, guidance and message for humanity.¹⁵
- The divine criteria of right and wrong,¹⁶ and the balance of justice for humanity.¹⁷
- Verifier of a part of the Scripture that came before it.¹⁸

The Qur'an however asserts that only those stand to benefit from it, who approach it with a pure heart,¹⁹ probe into its verses,²⁰ and seek the best meaning in it.²¹

The Translated Qur'an

The Arabic Qur'an is generous with idioms, metaphors, allegories and similes and features a complex construction of words, and therefore, its literal translation can hardly be meaningful. This, together with its extraordinary textual features, makes it almost impossible to render without grievous distortion in the meaning of many of its expressions, passages and themes. Traditionally, Muslim scholars have inserted additional words into the text to attain a meaningful rendition, and added explanatory notes in the margins to explain the message of the Qur'an in historical and thematic context. However, dictated by the traditional principle of taqlid (blind conformity with the works of the past scholars), practically all Qur'anic exegetes have referenced the work of an exegete of their choice as their primary source material, and embellished and adapted it to their immediate circumstances and world view. The traditional interpretative works (tafsir) have therefore been influenced by the personal and doctrinal background of their authors, and their choice of mentors, leading inevitably to varying interpretation of the Qur'anic message.

The Objective of this work

This book attempts to interpret the various facets of the Qur'anic message by drawing explanations primarily from its (the Qur'an's) own text. Thus, the meanings of the critical words, idioms, figures of speech, and phrases of the Qur'an have been derived from their usage across its text. Likewise, the essence of its guidance and its criteria of right and wrong, permissible and forbidden have been derived primarily from its own illustrations to provide the reader with a broad moral trajectory of the Qur'an. The work is thus designed to eliminate the influence of the personal, educational, and doctrinal backgrounds of its authors and their choice of source materials. This is consistent with the Qur'an's claim of representing the best interpretation.²² Accordingly, many Qur'anic scholars have advocated it since the early centuries of Islam. However, it never gained popularity, first because the orthodoxy was fully satisfied with the traditional exegetic discipline, and secondly because this approach is inherently more difficult and challenging than the classical exegesis. The long-

outstanding need for a clear understanding of the essential message of Islam, independent of personal exegetic influences, and the scope of using computer database for comprehensive and accurate scrutiny of the Qur'anic text as adopted in this work, provide the impetus and background for the compilation of this volume.

Coverage

The book covers about a fourth of the Qur'anic verses, partly rendered, and partly referenced/implied. It attempts to review, by topic, the Qur'an's clearly stated verses that constitute its core message (3:7 above). However, the listing of its repetitive exhortations under any topic can appear dull and flat, and therefore, in all such cases only a few verses are rendered to illustrate the Qur'anic message, while the rest of the verses are indicated in the footnote for the inquisitive to consult in their copies of the Qur'an.

The portion of the Qur'anic text that is not covered in this exposition relates to various Qur'anic illustrations, God's glorification, stories of the past prophets, fate of some of the ancient tribes, and tales and parables. This, however, does not undermine the scope of the work to any significant extent, as the lessons embraced in such verses are largely covered in the clearly spelled out directives, which the Qur'an commands its believers to follow (3:7).

Layout and Organization

The book is divided into 48 chapters, organized as follows:

Chapters 1-2 cover the salient features of the revelation and the text of the Qur'an.

Chapter-3 attempts to evolve a biography of the Prophet by drawing primarily on the Qur'anic allusions (some 250 verses) to contemporaneous events – an exercise that is designed to give a far more accurate representation of the Prophetic mission than the classical biography.

Chapters 4-14 relate to the Qur'anic reflections on the creation of the physical world, humans; its warnings about the Day of Judgment, and other concepts and notions of a universal nature.

Chapters 15-42 focus on the various facets of the Qur'anic guidance and message.

Chapter 43 recapitulates and summarizes all Qur'anic precepts relating to the rights and duties between all human relationships under a modern heading, 'Principles of human rights'.

Chapters 44-48 review the canonical five pillars of Islam, specifically for the Muslim readers. This has been placed towards the end as the Muslims are fairly familiar with them and need to have a better understanding of the broader message of the Qur'an, as covered earlier in the book, to derive greater benefits from the Islamic rituals.

The ordering of the topics, however, is somewhat arbitrary. As the Qur'anic message must be comprehended as a whole, there is no basis to give any ranking to its various elements.

Some critical issues and developments that have led to distortion of the Qur'anic message or confusion in religion have been covered in the Enclosures (four topics), and

the book is concluded with an Afterword that evaluates two current issues: the relevance of Islamic (Shari'a) law in today's multi-religious societies, and Sectarianism in Islam, in light of the Qur'anic message, and ends with a general appeal to both the Muslims and non-Muslims.

The Common Era has been used throughout the book, while in many places Islamic calendar is also noted, separated by a slash.

Last but not least, the classical division of the revelation into Meccan period (610-622) and Medinite (622-632) period has been maintained corresponding to the venue of the revelation (Mecca and Medina), and the chronology of Qur'anic chapters (Suras), where mentioned, is based on Noldeke's grouping,²³ which are generally agreed among the scholars.

Lingual Etiquette/ Nuances

A number of things that may sound somewhat academic but could be contentious need clarification:

1. Muslim scholars differ on whether Allah, the Supreme Deity of the Qur'an, can be rendered as 'God', and whether sanctifying adjectives should be used while referring to the Qur'an. We have followed Yusuf Ali, Thomas Irving (Talim Ali), Ahmed Ali and Muhammad Asad in using the English word 'God' for Allah - across this book, and excluded the sanctifying adjective 'Holy' while referring to the Qur'an.
2. The oratorical nature of the Qur'an reflects in the following dialectical nuances that may be noted for easy reading of the rendition of the verses presented in the book.
 - 'Say' means God is asking the Prophet to announce to his people.
 - 'You' may mean the Prophet himself or his Arab audience, by implication the reader himself, depending upon the Arabic verb-form (singular or plural form).
 - 'They', 'them', refer to the Prophet's followers or opponents depending upon the text.
3. The Qur'an features a rich vocabulary for different shades or categories of 'goodness' and 'badness',²⁴ with each word contributing to the lyrical harmony of its text. Any attempt to capture the different shades of meaning of the Qur'anic words for 'good' and 'bad' could compromise with the literary merit of translation. Therefore, in many places, the commonplace words 'good/kind' and 'evil' are used to convey all shades of 'goodness' and 'badness'.
4. For want of a common gender second person pronoun, the masculine form ('he'/'He') is adopted as per normal usage, without any gender bias, and likewise the generic word 'man,' is used, where appropriate, to denote both the sexes.

Finally, as a prelude to this exposition, a key mystical passage of the Qur'an is listed below to help the readers meditate on the Author (God) of the Arabic Qur'an.

"God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. A likeness of His light is a niche that has a lamp in it, and the Lamp is in a glass, and the glass is (dazzling,) as it were, a radiant star. (The Lamp is) lit from a blessed olive (tree), neither of East nor of West; its oil almost glows, though fire has never touched it. Light upon light! God

guides to His Light anyone He Wills, and God gives people examples, for God is Cognizant of everything”(24:35).

Muhammad Yunus & Ashfaq Ullah Syed

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Notes, Complimentary Verse references

1. Sanan Abu Daud, Urdu translation by Wahiduz Zaman, Vol.3, Acc. 253, p. 118.
2. Following are the quotations from some of the most eminent non-Muslim Arabic scholars of the modern era:

“It is by far the finest work of Arabic prose in existence” - Alan Jones, The Koran, London 1994, opening page.

“The sublime rhetoric of the Arabic Koran ... its richly varied rhymes... constitute the Koran’s undeniable claim to rank among the greatest literary masterpieces of mankind.” - Arthur Arberry, The Koran Interpreted, London 1956, p. x.

(Its language is) “the richest and most harmonious in the world.” - Savary.

Extracted from: Sliman bin Ibrahim and Etienne Diné, The life of Muhammad, London 1990, p. 71.

“.. the recited Qur’an is a distinctively compelling example of verbal expression.” - Michael Sells, Approaching the Qur’an, 2nd edition, Oregon 2007, p. 2.
3. For example, the passage 45:13-16, opens with a statement that God has made serviceable to humans whatever is in the heavens and the earth, (45:13), and this is followed in sequence by a bidding to the believers to forgive the disbelievers (45:14), a declaration on the individual accountability of humans to God subject to their deeds (45:15) and God’s favour on the Children of Israel.
4. God’s opening address to the Prophet in the passage (5:67-71) is followed sequentially by the Prophet addressing the People of the Book (5:68), God promising reward to all adherents of monotheistic faiths subject to their deeds (5:69), and God speaking about the rebellious attitude of the Children of Israel (5:70).
5. Michael Sells, Approaching the Qur’an, 2nd edition, Oregon 2007, p. 45.
6. Examples:

hawiyah (101:7). The 101st Sura (al Qari’a) - a short lyrical composition, opens with a brief glimpse of the apocalyptic calamity (101:1-5), and then warns its audience that “whoever’s scales weigh light’ (101:8), his mother is hawiyah” (101:9). It then asks: “And what can tell you what she is” (101:10)?, and concludes with the answer: “narun hamiah (raging fire)” (101:11). Totally lost in foreign rendition, the term hawiyah, presented in the feminine mode (101:10), preceded by a powerful imagery of a cosmic cataclysm, evokes a sense of profound loss or agony and can mean ‘a fall into an abyss’ or ‘a woman bereft of her child.’ The sense of loss is stressed phonologically by the sound figure of the word and leaves the Arab audience wondering what the Qur’an really means by this term. The

Qur'anic answer does not fully satisfy his curiosity as the expression *narun hamiah* is without the definite article *al* (the): *narun hamiyah* is not 'the raging fire', rather simply 'raging fire' - Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an*, Oregon, U.S.A, 1999, p.113.

sijjil (105:4). In the 105th Sura (*al-Fil*), the Qur'an alludes to the destruction of an army with elephants approaching Mecca by birds showering them with *sijjil*. This is a mysterious term that has been variously interpreted as 'a writing', 'rock', 'baked bricks', 'rock-hard clay', and, metaphorically, as 'a writing on the wall', something that had been decreed (by God). - Muhammad Asad, *Message of the Qur'an*, Gibraltar 1980, Chap. 105, Note 2.

7. 10:1, 31:2, 43:4, 44:4.
8. 12:1, 15:1, 16:64, 26:2, 27:1, 36:69, 43:2, 44:2.
9. 17:89, 18:54, 30:58, 39:27.
10. 7:52, 11:1, 41:3.
11. 12:2, 41:3, 43:3.
12. 7:52, 16:64, 27:77.
13. 31:3.
14. 2:2, 3:138, 24:34.
15. 2:185, 10:108, 14:52.
16. 2:185, 25:1.
17. 42:17, 57:25.
18. 5:48.
19. 56:79. Literally, the verse states: "None but the pure (of heart) can touch it (the Qur'an)", but given that the Qur'an was an oral revelation, the verse suggests that only those pure (of heart) can draw benefit from it.
20. 38:29, 47:24.
21. 39:18, 39:55.
22. 25:33.
23. Noldeke's classification is as follows, though some scholars place the opening Sura (1) in the Medinite period.
 - o Early Meccan: 1, 51-53, 55-56, 68-70, 73-75, 77-97, 99-109, 111-114. [48 Suras]
 - o Middle Meccan: 15, 17-21, 23, 25-27, 36-38, 43-44, 50, 54, 67, 71-72, 76. [21 Suras]
 - o Late Meccan: 6-7, 10-14, 16, 28-32, 34-35, 39-42, 45-46. [21 Suras]
 - o Medinite Suras, in (extrapolated) chronological order: 2, 98, 64, 62, 8, 47, 3, 61, 57, 4, 65, 59, 33, 63, 24, 58, 22, 48, 66, 60, 110, 49, 9, 5. [24 Suras]

Alan Jones, *The Koran*, U.K. 1994, [Reprint of the original translation of the Qur'an by J.M.Rodwell, 1861]; p. xx.

24. Typically, the Qur'an uses the words *sualehah*, *khayrah*, *hasanah*, *taiyibah*, *birr* for different categories of goodness, and the words, *khabisah*, *sharr*, *sayyi'ah*, *munkar*, *fahishah* for different categories of badness.

1. The Quranic Revelation and Compilation

1.1. Social and moral setting of pre-Islamic Arabia

Barren sandy desert, extremely hot climate, and scarcity of water resources made the heartland of the Arabian Peninsula an inhospitable abode for man since ancient times. Its original people were pagans, except for some Unitarians (*ahnaf*) who contemplated on the Oneness of God. In the post Judeo-Christian era, pockets of wet fertile land attracted Jewish and Christian settlers from the adjoining regions, and became isolated centres of trade and commerce. However, the vast stretches of the desert heartland that only sustained a nomadic life, remained in a primitive state until the advent of Islam. The nomadic tribes had preserved their ancestral paganism, with each tribe having its own idol; and the Ka'ba, a cubical shrine at the heart of an ancient sanctuary (*Haram*) in Mecca, was the centre of idol worship. The nomadic Arabs were largely unlettered, had no notion of central state or kingdom, and their social and moral norms were based on traditions (*Sunnah*) and dictated by the struggle for survival.

The Qur'an does not offer any details on the social and moral conditions of the time. However, as part of its dialogue with the pagan Arabs, it touches on the major vices of the era, as summarized below.

The Arabs abhorred the birth of a female child and would rather bury it alive than bear the shame and ignominy of raising it.¹ They also slaughtered their own children,² as sacrifice to idols, or on account of poverty.³ They forbade certain crops and animals to common people, reserving them only for the priests.⁴ They reserved some livestock for men, but allowed the women to share only that which was born dead,⁵ and forbade four kinds of cattle of either sex for food.⁶

The menfolk did not take any financial responsibility for their wives, and so when they were away on trading missions, their wives cohabited with other men to maintain themselves,⁷ and the vestiges of incest had lingered on.⁸

The poor, orphans, and travellers in distress were left uncared,⁹ slavery was institutionalized,¹⁰ and the sick and the mendicant were ostracized.¹¹

Offences against members of rival tribes were avenged by 'like for like' injury resulting in an unending cycle of avenge and blood vendetta often lasting for generations,¹² while economic injustice and immoral commercial practices were rampant.¹³

1.2. The Qur'anic revelation

As a Hanafi (believer in the Oneness of God), Muhammad had taken to periodic meditation in a mountain cave above Mecca. During one of these meditations, he heard a voice saying:

“Read! (O Muhammad,) in the name of your Lord who creates (96:1), (who) created man out of a clot (2). Read! Your Lord is Most Noble (3). He taught humans the use of the intellect (4). He taught man what he did not know” (96:5).

This was the beginning of the Qur’anic revelation (610). The next revelation, comprising the first seven verses of the 74th Sura (al- Muddaththir), came after a pause (fatarah) of two to three years, commanding the Prophet to proclaim his Prophetic mission, and setting out some of the core concepts of Qur’anic message:

“O you enwrapped (Muddaththir) (in your thoughts) (74:1)! Arise and warn (your people) (2). Magnify your Lord (3). Purify your inner self (thiyab) (4).**14** Shun all defilements (5). Do not bestow favour, seeking gains (6). And turn to God in patience” (74:7).

The revelations came in phases,**15** and at an early stage of the revelation, it assured the Prophet that he would have no difficulty in remembering and reciting the Qur’an.**16** This enabled verbatim recording of the revealed passages. The revelation continued for almost twenty-three years (610-632) until it declared its own completion, and the ‘perfection of its laws’ (5:3):

“...This day, those who reject (this Qur'an) despair of (ever harming) your religion. Therefore, do not fear them; fear Me. This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favour on you, and have chosen Islam for your religion...” (5:3).

1.3. Genesis, literary grandeur and consistency

The revelation came like ad hoc passages, without any continuity of theme or rhythm. Moreover, no attempt was made by the scribes to record the revealed passages in a chronological order: the Prophet directed their exact location in the Qur'an. This led the Prophet’s Meccan enemies to question his claim to be God's messenger. The revelation responded by challenging its audience to produce a chapter like it (2:23/24):**17**

“If you (O people,) are in doubt concerning what We have revealed to Our Servant, then produce a chapter like it; and call on your witnesses besides God – if indeed you are truthful (2:23). But if you do not do (it) - and you can never do (it), then heed hellfire, whose fuel is human beings and stones - prepared for the disbelievers” (2:24).

The Qur’an also claims that no one can even forge it (10:38),**18** and asserts that it is of such a literary grandeur that only God Almighty could be its Author (10:37):

“This Qur'an could not possibly have been devised by (anyone) other than God – rather, (it) is a confirmation of what was (revealed) before it; and a fuller explanation of the Book in which there is nothing doubtful, from the Lord of the worlds (10:37). Do they say, he [Muhammad] forged it?’ Say (to them): ‘Then bring a chapter like this, and call upon anyone besides God you can - if indeed you are truthful’”(10:38).

At the height of literary eloquence, the Arabs had great poets and poetry was big part of their lives, but they recognized in the Qur’an, the most eloquent language they had ever heard. The Qur’an virtually cast a spell on the listeners, so much so that the Quraysh

asked people to chat and make noise during Qur'anic recitation, understandably, to foil its magical effect.**19**

The Qur'an also challenged the priests and the learned among its audience to probe into it and find any contradiction in it (4:82) and asserted that its self-consistency is yet another illustration of its divine character (18:1):**20**

“Don't they ponder over the Qur'an? Had it been from (someone) other than God, they would have surely found much contradiction in it” (4:82).

“Praise be to God who has revealed to His devotee the Book, and did not put any distortion in it” (18:1).

As the revelation progressed, the seemingly unrelated passages fell in place and created an immensely intricate and inexplicably harmonious pattern of the Qur'anic text. This fully convinced the Arabs, who had opposed Muhammad for almost two decades, of the divinity of the Qur'an, and they came to the Prophet in large numbers from all over Arabia to embrace the new faith.

1.4. Memorization / recording during the Prophet's lifetime

Early Qur'anic revelations were generally short, and were memorized by Muhammad's followers, as pieces of a divine litany. In later years, revealed passages became longer. They were not only memorized, but also recorded. The scribes wrote them down on dry palm leaves, camel hides, paper scroll etc. When any writing material was not at hand, they inscribed them on white stone, animal bones, hardened clay, wooden tablets etc. These early records and inscriptions were then written down on sheets (Suhuf), which were held in reverence (80:11-16).

“Nay! The Qur'an is a message (80:11) for anyone who wants to remember (12), (retained) in honoured pages (Suhuf) (13), elevated and immaculate (14), (written) by the hands of scribes (15) – noble and virtuous” (80:16).

As the pagans put pressure on the Prophet to alter the wordings of the revelation such as by accommodating their deities, the Qur'an declares (6:115, 85:21/22):**21**

“The Words of your Lord will be fulfilled truthfully and justly: none can change His Words, for He is All-Knowing and Aware” (6:115)

“Surely We have sent down this Reminder, and surely. We will protect (preserve) it” (15:9).

“Nay! This is a Glorious Qur'an (85:21). (Inscribed) in a Tablet (well) guarded (lauh al-Mahfooz) **22** (against corruption)” (85:22).

These Qur'anic pronouncements serve as irrefutable proof of the integrity of its text. Had there been any alteration in the Qur'an, the Prophet's enemies as well as the general Arab public would not have embraced Islam during his lifetime; and even if, for the sake of argument, they did so under the prevalent historical setting, they would have definitely rejected the Qur'an immediately after the Prophet's death. However, this did not happen. The Prophet's immediate successors were as intense in their faith in the Qur'an as their predecessors during the Prophet's lifetime. Thus there can be no iota of

doubt that the Qur'an was handed down to the Prophet's successors and through them to the posterity in its original form.

1.5. Final compilation and authentication

While some of the Prophet's companions²³ compiled their own manuscripts (masahif), Zayd bin Thabit, the foremost among the Prophet's scribes collated all the original sheets (suhuf) within two to three years of the Prophet's death (632). These were retained originally by the first Caliph, Abu Bakr (632-634), then by the second Caliph, 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab (634-644), then by Hafsa bint 'Umar, one of the Prophet's widows, and finally authenticated by the special committee set up by the third Caliph, 'Uthman Ibn 'Affan (644-656).

The personal manuscripts of the Prophet's companions showed nominal differences in spelling, arrangement and numbering of chapters (Suras) and synonyms. Uthman's commission cross checked Hafsa's original sheets (suhuf) with each of these manuscripts as well as with the memorized litany, and arrived at a 'singular' text, which had the concurrence of all the companions of the Prophet, and was declared authentic without doubt (mutawattir). Some of Uthman's manuscripts are preserved. He made five copies and sent one copy each to Egypt, Syria and other dominions of Islam. Three of the copies have survived, and modern secular research has also established that except for dots and orthographic marks that were introduced later, ²⁴ they are identical to what we have today.²⁵

1.6. Historical accuracy of Qur'anic records

The Qur'anic records of the social, moral and political setting of the revelation, and its references to contemporaneous events must be necessarily true, because its verses were recorded as well as memorized during the lifetime of the Prophet. If this was not so the very premise of the Qur'an as a book of Truth²⁶ and Wisdom,²⁷ as it repeatedly claims, would have been challenged in the Prophet's lifetime, and Islam would never have spread out of the townships of Medina and Mecca, let alone to the farthest corners of the Arabian peninsula, in the very limited span of the last few years of his life.

This intrinsic accuracy of the Qur'anic records of contemporaneous events is of great significance. They can be used to verify the authenticity of Islamic theological records, which date at least a hundred and fifty years after the revelation, and are not always accurate because of their sole dependence on oral accounts, transmitted across the preceding generations.

It is also worth noting that since the Qur'an reflects the social circumstances of the time of revelation, it could not have been written in historical stages and increments as some orientalist argued, because then social and historical circumstances of a later era would have been inevitably reflected in the text.

Notes

1. 16:58/59, 43:17, 81:8.
2. 6:137, 6:140, 60:12.
3. 6:151, 17:31.
4. 6:138.

5. 6:139.
6. 5:103, 6:143/144.
7. Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, English translation by Ismail Ragi, 8th edition, Karachi 1989, p. 319.
8. 4:23.
9. 2:215, 4:36, 17:26, 30:38.
10. 2:177, 4:25, 4:92, 5:89, 9:60, 24:32/33, 58:3, 90:13.
11. 24:61.
12. 2:178.
13. 2:188, 2:275, 4:29.
14. The word *thiyab* in 74:4 literally connotes clothes that one wears, and accordingly most commentators have linked the verse 74:1 with the verses 74:4/5 to imply that the Prophet, who used to be enwrapped (74:1) in his cloak, is commanded to keep his cloak clean of all filth and pollution (74:4/5). However, Muhammad Asad observes quoting early scholars, that in classic Arabic the word *thiyab* is used metaphorically to denote the inner self, and that according to most of the (earlier) commentators, “the meaning of (the verse 74:5) is to ‘purify thy heart of all that is blameworthy.’” Muhammad Asad, *Message of the Qur’an*, Gibraltar 1980, Chap.74, Note 2.
15. 17:106, 25:32.
16. 75:16-19.
17. 17:88, 52:34.
18. 11:13, 52:33.
19. 41:26.
20. 39:23, 39:28.
21. 6:34, 18:27, 41:42.
22. This is the only verse with the phrase *lauh al-mahfuz*, rendered as ‘Tablet (well) guarded’. Many scholars take the literal meaning of the word and advocate that the Qur’an has been preserved in the heaven since eternity in an imperishable Tablet. However, others hold that this expression implies God’s promise to protect the Qur’anic text from any corruption. In the early centuries of Islam, this generated much debate and confusion as it bore on the highly contentious and sensitive issue of whether the Qur’an is created or uncreated and that of divine predestination. These are, however, purely theological questions and God best knows their answers.
23. Ibn Mas’ud, Ubayy Ibn Ka’b and Zayd Ibn Thabit, ‘Ali Ibn Abi Talib - to name the noted ones.
24. Caliph Malik al-Marwan (d. 68/686) introduced the dots and orthographic marks into the plain text of the Qur’an to enable the non-Arabs to differentiate between the different Arabic words as without these marks, many words look identical.

25. Ahmad von Denffer, 'Ulum al-Qur'an, U.K. 1983 / Malaysia 1991, p. 163.
26. 2:176, 39:2, 39:41, 42:17.
27. 10:1, 31:2, 43:4, 44:4. [Same as Note 7, Preface]

[27 references]

2. The Text of the Qur'an

2.1. Essence of Faith

An unqualified and wholesome belief in the One Almighty God (Tawhid), without the slightest association of anything with Him (shirk) distinguishes the Qur'an as the epitome of the purest form of monotheism. The Qur'an repeatedly asserts the transcendence of God and uses a rosary of attributes to convey the multifarious manifestations of His Words (kalimat). It recounts almost a hundred attributes of God such as, the Sustainer (Lord), the Sovereign, the Holy, the (source of) Peace, the Secure, the Preserver (of safety), the Mighty, the Inexorable, the Supreme, the Eternal Source (of everything), the Complete, the Fearless, the Exalted, the Wise, the Permanent, the Merciful, the Independent, the Omnipotent, the Originator of Heaven and Earth etc. The Qur'an however makes it clear that all Words are due to Him:

"Say (O Muhammad!): 'If the ocean were an inkwell for the Words* of my Lord, sooner would the ocean be exhausted than my Lord's Words (kalimat), even if We brought the same to replenish (it)'" (18:109). *[Scholars have connoted the word kalimat in this verse with 'wisdom' or 'knowledge.' It can also mean manifestations.]

"If all the trees on earth were (made into) pens and the oceans (were ink), with seven oceans for replenishment*, the Words (Kalimat) of God will not be exhausted. Indeed God is Almighty, Wise" (31:27). *[Lit., 'after that']

The Qur'an calls upon humankind to submit [orient themselves] to God, and to seek His forgiveness. It advocates belief in the 'unseen:' what is impenetrable to human perception (the angels, jinn), and affirms the certainty of the Day of Judgment.

2.2. Reference to past and Biblical Prophets / Scriptures

The Qur'an states that God sent messengers to different communities from time to time (10:47),¹ and declares that Muhammad is the seal of the prophets.²

"And there has been a messenger for every community, and when their messenger comes, judgment is passed among them justly, and they are not wronged" (10:47).

It calls upon Muslims to believe in all the prophets and previously revealed scriptures, and to make no distinction between any of the Prophets (4:152),³ and affirms that all the messengers are not mentioned in the Qur'an (40:78).⁴

"As for those who believe in God and His messengers, and do not make a distinction between any of them – it is they who will be given their rewards, for God is Most Forgiving and Merciful" (4:152).

“Certainly We have sent messengers before you (O Muhammad!): Some of them We have mentioned to you, while there are others that We have not mentioned to you...” (40:78).

The Qur'an enjoins the same true religion as the Judeo-Christian prophets had preached (2:136),⁵ but it unequivocally rejects the notion of divine incarnation and trinity (Nicene Creed) which describes Jesus as Son of God, and one of three among a multiple deity (4:171).⁶

“Say, ‘We believe in God, and in what was revealed to us, and in what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes; and in what was given to Moses and Jesus, and all the prophets from their Lord. We do not make a distinction between any of them. To God alone do we submit” (2:136).

“O People of the Book, do not commit excess in your religion, and do not say anything about God but the truth. The Messiah Jesus, the Son of Mary, was a messenger of God, and His Word that He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit from Him. Therefore, believe in God and His messengers, and do not say ‘Trinity’ - it is best for you to refrain (from this). God is one sole deity, too glorified to have a son. To Him belongs everything in the heavens and everything on earth, God is enough of a Patron” (4:171).

The Qur'an mentions twenty-four of the Biblical prophets by name, such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, to name the noted ones. However, the Qur'an does not tell the story of its prophets in a linear fashion. With the exception of the story of Joseph (Sura 12), the Qur'anic allusions appear in bits and pieces scattered across its text. Thus for example, Jesus is spoken of some 35 times either by his name Isa, or by some other title (Messiah, the Son of Mary),⁷ and some aspects of the story of Moses occur in 44 different passages.⁸

At the time of the Prophet, varying versions of Biblical accounts were held by diverse Christian sects,⁹ but the Qur'anic references to the missions of Biblical prophets, though fragmentary, are fully consistent. Accordingly many Christian priests and Rabbis saw the truth in the Qur'anic revelation (2:146),¹⁰ and listened to it with overwhelming awe, admiration, and devotion (17:107).

“Those to whom We have given the Book, know this (to be true) as they know their own sons...” (2:146)

“Say: ‘Whether you believe in it - or you do not believe, indeed, those who are given knowledge before this (Qur'an), fall down prostrating on their faces when it is recited to them” (17:107).

2.3. Qur'anic guidance is broad based and universal

The Qur'an sets out the highest principles of belief and a framework of moral values and social guidelines. However, its guidance is timeless, designed for universal communities, and is therefore broad based, and not spelled out in any details. For example, it lays great emphasis on good deeds and Zakah (traditionally rendered as charity) - but does not define either. Its treatment of social and civil norms, finance etc. is in general terms.

It does not give any detailed instructions in civil law or administration of justice, though it touches on the punishment for some of the major prevalent offences and crimes, while emphasizing on justice and equity in general terms. However, the Qur'an is specific when it radically changed what existed at the time. Accordingly, it clearly spells out the various facets of family and inheritance laws, thereby ensuring the rights and privileges of women in different capacities: as an independent person, a wife, a mother, a widow, or as an inheritor of property from the next of kin.

The Qur'an remains silent about the physical setting of life, as the latter changes with time, place, and state of civilization. Thus, it refers to man's eternal need for eating but does not say how to prepare the food. It refers to man's eternal need for lodging, but does not say a word about the type or nature of his abode. It refers to man's need for traveling to distant lands, but does not prescribe any mode of communication. It refers to man's eternal need for harnessing the forces of nature for his use, but does not elaborate on the methodology or the process to accomplish this.

To put it in a word, the Qur'an is practically silent about the myriad of objects, articles, gadgets, tools, instruments, and equipment that man has been developing with the progress of civilization. Contrary to the once popular notion, the Qur'an does not even condemn music, though of course good Muslims should be cautious as far as certain types of music are concerned (because they neatly go together with drugs, alcohol and prostitution).

Historically, the orthodox have been suspicious of all new things. Their objection, in the historical perspective, has ranged from the introduction of the handkerchief in the post Prophetic era, to the use of printing machine in late medieval era and photography, microphone and television in more recent times. But the Qur'an does not provide any basis to prevent humans from using the God given faculty of their minds, and to change the physical setting of their life through enterprise, innovation, discovery and invention.

2.4. Qur'anic commandments are not gender biased

The Qur'an addresses its believers using a common gender pronoun, *aa'manu*, but the Qur'an also uses this word to denote the male believer. Therefore, to leave no ambiguity that its commandments are directed to both men and women, the Qur'an states:

“Indeed, for Muslim men and Muslim women, for believing men (*mu'minin*) and believing women (*mu'minat*), for devout men and devout women, for truthful men and truthful women, for patient men and patient women, for humble men and humble women, for charitable men and charitable women, for fasting men and fasting women,¹¹ for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who remember God a lot - God has prepared for them forgiveness and a great reward” (33:35).

“Anyone, whether a man or a woman, who does good deeds, and is a believer – it is they (who shall) enter the garden and will not be wronged at all” (4:124).

2.5. The Transformative human language of the Qur'an

Some of the Qur'anic verses regard the manifestations of nature as well as the day-to-day happenings of life as totally dependent on God's Will or Command. Any simplistic comprehension of such verses, typified below could lead to confusion and misinterpretation.

“...He sends down mountain-masses (of clouds) from the sky with hail in them, and He strikes with it anyone He wills and turns it away from anyone He wills...” (24:43).

“...God leaves straying anyone He wills and guides anyone He wills...” (14:4, 74:31).

“...God multiplies things for anyone He wills...” (2:261).

These stipulations seemingly suggest that man need not make any effort to do anything on his own, as everything depends on God's Will. But such an interpretation is totally out of line with the following Qur'anic assertions appearing in two of its verses:

“... God does not change the favour which He has bestowed on a people, unless they change themselves*...” (8:53).

“... God does not change the condition of a people, unless they change themselves*...” (13:11).

*[Lit., 'change that which is in themselves.']

These Qur'anic assertions point to both a divine law of cause and effect and to the fundamental premise of man's free will to choosing the right path out of the “two highways shown to him” (90:10/Ch.17.1).

The truth remains, God is above any comparison with any of His creations. Therefore, as Ali al-Tantawi explains, human attributes, such as ‘will’, ‘wish’, etc. when employed to express God's Might and Power, cannot be interpreted to mean the same as when used in the context of human beings.¹²

2.6. Manual handling of the Arabic Qur'an

One of the verses of the Qur'an (56:79) declares: “None but the pure (mutatahhirin) can touch it (the Qur'an).” In the context of the revelation, this probably meant approaching the Qur'an with a pure heart (Note 19/Preface), the Muslims generally regard this as an instruction to attaining purity (Tahara) by doing the ritual ablution (Wudu) before touching any printed copy of the Qur'an, or a part of its text. The Qur'an however uses the word Tahara to denote the various dimensions of purity, such as purity or clarity of mind, spiritual purity, purity in sexual behaviour, purity of a drink, etc.¹³ Therefore, while applying the injunction to non-believers, the Qur'anic word Tahara may be understood in its broader sense. Furthermore, the Qur'anic guidance is for all humanity,¹⁴ and it is ‘a reminder for all the worlds.’¹⁵ Therefore anyone of any faith, who may not feel obliged to comply with the Qur'anic injunction on ablution, may still touch and read it, and benefit from its guidance. It would therefore follow that the non-Muslims may touch, or read the written text of the Qur'an without undermining its sanctity.

2.7. The Qur'an's clue to its mysterious character

One of the earliest verses of the Qur'an (74:30) refers to the overlooking of hellfire by nineteen angels. The passage is allegorical, but the subsequent verse (74:31) has some clear stipulations that are worth pondering:

“Over it are nineteen (angels) (74:30), and We have made none but the angels the wardens of hellfire; and We have not set their number (at 19), except as a trial for those who deny (this revelation) - so as to convince those who were given the Book, and to strengthen the faith of those who believe; so that those who were given the Book and who have faith (in One God) may not be in doubt, and that those with sickness in their hearts, and the disbelievers may say: ‘What does God mean by this example?’ God leaves straying anyone He wills and guides anyone He wills...” (74:31).

If we ponder over the number 19, as the verse (74:31) apparently invites us to, we find some easily verifiable clues that point to a mysterious bearing of this odd prime number in the formatting and composition of the Qur'anic text. Thus for example:

The Qur'an's opening benediction, Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim [In the name of God, the Benevolent, the Merciful] has **19** letters. The Qur'an has 114 chapters (Suras) - the number is a multiple of **19**. The Qur'an's first revealed passage (96:1-5/Ch. 1.2) contains **19** words, 76 or **19X4** letters, and is located in the chapter (96) - which stands **19th** from the end (counting 114 as 1, 113 as 2...) and contains **19** verses, and 304 or **19X16** letters. The number of Qafs in the 50th chapter, Surah Qaf, which begins with the letter Qaf as a Qur'anic Initial (maqta)*, is 57, or **19X3**.

*[muqattat, (pl. form of maqta) are letters of unknown meaning which appear at the beginning of some of the Qur'anic chapters, as Qur'anic Initials.]

The number of Qafs in the 42nd chapter, Surah al-Shura, which is the only other chapter beginning with a Qur'anic Initial containing a Qaf (42:2), is 57, or **19X3**. The 42nd and 50th Qur'anic chapters having a Qaf in the Initial have 53 and 45 verses respectively, and the sum of the chapter as well as verse number in each case (42+53, 50+45) is 95, or **19X5**. 14 Arabic letters appear in 14 different combinations in 29 chapters as Qur'anic Initials, and the sum of these numbers is 57 (14+14+29), or **19X3**. Though the 9th Qur'anic chapter (Surah al-Tawbah) does not begin with Bismillah..., there is an extra Bismillah...in the text of Chapter 27, giving a total of 114, or **19X6** Bismillahs...in the Qur'an. The 27th chapter (which has an extra Bismillah...) counts **19th** from the 9th chapter, which does not begin with a Bismillah... The number of Qafs in the first 19 verses of the first Qur'anic chapter having at least 19 verses (Surah al-Baqarah, 2) is **19**. Given the innate incapability of human mind to comprehend a sentence or a passage with a predetermined arithmetical order to have a mathematical consistency of a completed work, it is just not possible to have the cited 15 easily verifiable examples as a mere coincidence.**16**

Notes

1. 13:38, 15:10, 23:44, 30:47, 35:24, 43:6, 57:25.
2. 33:40.

3. 2:177, 2:285, 57:19.
4. 4:164.
5. 3:3, 3:84, 42:13.
6. 5:73.
7. Geoffery Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, Oxford 1996 reprint, p. 18.
8. Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'an*, 2nd edition, Oregon 2007, p. 15.
9. Geoffery Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, Oxford 1996 reprint, Chap. 3.
10. 6:20, 28:52, 28:53, 26:197.
11. The underlined expression represents the traditional rendering of the words sa'imin and sa'imat, based on the Qur'anic usage of the word siam for fasting in the month of Ramadan. However, the Qur'an also connotes this word with abstinence (19:26), and if this meaning is applied, then the underlined expression will read: "for men and women who abstain (from greed and vices)." - Muhammad Asad, *Message of the Qur'an*, Gibraltar 1980, Chap. 33, Note 38.
12. Ali al-Tantawi, *General Introduction to Islam*, English translation, Makkah 1994, p. 88.
13. List of different derivatives of the word Tahara used in the Qur'an:
 - mutahhir, tahhar: God purified Jesus (3:55) and Mary (3:42).
 - tahhir, tahhar: purifying one's thoughts (74:4) sanctifying the House (for worship) (2:125, 22:26).
 - athar: a pure mental state that is conducive to one's treating his divorced wife with honor and generosity (2:232), to give out in charity (58:12), and to overcome sexual desire (33:53); purer sexual relationship between man and woman as against homosexuality (11:78).
 - mutahhra: the pure and sacred contents of the revelation (80:14, 98:2); pure companions (2:25).
 - yatatahhru: purity in sexual behavior (7:82, 27:56); spiritual purity of people attending the mosque (9:108).
 - tahura: pure rain water (25:48); a most pure drink (76:21).
 - yutahhir: God purifies the faithful (5:6); He does not purify the pagans (5:41); the charity offered to the Prophet purified the faithful (9:103); God purified the Prophet's wives (33:33).
 - tatahhr: women's physically pure state outside their monthly courses (2:222).
14. 2:185, 10:108, 14:52 [Same as footnote 15, Preface]
15. 38:87, 68:52.
16. The statistical chance of such a repeated occurrence of 19 as a factor in all the above noted 15 instances is 1 in 1915 (15,000,000,000,000,000). In other words, if one was to go through more than fifteen million billion books, statistically he will find only one meeting the above arithmetical logic. It is indeed quite mysterious.

3. Muhammad and the Prophetic Mission

The Qur'an is almost silent about Muhammad's personal life: it does not name, nor bear any information about his parents, wives, offspring, friends or acquaintances, though it leaves the following record about his early life:

“Did He not find you (O Muhammad) an orphan and give shelter (93:6)? And He found you wandering, and gave guidance (7). And He found you needy, and gave sufficiency” (93:8).

On the other hand, the Qur'an is replete with comments on the immediate circumstances of the Prophet - but its commentaries are of very general nature - often oblique and fleeting, and barring exceptions, there is no mention of any names of characters, places, events, numerical figures or sequence of events that go with an historical record. Accordingly, it is not possible to construct the Prophet's biography in the historical lines from the Qur'anic allusions alone. Partly for this reason and partly for the reverential remoteness of the Qur'an, its references have not been probed in a focused manner, and are quoted only sparingly in classical biographic reports.

The details as we find today in the Prophet's biographic literature are largely based on the works of Ibn Hisham (d. 218/834), al-Waqidi (d. 206/822) and Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845). However, these works were characterized by the historical constructions of the era, and “are far from being certain historical fact.”¹ Thus, the classical works on the Prophet's biography contain materials that can be misleading, incorrect and even legendary, notably, reference to Satanic verses, miraculous powers of the Prophet, exaggerated accounts of the Prophet's actions against some of his most treacherous enemies – to cite some examples (Encl.1).

This work attempts to piece together a crystallized account of the Prophetic mission (610-632) by drawing primarily on the Qur'anic allusions (rendered or paraphrased in italics). As discussed earlier (Ch. 1.6) and conceded by Maxime Rodinson, a distinguished modern biographer of the Prophet, the Qur'an “does provide a firm basis of undoubted authenticity,”¹ and hence this exercise is expected to produce a far more accurate assessment of the major events of the Prophetic mission than the classical biography. The work, however, draws on the classical sources to provide the historical context that is essential to fill personal information and names of important figures and places, not furnished by the Qur'an. It has also received valuable inputs from Abou El Fadl, one the most distinguished scholars of Islam of our era.

The classical sources tell us that Muhammad was born in Mecca (570), a posthumous child, who lost his mother at age 6, his next guardian - his grandfather at 9. He was then reared and protected by his uncle, Abu Talib, the chief of the Hashim clan, who were the custodians of the Ka'ba and belonged to the powerful Quraysh tribe.² We are also told that at about age 25, Muhammad married Khadija, a widow, about 40 years old, who had already been married twice and had several children. She bore him six children: four daughters and two sons, of whom only the daughters survived. Muhammad led a stable and harmonious family life, and did not arouse any particular interest of the community until he experienced the first revelation (632).

3.1. Meccan Period (610-622)

Muhammad's wife, Khadija, and his cousin 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib, then a minor who lived in Muhammad's household were the first to believe in him. Muhammad's friend Abu Bakr and 'Uthman Ibn 'Affan, a brilliant young man of the Umayyad tribe, also readily acknowledged the truth of the revelation as the word reached them. Thus in its nascent stage, Islam recruited three of its Caliphs (Abu Bakr, Uthman and Ali) some two to three decades before the responsibility of governing the young Islamic nation was thrust on them (610 onwards). The egalitarian message of the revelation had particular appeal for the poor and the slaves and many of them converted to the new faith. However, the bulk of the community took Muhammad for a joke: they laughed at his followers, winking at each other as they passed by and made fun of them as they reached home.³

As the revelation progressed, it increasingly challenged idol worship and prevalent social and moral norms. This deeply hurt the sentiments of community leaders, who grew increasingly angry with Muhammad and bitterly resentful of the converts. They called Muhammad an impostor, a madman,⁴ and an insane poet,⁵ and ridiculed the Qur'anic revelation.⁶ They also found the revelation strange and unbelievable,⁷ and condemned it as the legends of the ancients.⁸

While the pace of conversion was slow, its social impact was alarming. By joining Muhammad's creed, the converts broke their clan loyalty - their tacit covenant of love and fellowship with all clan members. Therefore, in the eye of the community, they became traitors and the Quraysh leaders put enormous pressure on their families to revoke marriages or engagements with them. Thus, the revelation was destroying the love and affection in the families and the peace and harmony in the community. The Quraysh leaders also feared that Muhammad's claims could bring disgrace to them during the annual fair, when the delegates of pagan tribes from all over Arabia came to Mecca for pilgrimage and trading and brought rich presents for them. Therefore, they had to isolate Muhammad and keep others from joining his camp. They now questioned why Muhammad could not show any miracles,⁹ and why the Qur'an was not revealed to a man of importance from the two cities¹⁰ - for Muhammad was neither wealthy nor powerful. They also declared that other people coached him or dictated to him morning and evening.¹¹ Furthermore, they argued that Muhammad had the power to separate a person from all his loved ones – his father, his mother, his spouse, his brothers and sisters and all the rest in the clan, and therefore he must be a deceitful liar and a great sorcerer. Accordingly they charged him with forging lies and witchcraft,¹² forging lies against God, forgery and making up tales,¹³ witchcraft,¹⁴ obvious witchcraft that was bewildering,¹⁵ and of being bewitched or possessed by a Jinn.¹⁶

As the revelation consistently challenged the prevalent social and economic norms, it became amply clear that its egalitarian message was tailored to do away with tribalism and remove the privileged class altogether. All this was extremely disturbing, and the community leaders watched the situation with growing alarm. The prevalent clan ties and fear of revenge prevented them from taking to violence, but they hoped for a misfortune to befall him any time,¹⁷ while they captured and persecuted those converts who were weak and helpless.¹⁸

Around the fifth year of his mission (615), the Prophet asked his followers to take refuge in Abyssinia - a neighbouring country with a flourishing Christian Arab civilization. When the Quraysh leaders approached the king of Abyssinia to return the refugees, the Muslim delegate recited the Qur'anic passage on the miraculous birth of Jesus, Son of Mary.¹⁹ The King was deeply touched and allowed them to stay on. This only made the Quraysh more hostile.

It was around this time that 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab, the most gifted and talented among the Quraysh youth and a fierce opponent of the Prophet publicly announced his conversion (616). The Quraysh knew something had to be done. They imposed a social and economic boycott (616-617) on the Hashim clan to isolate Muhammad and his followers from the rest of the community and force them into starvation. But it ran against the tradition of Arab hospitality and also affected the followers of the diverse clans and tribes who had joined the Prophet's faith, and as such, was eventually lifted.

(The Quraysh) then tried to induce the Prophet to forging what they wanted, attributed to God.²⁰ This aggrieved the Prophet but the revelation reminded him that it was not he but the message of God that they were repudiating.²¹ The revelation reminded him that messengers had been rejected before him, but they endured until God's help came to them, and declared that there can be no alteration in the Words of God.²²

The ninth year of the revelation (619) is referred to as 'the year of sadness.'

Muhammad's wife Khadija, as well as his uncle and guardian, Abu Talib died within a few days of one another. His new guardian, Abu Lahab, was sceptical of his mission, and treated Muhammad as the black sheep of the family, while his wife was openly hostile to him, as the Qur'an attests, though obliquely.²³ Muhammad was thus left at the mercy of his opponents, with virtually no one to protect him. His Prophetic mission had almost stalled with barely over a hundred converts, while the whole of Meccan society had turned against him and his followers.

Unwavering in his faith in God, Muhammad travelled to Taif, a nearby town to seek new audience. The people of Taif however rejected his claims and rebuked him and he was forced to travel back to Mecca.

It was around this time that the Prophet had a vision that he was transported from the Sacred Mosque (Ka'bah) to the Furthest Mosque (in Jerusalem),²⁴ from where he ascended the heaven, passed through each of the seven heavens and finally encountered the Presence of God. In Islamic traditions, the experience is described in graphic details – though in many versions, and is commemorated as al-mi'raj.²⁵

The revelation attested that God had ordained this vision as a test to the people²⁶ so as to choose the most pious and the strongest believers among them. Accordingly, a number of his followers whose faiths were weak became suspicious of Muhammad and indeed left the Islamic faith, but the majority of the Muslims remained steadfast and believed in the Prophet while his close companion Abu Bakr most emphatically endorsed the truth of his vision. The Quraysh and the Prophet's enemies, however, grew even more sceptic of him: they thought, having failed to perform any miracles, he was feigning a vision.

Muhammad now turned his attention to the visitors from Medina who came during the annual fair, when nomadic tribes from all over the peninsula congregated to Mecca for pilgrimage (hajj, which was later adopted in Islam). First he met with a small group, who appeared quite sympathetic. In the subsequent years he met bigger delegates, and eventually concluded a treaty with them - known as the Treaty of 'Aqaba. According to the terms of this treaty, the Medinite Muslims were to provide shelter, sustenance and protection within Medina, and were described as Ansars, traditionally rendered as 'Supporters', and the Meccan Muslims in their midst were to enjoy the status of Muhajirin (i.e. Emigrants, who had permanently left their homeland for a new abode).

The Prophet's Meccan enemies were so infuriated at this new development that they conspired to confine him (to his home) or kill him or exile him.²⁷ Meanwhile small batches of Meccan converts slipped away, and made migration (Hijra) to Medina. Finally, when practically all the converts had departed, the Prophet left Mecca secretly (July, 622), in the face of grave danger. His enemies pursued him. He took shelter in an obscure cave along with his companion (Abu Bakr, not named in the Qur'an) when God sent divine peace (Sakinah) upon him and strengthened him with forces invisible.²⁸ (The revelation also) assured him that God would surely bring him back to the destination.²⁹

3.2. Medinite Period (622-632)

An enthusiastic Muslim community that had already flourished in Medina received the Prophet as its long awaited leader. His presence created an immense excitement and heightened religious zeal in the community and more and more people showed interest in the new faith and entered Islam. The Prophet now made a comprehensive peace and common defence treaty with the diverse tribes of Medina – Jewish as well as pagans. As history unfolded, the treaty virtually established the Prophet as the civil and political leader and chief judge of the mixed community of Medina – a political victory of immeasurable proportions that has confused many eminent scholars.³⁰

At this stage, the Jews were supportive of the Prophet as the revelation acknowledged them as believers (mu'minun), referred to them as the People of the Book (ahl al-kitab), and the Muslims faced Jerusalem, their spiritual centre, during prayers. Some of the Medinite converts, however, wavered in faith.³¹ They pretended to believe but in their hearts mocked at the new faith.³² (Referred to as) the hypocrites (munafiqun) (at a later stage of the revelation),³³ they opposed the Prophet³⁴ and unknowingly created disorder in the society.³⁵

The Prophet's followers so far had been a purely religious or spiritual community, but in their present situation fighting had become unavoidable if they had to survive in their new habitat. The tribal mores permitted an aggrieved tribe to make a sporting raid (ghazu) on its adversary and seize goods to recover the losses inflicted by them. So, on one occasion a small band (some eight in number) of Emigrant Muslims conducted a ghazu on a caravan of a Meccan tribe and the encounter overlapped the traditional sacred months (the first, seventh, eleventh and twelfth months of lunar calendar).³⁶ This was a serious matter, but soon the revelation declares that more serious in God's sight was to block the way to the path of God, denying God, preventing access to the Sacred mosque and driving away its people.³⁷ (Within a year of their

migration), the revelation grants the Emigrant Muslims permission to fight as they had been oppressed and expelled from their homes unjustly merely because they said, 'Our Lord is God alone.'**38** In the subsequent years, in the aftermath of offensives from their Meccan foes, the revelation endorses fighting,**39** and finally prescribes fighting and gives a clear mandate and convincing rationale to fight those who attacked them, allowing them to fight back if attacked in the traditional sacred months.**40**

Meanwhile, the Quraysh were greatly alarmed at Muhammad's turn of fortune and waited for an opportunity to get rid of him. Hearing reports that Muhammad had left Medina with his followers to attack their trading caravan returning with goods from Syria past Medina, they sent a powerful army to eliminate them once and for all. The stage was set for the first major battle in Islam.

3.3. Battle of Badr (625)

The commander of the Quraysh army (Abu Jahl, not named in the Qur'an) was boastful and took the expedition as an easy way to fame.**41** (The Prophet meanwhile had) summoned his people to accompany him (on a mission), but some were averse to it (not knowing the destination).**42** Many of his companions hoped that they were heading for the unarmed one (the Meccan trading caravan).**43** They camped at one end of the valley of Badr, while the Meccan army approached from the other end, and their trading caravan passed close by unnoticed as God had willed.**44**

(Just before the battle) the Prophet had a dream in which he saw the Meccans small in number. Had the Prophet seen their full strength, (and disclosed it), many of his followers would have been disheartened and would have disputed over the matter.**45** As the truth became clear to the Muslims (that they had to fight against the powerful Quraysh army), they were struck with horror,**46** without realizing that it was God's scheme to verify the truth of His Words and to cut the root of the pagans.**47** The hypocrites and those weak in faith thought that their faith had deluded them.**48**

The Muslims prayed for God's help, and were inspired with the hope that God will help them with one thousand angels, one after another.**49** God had ordained this hope in their hearts merely to reassure them,**50** while God covered them with drowsiness as security from the divine and showered rains to refresh them with it, to drive from them the defilement of Satan, and to strengthen their hearts and make their feet steady.**51** Furthermore, God inspired them through the angels that He was with them and He cast terror into the hearts of their pagan enemies.**52**

As the Muslims met the Meccan army, God made this army seem trifling in their eyes, just as He made the Muslims appear to be of little concern to the Meccans.**53** (The revelation) commanded the Prophet to inspire his followers and assured them that if they persevered patiently, they would overcome the attackers, even if they were twice or ten times as many.**54**

The revelation urged the Muslims to stand firm and remember God a lot when facing the army,**55** and exhorted them to obey God and His Prophet, and to avoid rifts, lest they lose courage and spirit, and to remain patient,**56** and not to retreat during the battle except as a strategic move, or to regroup.**57**

(As the battle began) the devil who had assured them (the attackers) of success turned around and absolved himself of all his responsibilities and stood in terror of God.**57** (So, the Muslims won a decisive victory) and took many captives,**58** and the Prophet is asked to tell them (the captives) that if God recognizes any good in their hearts, God will give them better than what was taken from them.**59** (The revelation tells the Quraysh), if they wanted a judgment it was before them, and warns them to desist from any further attack and declares that their army, however large, will avail them nothing.**60** To console the Muslims at the loss of their next of kin and relatives who were among the attackers, (the revelation declares that) God had ordained the killing to test the believers, and to thwart the evil design of the pagans.**61** As for the spoils that were collected from the battlefield, (the revelation prescribed) a fifth share for God and the Messenger, and the rest for relatives, orphans, and the needy and the traveler. **62** The Muslims' victory at Badr coincided with the Christian Byzantines' victories against their powerful conquerors, the Persians, realizing a Qur'anic twin prophecy, made many years previously.**63** This must have strengthened the faith of the believers and put terror into the hearts of the Quraysh.

The Quraysh now made massive preparations, collaborated with the nomadic tribes hostile to Muhammad and sent a combined army, which camped at the plain facing Mount Uhud, a few miles from Medina. The second major battle against the Muslims was soon to begin.

3.4. Battle of Uhud (625)

(The revelation had meanwhile urged the Muslims) to prepare against their attackers with whatever arms and cavalry they could muster, and to avert fighting if their enemies were inclined toward peace.**64**

Since the enemies were very powerful, the leaders of the community were keen to avert fighting. They argued that the invaders might eventually withdraw without a fight as was customary after a siege - as desert conditions were too harsh for sustaining any siege for long.

(The revelation commanded Muhammad) to urge the believers to fight without compelling anyone,**65** (and reminded the believers) that at Badr also they were weak and helpless,**66** and inspired them with God's promise of sending down three thousand angels,**67** and declared that if they stood firm and dutiful in the face of a sudden attack, God would assist them with five thousand angels, swooping down.**68** (As in the battle of Badr),**49** God had made this (promise) only to set their hearts at peace,**69** and thus to enable them to overthrow their enemies and repulse their attack.**70**

On way to the battleground a faction of Muslims (led by Ibn Ubayy)**71** withdrew saying, if they knew how to fight, they would have followed the Prophet.**72** They also divulged matters of secrecy or alarm to others, instead of informing the matter to the Prophet and those with authority.**73**

(On the day of the encounter), the Prophet left early in the morning to put his people at battle stations.**74** Initially, the Muslims made decisive gains, when some of the fighters weakened: they argued over the order and disobeyed after God showed them what they loved of this world (victory/booty).**75** They ran off, paying attention to no one and

ignoring the Prophet calling them from behind. (The attackers struck back in full force and thus) God repaid them (the Muslims) with affliction upon affliction so that they would not sorrow over what slipped away from them.**76** Two of their factions almost lost hope.**77** (The revelation urged the defenders) not to despair or grieve**78** (and consoled them that) if they were wounded, their enemies had also sustained injuries, (and reminded them that) these were the days of changing fortune to which God subjects humankind to know which of them truly believe,**79** that He may purge those who believe and destroy the unbelievers.**80**

Finally, the Prophet was struck unconscious and word spread that he was killed. The attackers took the rumour on face value and left the field in glory and pride. The survivors were traumatized, and lay wounded and lifeless in the field, struck with grief at the loss of some 62 of their men.

God sent down a sense of security – an inner peace over a group of them (who were firm in faith) while others who had been anxious about themselves, were assailed with the thoughts of pagan ignorance. They said, ‘if we had any say in the matter our men would not have been killed.’**81** Those, who had stayed back said of their brethren: ‘Had they obeyed us, they would not have been killed.’**82** (The revelation reminds them that) Muhammad was merely a messenger, other messengers had passed away before him, (and asks,) if he died or was killed would they turn on their heels? **83**

Soon after the initial confusion of the battle, the Prophet planned a chase of the Quraysh army on their way to Mecca. (The revelation promised) the wounded followers of the Prophet who responded to his call: those among them who did good and remained heedful (wattaqu), a splendid reward **84** and exhorted them not to let up in pursuit,**85** which however ended without any engagement, as they could not catch up with the Quraysh army.

3.5. The Hypocrites

The defeat at Uhud was very frustrating to the hypocrites (Ibn Ubayy and his followers). They used their faith as a cover to lead others away from Muhammad.**86** They were charming in looks, deceitful in speech and commanded profound self-confidence,**87** and turned away from the believers in arrogance.**88** They discouraged the people of Medina [Supporters] from spending anything for the Meccan Muslims [Emigrants] in order to force them out of Medina,**89** and looked forward to the expulsion of the humble ones (Muhammad and the Emigrants) after their return to Medina.**90**

Some of them pretended obedience in public, but schemed against the Prophet by night,**91** and befriended the disbelievers.**92** The Prophet’s followers were, however, in two minds about these hypocrites.**93** (The revelation commands them) not to argue on their behalf,**94** and asks the Prophet not to plead on their behalf.**95**

It was due to mercy from God that the Prophet was mild to the dissenters (who harbored doubts against him during the Uhud battle and defied him).**96** (Later, the revelation reassures them that) no prophet could be false to his trust (by giving his own decision in God’s name).**97**

3.6. The Native Jews

There were three native Jewish tribes: the Qaynuqas, the Nadirs and the Qurayzahs. They lived in their respective settlements: the Qaynuqas in the heart of Medina, side by side with the Muslims and the pagans; the Nadirs, a few miles away; and the Qurayzahs in the outskirts of Medina. They had adopted Arab culture, spoke an Arabic dialect, and except for their Judaic faith, formed an integral part of the multi-tribal society of Medina, then an extended oasis, rather than a town in the modern sense.

While the Jews were a closed community and lacked unified leadership, the Muslims were a growing community (because of conversions) and were completely united under the supreme leadership of the Prophet. This was disturbing to the Jews, and they remained suspicious of the Prophet's ultimate motive. However, one day their suspicion turned into a great shock. During a prayer, the revelation commanded a change in the direction of prayer (from Jerusalem to the Ka'bah), **98** signally a separate religious identity for the Muslims. Since the revelation had described the Ka'bah, as the first House of worship built by Abraham,**99** the new prayer direction (Qiblah) virtually appointed the Muslims as the true representatives or spiritual successors of the Prophet Abraham, the forebear of Moses, their Prophet, the first Patriarch of all Jewish people, and the archetype of pure monotheism. From their perspective, Muhammad had hijacked their spiritual heritage and laid the foundation of an independent Semitic faith that could claim greater genuineness and purity than their own. Not many months later, they got the news of Muhammad's victory at Badr. They were shattered.

Shocked and confused at the sudden change of qiblah towards a direction (Ka'ba) they identified with paganism at this stage,**98** the Muslims, by and large, failed to realize what went through the hearts and minds of their Jewish brethren. The revelation, however, brings the truth across. The Muslims loved them, but they did not love the Muslims, and they wouldn't have done so even if the Muslims believed in the whole of their scripture. When they met the Muslims, they would pretend to believe but when they were alone, they bit their fingertips at them (the Muslims) in rage. Moreover, if any good befell the Muslims it grieved them; but if something bad happened to them, they rejoiced at it.**100** Thus they loved what distressed the Muslims, spoke maliciously against them, and what their breasts concealed was even worse.**101** However, malice alone could avail nothing. The Jews had to do something before it was too late.

The Qaynuqas reacted by refusing to accept the Prophet's arbitration in a local dispute, defying the treaty they had made with him upon his arrival.

(The revelation asked Muhammad) to break off relations with treacherous people, and inflict crushing defeat in war to those of their allies who repeatedly broke their treaty.**102** The Qaynuqas were made to surrender, and were allowed to leave Medina. The Nadirs watched the expulsion of the Qaynuqas with consternation and waited for their chance to act. Uhud gave them the opportunity: the Muslims had suffered heavy casualties and were demoralized. The hypocrites had turned against Muhammad. So, they broke their ties with him, and made an alliance with the Meccans; and to please them, declared that the idol worshippers were more rightly guided than the Muslims.**103** Meanwhile, an assassination plot leaked out, and the Prophet demanded their expulsion from the oasis for breaking their treaty, and finally on their refusal to comply, laid siege

on their settlement. The Nadirs counted on the hypocrites for their pledged support, but they never turned up.**104** (Finally, as a prelude to an attack) Muhammad ordered his men to cut their palm trees down.**105** The Nadirs surrendered without a battle, and were allowed to depart in full dignity and complete safety with as much of their possessions as their camels could carry. However, the Muslims made material gains in terms of what was left by the people of the settlement (the Nadirs), without having to drive horses or camels for it. (The revelation reserved) it for God and His Messenger, relatives, orphans, the needy and the traveler, so that it didn't circulate among the rich in their midst.**106**

3.7. Battle of Confederates (The Trench war) (627)

With time, it became clear to both the Quraysh and the Jews that either they had to destroy Muhammad and his followers, or the reverse might happen. So they had no option but to go for an all-out war.

They [the Quraysh] formed a military confederation with the powerful Jewish tribe of Khaybar (a settlement some 85 miles from Medina) and the nomadic tribes opposed to the Prophet. Their armies approached Medina in a coordinated manner, while the powerful Qurayzah (Jews) of Medina stood by to strike or let the invaders attack the Muslims from the rear. It was almost check and mate in a war game. Muhammad consulted the matter with the community and upon the suggestion of a Persian convert, Sulman Farassi, got a deep trench dug around the town to keep the invaders at bay as he was in no position to face them. The attackers were soon to arrive.

They came on them, waves upon waves. (As the Muslims watched them from distance,) their eyes dimmed and their hearts rose up to their throats and they imagined (weird) thoughts about God.**107** This was a moment of trial for the believers as they were shaken by a most violent shock.**108** (On the other hand) the hypocrites and those with sickness in their hearts said what God and the Prophet of God had promised was mere illusion.**109** A party of them said to others to go back as it was no (safe) place for them, and a party of them sought the Prophet's permission saying that their homes were exposed, though they were not exposed and they only wanted to flee.**110** But had the enemy entered (the city) from the sides and asked them to dissent and join a civil war, they would have readily done so,**111** despite their oaths of allegiance.**112**

The siege lasted for a month, and it was only the Qur'anic exhortations and the Prophet's exemplary leadership that kept the Muslims from surrendering.**113** But finally God repulsed the pagans in their rage by a severe storm**114** and forces invisible.**115** By this time the attackers had run short of provisions, and more importantly, their tents and riggings were blown away by the storm. So they departed in a hurry, and the Muslims were spared a crushing defeat and virtual annihilation. God then brought down from their fortifications those People of the Book (the Qurayzah) who had backed the attackers and cast terror into their hearts: some of them were slain, some were taken captive**116** and their lands and houses and goods were seized.**117**

3.8. Hudaibiyah Peace Treaty (628)

In the sixth year of Hijra, the Prophet had a dream in which he saw himself and his followers entering the Sacred Mosque (the Ka'bah) in complete security, heads shaved

(or hair cut short) and without fear, **118**and he declared his intention to perform the pilgrimage. The nomadic Arabs who were weak in faith preferred to stay back,**119** as they thought the Prophet and the believers would never be able to return to their families.**120**

The Prophet set off for pilgrimage with some one thousand of his followers, all in pilgrim garb, not geared for any combat. The Quraysh sent a cavalry squadron under the command of Khalid Ibn al-Walid, a veteran of the battle of Uhud and Trench, to intercept the caravan. The pilgrims made a detour and camped at Hudaibiyah, some nine miles from Mecca; and a powerful Quraysh army camped nearby threatening them with total destruction, as they had not come with any preparations for war. The pilgrims waited in gnawing uncertainty - tormented, agonized and utterly confused about the dire predicament their faith had brought them to, when God sent divine peace (Sakinah) down into their hearts to add faith to their faith.**121** Inter-tribal rivalry and politics helped the pilgrims, and one of the nomadic tribes (The Khuza'a) brought in provisions for the pilgrims and tried to mediate with the Quraysh on their behalf. Since uncertainty loomed large despite some exchange of envoys, the Prophet sought an oath of allegiance from his increasingly anxious followers. God was pleased with them (Muhammad's followers) when they swore allegiance to him under the tree for He knew what was in their hearts, and He sent divine peace (sakinah) down on them and rewarded them with a way out,**122** and soon a peace treaty was signed.

The Meccans dictated the terms of the treaty in a high-handed manner. It undermined the position of Muhammad as the Prophet of God, and was offensive and humiliating to the Muslims and seemingly to the sole advantage of the Quraysh.**123** The Prophet's companions were quite perplexed, though they remained unwavering in their faith, and in their allegiance to the Prophet. However, soon the Qur'an declares:

Indeed, We have (now) given you (O Muhammad!) a clear opening.**124** God has promised you an abundance of gains that you will take, and He has expedited this for you, and it was God who held back the hands of your enemies from you as a sign for the believers.**125** Even if the pagans fight you, they will turn their backs and will not be able to find any protector or any helper.**126** This reassures the believers and their confusion was over.

As the revelation had declared, the Hudaibiyah treaty allowed for increased interaction between the Muslims and the nomadic tribes who were now free to form alliance with the Quraysh or the Prophet as they chose. This promoted conversion, and within one year of signing of the treaty, the Muslims had grown sufficiently in number to contain their perennial foes, the Meccans. Besides, the clauses of the treaty that were apparently unfavourable to the Muslims, worked in their favour and promoted conversion instead of restricting it.**127**

3.9. Peace treaty with the Jews of Khaybar (629)

The Hudaibiyah treaty was no great reassurance to the Prophet. He knew well that the Jews and the members of the confederates hostile to him could reunite and wage yet another invasion. Meanwhile the revelation continued to warn the Prophet that the Jews came to him in disbelief and left in disbelief,**128** listened to lies and distorted his words from their context by listening to others.**129**

The Jews had signed the treaty, mainly as a ploy to conspire against the Prophet. Accordingly, soon after signing the treaty they began organizing a large number of Arab tribes, hostile to the Prophet, to launch a surprise attack against Medina. As the Prophet got clear evidence of correspondence going back and forth between the Jews of Khyber and the Arab tribes, he decided to launch a campaign against Khaybar. The revelation had barred him from taking with him those Arab volunteers who had stayed back during the pilgrimage;¹³⁰ he therefore set off for Khaybar with a small group (reportedly some 600) of only those devout followers who had accompanied him in the pilgrimage. The Jews of Khaybar had a strong and well-trained army, their fortified settlements were considered impregnable, and it was their last opportunity to destroy Muhammad. Thus, in military terms, Muhammad was courting disaster. However, after a series of encounters and sieges, the Jews surrendered. The Prophet concluded a peace treaty with them granting full liberties and military protection against a levy that was no different from what they paid to their old Bedouin protectors.

3.10. Mecca Reconciled (630)

In the year 629, his ninth year in Medina, the Prophet performed the pilgrimage (though not in the hajj season) in accordance with the terms of the Hudaibiyah treaty. Soon after this pilgrimage, the two great Quraysh stalwarts, Khalid Ibn al-Walid, and 'Amr Ibn al-'As, who had fought against him at Badr and Uhud, entered the faith.

Muhammad now envisioned integrating his own people – the Quraysh, whom he loved,¹³¹ but could not bring to his faith.¹³² He was treaty bound not to interfere with the Meccans, and waited for an opportunity to realize his vision. This came about when the Quraysh took up arms against one of the Meccan tribes who had treaty alliance with him for defending them when attacked. The Prophet set off for Mecca with all his men, all armed for battle if needed.

(As the Muslims began to enter the city), the most fanatic among the Quraysh tried to resist when God sent divine peace (Sakinah) upon His Messenger and on the believers, and imposed on them the Word of restraint (Taqwa), as they were entitled to it and worthy of it.¹³³

God withheld the hands of the Meccans from the Muslims and the hands of the Muslims from the Meccans.¹³⁴ Had it not been so, the Muslims would have trampled on those believing men and believing women (among the Meccans) they were not aware of (as those Meccans had secretly become Muslims), and thus guilt and stigma would have befallen them unawares. Had the (Meccan) Muslims been separated out, God would surely have punished the disbelievers among them (the Meccans).¹³⁵

In the ensuing days, the Meccans came in groups to the Prophet to embrace the new faith,¹³⁶ and the revelation reminded the Prophet to glorify God and seek forgiveness (and thus to remain humble).¹³⁷

3.11. The battle of Hunayn (630)

Shocked at the massive conversion of the Quraysh, the Hawazins, a powerful tribe proud of Arab paganism, sent a strong army (630) to retake the Ka'ba: it ambushed the advancing Muslim army at the valley of Hunayn.

The numerical superiority of the Muslims that delighted them came to no benefit, and the earth, spacious though it was, narrowed on them and they were forced to retreat.**138** God sent divine peace (Sakinah) upon the Prophet and on his followers and forces invisible and thus helped them to defeat the pagans.**139** With this victory and continued entry of diverse nomadic tribes into Islam, the Muslims emerged as the most powerful community (Ummah) within the outreaching borders of Arabia. But the Prophet had a formidable task ahead of him.

In the aftermath of the pilgrimage (628), or probably, the Khaybar expedition (629), the Qur'an had predicted a potential military encounter against a people of great might.**140** This had yet to be realized.

3.12. Tabuk Expedition (631)

At this moment in history, the neighbouring Byzantine Empire posed a serious threat. They had decisively defeated their mighty adversary, the Persians in successive major battles in the preceding years,**63** and now threatened the very survival of the Muslims under the Prophet, or after his demise. The Prophet knew that he must lead an expedition up north to the frontiers of Byzantium to realize the Qur'anic prophesy, and he asked his followers to make preparations for it. If there were immediate gains and a convenient trip, they would have followed the Prophet, but the destination was too far for them (about 350 miles).**141** Accordingly, the hypocrites ridiculed the Prophet in their hearts,**142** privately joked about him,**143** and tried to stir up discord and upset matters for him.**144** Many of the Prophet's followers preferred to stay back,**145** and some of them requested him not to put them to such a hard test.**146**

Some Bedouin Arabs came to the Prophet (who was based in Medina) with excuses seeking exemption while others, who belied God and the Prophet, remained at home.**147** The hearts of some of the believers nearly swerved, while three persons among the devout believers stayed back,**148** and some of the hypocrites aimed at something that was beyond their reach.**149**

Eventually the Prophet's company set off on this dangerous mission, and halted at Tabuk, about 250 miles from Medina.

Muhammad stayed there for ten days, made pacts with local rulers and important Jewish settlements and returned. This expedition demonstrated the Prophet's faith and conviction in his mission for there could be no military or political justification of this highly risky venture.

The Muslims had never fought against an imperial army and had no supply lines to sustain an attack and were thus poised to a crushing defeat, and in case of a rout, total annihilation. The Byzantines on the other hand had just re-established their military supremacy in the region, having defeated their powerful enemy, the Persians in many successive battles in the preceding years.**63** The fact that they did not challenge the 'nomad Arabs' as they must have thought of them, stationed at a day's march for their cavalry, speaks of the awe the Prophet must have evoked in the heart of the mightiest empire of the era.

3.13. Year of deputations (631)

The Prophet's safe return from his long and perilous journey to Tabuk, in sequel to his uninterrupted successes in the preceding years veritably crowned him as the king of the whole of Arabia.

Meanwhile the truth of the Qur'anic revelation was becoming increasingly clear as its seemingly unrelated passages were falling in place (Ch. 1.3). This created a great excitement all over the country and delegates came to Medina from faraway places to see the Prophet, to listen to the Qur'an, and to swear allegiance to the new faith. However, since there was no compulsion in religion, many nomadic tribes preferred idol worship, and remained hostile to Muhammad.

The Pilgrimages (631, 632)

As the Muslims were now settled in Mecca, the revelation adopted the yearly pilgrimage (hajj) as part of Islamic rite. They took part in their first pilgrimage - the great hajj as the Qur'an calls, **150** with great enthusiasm, jubilation and religious fervor. The Prophet, however, could not attend it and sent Abu Bakr to represent him.

As the Prophet's mission was nearing its end, urgent measures were needed to establish Islam as an historical reality, lest its powerful enemies could destroy it soon after the Prophet's death. (Therefore, the Qur'an) gives an ultimatum of four months **151** to all the hostile pagans who were breaking their treaty obligations. **152** As to those with whom the Muslims had a treaty, they were given time until the treaty term expired, **153** while those who sought peace were granted security and safe passage to a place of security (i.e. their tribal homelands). **154** (The revelation further declared) that the pagans were spiritually unclean and were not permitted to approach the Sacred mosque after that year, and (since this meant loss of trade and gifts from the pilgrims), the Muslims were assured that God would enrich them from His bounty, if He wills. **155**

In the tenth year of hijra, the Prophet went to Mecca to perform the hajj. Meanwhile the Qur'an had declared its own completion (5:3/Ch. 1.2), and the Prophet died soon after his return from Mecca. This Hajj is remembered as the Farewell pilgrimage.

3.14. The Qur'an constantly guides and assures the Prophet

Throughout the Meccan period, Muhammad not only bore the wrath of the Quraysh but also lived under an immense burden of uncertainty lest the mystery of revelation might cease to recur. Therefore, the Qur'an devotes two early passages (including the 98th Sura) to console and reassure him:

"By the morning bright (93:1), and the night when it is still (2), your Lord (O Muhammad) has not abandoned you, nor is He displeased (3). And what comes later will be better for you than what came before (4), and soon your Lord will grant you, and you will be pleased" (93:5).

"Didn't We expand your chest for you (94:1), and removed your burden from you (2) which weighed heavily on your back (3), and raised your reputation for you (4)? (Remember,) relief comes with distress (5). Indeed relief comes with distress (6). So when you are free, remain steady (7) and turn towards your lord with longing" (94:8).

(The Qur'an attests that) Muhammad was indeed God's messenger on a straight path¹⁵⁶ - a witness, a herald and a warner, ¹⁵⁷ inviting others to God by divine leave - an illuminating lamp.¹⁵⁸ (It declares that) the Prophet had neither strayed, nor was he misguided and did not say (anything) of his own whim, but was inspired with a revelation, taught by the mighty one (the Angel of revelation).¹⁵⁹ (It affirms that the Prophet) did not know the unseen, nor was he an angel, but he simply followed the revelation,¹⁶⁰ and it was not up to him to change the wordings of the revelation in any way.¹⁶¹ It proclaims that God sent the Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, to distinguish it from all religions, however the pagans detested this.¹⁶² The Qur'an consoles the Prophet in his grief, ¹⁶³ and anguish,¹⁶⁴ and (asks him) not to stretch his eyes to what God bestowed on others,¹⁶⁵ nor to feel depressed by their plots,¹⁶⁶ nor to be unsettled by them.¹⁶⁷ (It exhorts him) not to let his enemies obstruct him from the messages of God after it had been revealed to him,¹⁶⁸ and to endure patiently what they say. (It asks him) to avoid them in a graceful avoidance,¹⁶⁹ to ignore their insults and to trust in God,¹⁷⁰ and to seek refuge in Him,¹⁷¹ and assures him that God was enough for him against those who ridiculed him.¹⁷² (It declares that Muhammad) was not a poet,¹⁷³ nor possessed by a Jinn,¹⁷⁴ neither was he a fortuneteller,¹⁷⁵ nor insane;¹⁷⁶ but he was endowed with rank and power before the Lord of the Throne,¹⁷⁷ and was destined for an unending reward¹⁷⁸ and that soon he would see and his enemies would see,¹⁷⁹ which of them was demented.¹⁸⁰

(The Qur'an asks its immediate audience) why they shouldn't probe the revelation (lit., speech) lest what came to them hadn't come to their ancient ancestors, and why have they not recognized the messenger of God and thus disavowed him?¹⁸¹ When one sign (revelation) replaced another and the Quraysh charged Muhammad with forgery, the Qur'an declares that only God knows (the scheme of the) revelation.¹⁸² (It exhorts the Prophet) to give the call, to be upright as he was commanded, not to follow their (his enemies') whims, to believe in any scripture God revealed and to treat them all justly.¹⁸³ (It, however, cautions him) that those who inherited the earlier revelations are themselves in doubt about the integrity of their scriptures and disturbed about it,¹⁸⁴ and declares that the Gospel and the Torah foretold the coming of the Prophet and his broader role.¹⁸⁵ Last, but not least, the Qur'an refutes any notion of an outsider coaching the Prophet on the ground that the Qur'an was in pure and clear Arabic whereas the tongue of the one they alleged was foreign.¹⁸⁶

3.15. The Prophet's status in the community

The Qur'an accords the Prophet the highest status in the community and declares that the Prophet had a greater claim on the believers than they had on each other, and his wives were their mothers.¹⁸⁷ It prescribes etiquette for addressing him, conversing with him, entering his private quarters and observing normal courtesies, and forbids marriage with his wives after his death (33:53, 49:2-5).

"You who believe, don't enter the Prophet's (private) quarters unless you are given permission (to come) for a meal, (but) do not be (so early) as to wait around for its preparation. But when you are invited, then go in, and when you have taken (your)

meal, then disperse, without (seeking) social conversation (Hadith) that annoys (yu'dhi) the Prophet, and he feels embarrassed to ask you (to leave); but God is not shy to ask you what is right. And when you ask (his wives) for anything (you need), ask them from behind a screen. That will be purer for your hearts as well as their hearts. It is not proper for you to annoy God's messenger, nor to marry his wives after him: that would be serious with God" (33:53).

"You who believe, do not raise your voices over the Prophet's voice, and do not be loud (while speaking to) him the way you (speak) loudly to each other, lest your actions miscarry without your noticing it (49:2). Those who lower their voices in the presence of God's messenger are those whose hearts God has tested for piety (Taqwa); there is forgiveness for them and a great reward (3). Most of those who call out to you from outside (your) quarters do not use their reason (4). It would be better for them if they waited patiently until you came out to them, yet God is Most Forgiving and Merciful" (49:5).

This is a clear proof of the community's love for the Prophet – they wanted to be around him all the time, and as the community of believers grew, the rush on the Prophet was enormous. This over-taxed the Prophet. God not only wished to protect the privacy of the Prophet but also to teach the community important social norms.

3.16. The noble persona of the Prophet

Muslim as well as non-Muslim scholars tend to devote their scholarship to the institutional history of the Prophet, but as for the persona of the Prophet, they segment it, idealize it or merely glance through it, and shelve it - as something abstract pertaining to the private and personal aspect of the Prophet's life. However, it is imperative for Muslims to probe the persona of the Prophet as part of their fundamental religious obligation, as discussed later (Ch. 15).

One problem that is often faced in constructing the personality of the Prophet prior to the revelation from the illustrations of the Qur'an is its near silence on the matter as mentioned earlier. However, if we carefully study Qur'anic records, we can gain some clear insights into his personality.

First, we notice that the Quraysh brought numerous charges against the Prophet, such as those of fabricating the revelation, telling stories of the past, forging lies against God, and so on, but these were all centred around the revelation; they never ever questioned the integrity of his character. This clearly demonstrates that Muhammad must have been a person of impeccable moral character, who never gave himself to any form of vices – social, moral, political or ethical, indicating that he was a quiet and unobtrusive person, who never meddled in anyone's affairs. Early reports also tell us that he was known as al-Amin (The faithful, the trustworthy) throughout Mecca before the revelation.

(The Qur'an declares that) unless God willed, the Prophet would not have recited the revelation to his audience, nor God would have taught it to them, (and it asks his audience to reflect on this) as the Prophet had lived with them for a lifetime before the revelation.¹⁸⁸ This demonstrates that the Prophet had not displayed any literary or poetic genius, or any philosophical, psychological or theological insight prior to the

revelation. This in turn indicates that the Prophet neither had any aptitude, nor grooming, nor ambition to found a faith or lead a faith community, let alone becoming the virtual ruler of the whole of Arabia towards the end of his life. His greatest gifts, apart from the power of revelation, were his noble personal qualities.

The Prophet was mild to his men even after their lapses in Uhud expedition.¹⁹⁶ He readily excused others from taking part in Tabuk expedition.¹⁸⁹ He offered food to uninvited guests, and cordially entertained them, even if they caused him annoyance, by staying on after the meal for socializing (33:53/3.15 above). The Prophet also displayed the most pristine form of generosity by praying for the forgiveness of his enemies.¹⁹⁰ Accordingly, the Qur'an describes him as a noble messenger,¹⁹¹ endowed with a sublime character,¹⁹² faithful to his trust,¹⁹³ and (a manifestation of God's) mercy to believers,¹⁹⁴ and to all humanity.¹⁹⁵

Furthermore, the fact that the Prophet's immediate company included the most eminent and learned men of the era - who were later to become caliphs, governors and generals - and that they all accepted his leadership as most humble and obedient followers clearly shows that there must have been something very extraordinary about the personality of the Prophet. According to early reports, the very presence of the Prophet had a compelling appeal, and his personality radiated some beautiful characteristics and aura (kiramah) that only those who were present in his company could perceive. As a result of these extraordinary virtues and characteristics, the Prophet developed a very special relationship with his companions that impressed all the contemporaneous observers and has perplexed his opponents ever since. This goes to explain why his companions would defy and sacrifice everything for the sake of the Prophet.

However, on a personal level, the Prophet was a mortal like others.¹⁹⁶ He had no power to avert harm from himself, or to benefit himself, or to harm or guide others.¹⁹⁷ Like most of fellow Meccans, he was unlettered,¹⁹⁸ and could not read a book - for had it been so, the prattlers would have been skeptical.¹⁹⁹ He was a messenger of God and his only mission was to convey (God's message)²⁰⁰ with clarity;²⁰¹ that he may deliver humanity out of darkness into Light.²⁰²

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Essential Message of Islam

Approved by al-Azhar al-Sharif, Cairo, Egypt

Endorsed and Introduced by

Khaled Abou El Fadl

Distinguished Islamic Scholar

Professor of Law, UCLA, California

Muhammad Yunus & Ashfaq Ullah Syed

Scrutinized and restructured by Afra Jalabi

Dedicated to the Prophet Muhammad pbuh

(May God's blessings and peace be upon him),
to whom the Qur'an was revealed for all humanity.

Muslim readers are encouraged to pronounce the benediction, ***Sallallahu 'Alaihi Wa Sallam*** (SAW) (rendition inserted above), each time they take or read the Prophet's name. They will then be fulfilling the Prophet's Sunna. This book spells out the benediction in the above first instance of the appearance of the Prophet's name, and leaves the Muslim readers to invoke it as they read through the work

“Will they not, then, ponder over this Qur'an? - or are their hearts sealed”? (al-Qur'an 47:24).

Endorsed And Introduced By:
Dr. Khaled Abou El Fadl

This book is endorsed and introduced by one of the most distinguished Islamic scholars, Dr. Khaled Abou El Fadl, who is the Alfi Distinguished Professor of Law at the UCLA School of Law, where he teaches International Human Rights, Islamic Jurisprudence, National Security Law, Law and Terrorism, Islam and Human Rights, Political Asylum and Political Crimes and Legal Systems. He was awarded the University of Oslo Human Rights Award, the Leo and Lisl Eitinger Prize in 2007, and was named a Carnegie Scholar in Islamic Law in 2005. He was appointed by President George W. Bush as the only Muslim on the Commission for International Religious Freedom, and also previously served on the Board of Directors of Human Rights Watch. Dr. Abou El Fadl has written 14 books (five forthcoming) and over 50 articles on Islamic law and Islam. His books have been translated into numerous languages including Arabic, Persian, French, Norwegian, Dutch, Ethiopian, Russian, and Japanese. In 2007, his book, “The Great Theft” was named as one of the year's Top 100 Books by Canada's Globe and Mail. His book, “The Search for Beauty in Islam: A Conference of the Books” is a landmark in contemporary Islamic literature.

Introduction

By: Khaled Abou El Fadl

The Paradoxes of Islamophobia and the Future of the World

Every epoch of human history has suffered its share of jahl and jahiliyya. Jahl means ignorance, heedlessness, the lack of awareness, and even idiocy or foolishness, but with the clear connotation of the perverse, pernicious, the dark, foreboding, and inauspicious. In Islamic eschatology, it is common to refer to a people plagued by ignorance, injustice, cruelty, and hatred as a people living in a state of jahiliyya. Ingratitude, selfishness, and arrogance are all thought to be characteristics of jahiliyya as well as the prevalence of vice and inequity in any society. Jahiliyya, however, has been as entrenched in human history as the social ailments of bigotry, racism, hatred, and oppression.

But therein is the enduring and unyielding role of Islam—Islam is submission and surrender only to God. And it is resistance and rebellion against the personal jahiliyya of the iniquitous and uprooted soul, and against social conditions and structures that compel the sufferance of ignorance and hatred and that ultimately deny human beings the fair chance to come out to the light. The theology of Islam resists the state of jahiliyya by calling upon human beings to wage a relentless jihad in pursuit of enlightenment and against the oppressiveness of ignorance and against the social and political deformities and illnesses that spread in the absence of justice. The jihad against jahiliyya is a constant struggle to bring balance and peace to one's own soul, and to pursue balance and peace for one's society and for humanity. In other words, it is a jihad to bring justice within and without—for oneself and for all of humanity. This jihad is a never-ending effort at self-enlightenment as well as the pursuit of enlightenment at the communitarian and social level. In Islamic theology, a Muslim is in a state of constant resistance to the state of jahl and the disease of jahiliyya—in a sense, in struggling to submit to the Almighty, a Muslim struggles for liberation from and against falling captive to godlessness. Godness is not just a conviction or belief; it is a practice and state of being. And this state, which is quintessentially interconnected with beauty—with the attributes of divinity such as love, mercy, justice, tranquility, humility, and peace—is in direct antipathy to jahiliyya, which in turn is associated with the ailments suffered in a state of godlessness such as hate, cruelty, inequity, arrogance, anxiety, and fear.

As noted above, every time and age suffers from its share of jahiliyya but what is distinctive about the moral failures of our age is not their nature or kind. Indeed the moral failures of our age remain disparagingly similar to past ages. But what is different about our age is that while the moral failures remain the same, more than any other time in the past, these same failures—these jahiliyyas are more inexcusable and less and less understandable. Human beings continue to suffer from ignorance but our ability to teach, learn, and communicate is better than in any previous age. We continue to suffer from hate, bigotry, and racism but our knowledge of human sociology, anthropology and history—our collective experiences as human beings make these failures less understandable, leave alone excusable, than in any other time in history. We continue to wage war and slaughter each other, but at the same time, our ability to kill and cause destruction is more lethal and dangerous than any other time in history. But our co-dependence on each other as human beings, and our increasingly interlinked world, in addition to the unprecedented dangers posed by our weapons make our constant resort to war and violence incoherent and incomprehensible, and definitely, less forgivable than in any other time in history.

In this age, the problem is not our technical abilities or our know-how—the problem is in our will, our sense of purpose, in our normative values, and indeed, in our very comprehension of humanness. Paradoxically, while our collective sense of the humane—our understanding of rights, denial, and suffering—has improved, and while our technical ability to protect rights or remove suffering has also been augmented, our ability to get beyond our isolation and limitations as individuals and to reach for the

transcendental and perennial in what is human has deteriorated. In the modern age, our rational sense of the humane has increased but our spiritual grasp of the human has deteriorated. Perhaps this is why so many philosophers have described the modern age as the age of anxiety, restlessness, uprootedness, or groundlessness. Indeed the predicament of the modern age has been that while our intellectual capacities have sprung forth by leaps and bounds, our spiritual abilities, to say the least, have not. Our ability to access information about each other and to collect and organize data about our world has given us a greater sense of control and has raised our expectations as human beings but all of this has done little to raise our sense of consciousness. We can see more of our world and further into the universe than any other time in history, our failure to decipher and perceive the truth of reality, leave alone beauty, has only grown more intense and also inexcusable.

In Islamic thought, we tend to see religion and religiosity as fundamentally antithetical to jahiliyya and all the ugliness that it represents. There is no doubt that throughout human history religion has been a powerful instigator of change—in fact, religion has possessed the power of truly transformative moments in history. Not too many forces in history have had the power of religion to inspire, motivate, and inform. Moreover, many social theorists have recognized the positive, and in my view, necessary role that religion ought to play in remedying many of the ailments suffered in modernity. However, for any true believer—a believer who does not go through the affectations of belief but a person who has felt anchored, inspired, and empowered by belief—for the believer who because of his/her religious conviction was able to reach out for godliness, for the perennial, transcendental, sublime, and beautiful—for that kind of believer, there is no alternative to fending off the jahiliyya of modernity, or of any age for that matter, without the empowerment and the enlightenment of faith. It is precisely for the believer whose engagement with the Divine has translated into nothing but a sense of beauty, peace, balance, and mercy that a particular kind of jahiliyya is more offensive than all others.

This jahiliyya of which I speak is the jahiliyya that is instigated and perpetuated in the name of religion itself. It is when religion is usurped and turned into an instrument of hatred, bigotry, prejudice, ignorance, suffering, and ugliness. As a believer, this deeply offends me because more than ever before I feel that humanity needs the love, mercy, and light of God. To use religion to perpetuate a state of godlessness is to say the least offensive. But as a Muslim, the perpetuation of Jahiliyah in the name of Islam is more than offensive; it is an abomination—it is a complete breakdown in the logic and rationale of existence. As a Muslim, I think of this abomination as a fundamental and inherent contradiction in terms. The two cannot co-exist because the illuminations of God cannot co-exist with the darkness of jahiliyya. But I must admit that in the same way that I find the jahiliyya of those who hate in the name of Islam simply grotesque, I also find the very widespread and sadly trendy jahiliyya of Islam-hating, Islamophobia, and prejudice against Muslims to be no less disturbing.

By my training and education, I am accustomed to dealing with those who hate in Islam's name by challenging their convictions and arguments with theological and jurisprudential refutations. And for many years, I focused all my teaching and writing on

challenging and deconstructing the beliefs and claims of Muslim bigots. However, Islam-hating or Islamophobia poses its own set of exceptional challenges—not only am I not trained to deal with the irrational rage of Islam-haters, in this day and age, Islamophobia leaves one with an intractable sense of despair and hopelessness.

Islam-hating enjoys a long and firmly established pedigree. Unfortunately, Islam-hating is a practice rich with tradition. Starting with the early Muslim challenge to the dominance and hegemony of the Persian and Byzantium superpowers around fourteen-hundred years ago, Islam has become the object of highly motivated socio-cultural processes that were hate-filled and hate-promoting. In response to the spread of Islam, an elaborate institutional practice was born in Christian societies, which was supported by a tradition of theological and ideological dogma and ignited by a web of political and social anxieties. The function performed by this institutional practice was, at least initially, defensive and reactive—it sought to contain the threat of Islam not only by promoting cultures plagued by a sense of siege but even more, by a sense of revulsion and outrage at the Muslim heathen. The same processes that constructed the archetypal Muslim who induced fear also nurtured a mythology of a culture at the brink of suffering God's wrath and damnation because of the Muslim heathen. Leading up to the beginning of the Western Crusades, narratives of piety and anti-heresy re-enforced without adequate private and public performances of outrage and disgust at the infidel (Muslim) society risked incurring God's vengeance, wrath, and even damnation. Some contemporary historians have argued that the very idea of the West—the very notion of the abode of Christendom, which was historically wedded to the institutions of Catholicism—as a unit defined by a coherent identity, cultural unity, and a basic set of shared political interests developed in direct response to the rise of the Islamic civilization. Feeling challenged, threatened, and also defeated, the West, with its reactively formed identity, perhaps had no choice but to develop narratives of fear and self-preservation directed against Muslims and Islam. In these narratives of fear, anxiety and obsession—narratives that stereotyped, exaggerated, and demonized the Muslim as a symbolic construct, Islam is cast into the role of the eminent and everlasting threat, and the Muslim does not just embody the image of the enemy but is made into the proverbial bogeyman—the infidel whose very existence, leave alone the infidel's successes and victories, is a horrific blasphemy and outrage against God, King, and Church. In Feudalistic Europe, at a time when political dissent, blasphemy, and heresy were hardly differentiated, Islam was seen as an atrocity against God and majesty, the cause of Divine wrath and damnation.

It took the West, led by the Catholic Church, about four centuries of incitement and sacred rage to build-up the frenzy of intolerance and hate that would fire-up and sustain six-centuries of waves of Western invasions of Muslim lands known as collectively as the Crusades. Contrary to popular belief, the Crusades did not just target the holy land and Jerusalem, but included Andalusia, and eventually Granada, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and even the Eastern Orthodox Church of Constantinople. Eventually, the repeated invasions of the Crusaders were defeated, but not before leaving a trail of fear and hate that eventually culminated in the Ottoman invasions of Eastern Europe. However, hardly had the Ottoman invasions been repulsed and defeated,

incidentally without much help from Western Europe, when a new chapter of religious bigotry and hatred had been perpetuated through the pseudo-religious culture of Western Colonialism and its brain-child movement, Orientalism.

As the de-colonization movement surged and nations gained the right to national liberation and self-determination, humanity seemed to be on the verge of unprecedented advancements in finally becoming united over core values, among them tolerance as a necessary and compelling moral and ethical virtue. Of course, I am not claiming that when nations and governments were busily adopting, ratifying, or affirming the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and many international human rights treaties—among other things, banning racial discrimination, religious bigotry, and gender inequality—that these governments actually meant to implement what they pledged themselves to do. The reality, especially from a Muslim point of view, is that the rise of the contemporary regime of human rights and humanitarian institutions and laws is replete with unresolved and perhaps irresolvable contradictions and paradoxical tensions. For Muslims emerging from the hypocritically enlightened and pathologically self-righteous but invariably exploitative and bloody dungeons of Colonialism onto a new age radiating with the glitter of principles such as the right to self-determination, national liberation, non-intervention, and the prohibition against the use of force, the world must have looked very promising but also confusing. The confusion was the by-product of the Cold War and the hypocrisies elicited by the logic of political realism and the doctrine of real-politik; and the confusion and bitterness grew with the reality of aggressive hegemony of contemporary imperialism. But from the very inception of the age of rights, or what I call the age of promises, the confusion started with the destruction of Palestine, the dispossession of Palestinians, and the re-occupation of Jerusalem by the Crusader reminiscent historical movement of “pilgrims from the West.” All of this had to cast doubt upon the credibility and integrity of contemporary ethical universalisms and their inclusiveness towards Muslims. For instance, Muslims could not fail to notice the tension and irony in the fact that 1948, the year that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was passed, was also the year the Palestinians lost their homeland and the Israelis gained theirs. Nevertheless, regardless of the challenges and contradictions that confronted Muslims in the modern age, there is no question that as human beings moved through the 20th century and advanced towards the 21st, there were tangible successes in that, on principle, finally there was collective recognition of the wrongfulness and immorality of racism, ethnocentrism, bigotry, and religious and cultural intolerance, among other vices. Also even if just in principle, a collective recognition and admission was reached that all human beings are, at a minimum, entitled to life, security, and dignity. In other words, in the post-colonial era, and especially by the end of the Cold War, it looked like after centuries of creating and suffering so much man-made misery, at least there were concrete and tangible achievements—finally, human beings have learned something worthwhile.

This is exactly why religious bigotry is so distressing—it is an indication that after all, perhaps we have learned nothing. It is distressing to think that despite the horrendous

history of senseless slaughter and persecution, humans do not develop higher states of conscientiousness or more reflective and balanced senses of being but only grow ever more sophisticated in obfuscating the difference between reality and dreams. The currently trendy phenomenon of Islamophobia and the lucrative business of Islam-slaming ominously condemn us to recycling history through the irrational processes of reciprocated hate. But it is much more than the fear of repeating history that is at stake here.

Today is not like yesterday, and tomorrow will be more different still. Muslims are no longer the representatives of a dominant civilization and are not co-participants in defining the norms of our lived world. No part of the Muslim world could be considered coherent units of integrated economic and political power as in the cases of Europe, Russia, China, or India, and Muslims leverage very limited actual power in their lived world. But according to the dogma of the modern world, wars of aggression and foreign occupation are no longer permitted, and unlike pre-modern barbarisms, people and individuals need not rely on their ability to leverage power because all human beings and all nations have rights. Indeed the very idea of rights—the *raison d'être* of humanitarian protections and immunities is founded on the notion of protecting the weakest elements of society—whether nationally or internationally, rights exist to protect those who are members of target groups or those who are members of groups that are in weak and insular positions, and therefore, unable to protect themselves. Today, the whole paradigm of world order and international law is founded on the notion that instead of the protection of force, the weak should be able to rely on the protection of principle or, alternatively, on principled protection. In other words, today's world is different than any other age because today there is authoritative legality in the world order and in principle, there is rule of law.

I am not so naïve as to believe that the United Nations is truly a parliament of democratic governance or that the Security Council implements international law impartially and fairly or to think that most international legal obligations are applied fairly and impartially. But the gap between the reality and the ideal is what makes the contemporary condition so precarious for Muslims. There is not a single permanent member of the Security Council that is Muslim, and in this age, Muslims play a largely marginal role in governing or influencing global issues. In fact, the fate and well-being of most Muslim countries in the modern world depends on the good faith and fair-mindedness of the non-Muslim world powers towards Muslims—the opposite is not true.

Considering the distribution and structure of power in the modern age, much of the role of Muslims in today's world and much of what is done to and with Muslim nations is contingent on two critical presumptive premises: 1) The major powers that run the world today are no longer motivated by religious bias or rancour. Policy pursued by these world powers does not seek to promote or harm one set of religious beliefs over others, and does not favour or disfavour a people or nation because they belong to one religious tradition or another. Put differently, the dominant powers of the world do not govern in the name of Western Christendom, and their economic and political powers are not used

to leverage the supremacy of the Judeo-Christian civilization, for instance, against others. 2) The decisions and policies of the dominant operative powers in today's world are based on rational choices and shared interests and not on historical, racial, religious bias or any other type of prejudice.

Among other things, these two presumptive premises fundamentally mean that religious wars have ended and that we live in a rationally driven world. Without the fulfilment of these two premises, the reality becomes that Muslims live in a world that they do not control, and more so, in a world in which they do not have much power, and they also live in a world in which they are very likely to become the targets, and considering their limited power, even victims of bigoted policies. Now, I think that it is rather obvious that these two premises are not perfectly fulfilled and indeed, can never be perfectly fulfilled. World powers that have near hegemonic influence on today's world are not immune to the numerous subjectivities that normally affect decision making. What is important, however, is not if these two premises are fulfilled but the extent to which they are fulfilled at any given time. For example, the rule of law and world order in the modern age is premised on the assumption of the illegitimacy and wrongfulness of racially biased policies but no one would seriously suggest that racism wittingly or unwittingly does not affect the subjectivities of policy makers. This, however, is one of the reasons that Islamophobia and Islam-hating is emblematic of the foundational failures of the modern age—policies that target or profile Muslims as a group, or that speak of the dangers of a Muslim cultural invasion of Europe, or that legitimate the denouncement and deprecation of the Islamic faith, very much like the institution and logic of Apartheid, undermine the fundamental structure of legitimacy in the modern age. In this regard, there are many reasons to be very concerned.

Policies that are founded on the presumed inherent dangers of Islamic theology or law; or policy makers who effectively legitimate religious bigotry by seeking the “expert” counsel of professional Islam-haters do nothing less than undermine the very logic that provides structure and authoritativeness to order of this age. I emphasize that the problem is not the existence of discrete and surreptitious religious bigotry—the problem is the fact that this religious bigotry is rationalized, and legitimated; it is cleansed of all sense of shame or fault and then stated as a normative value: the truth that needs to be uncovered. Here, the evidence on the ground, so-to-speak, is shocking, deeply troubling and overwhelming. For example, since 2002, thousands of books published in the United States and Europe spewed sheer hateful venom against Islamic theology, law, and history. More troubling is the fact that many of these pseudo-intellectualized displays of bigotry became massive bestsellers in Western countries. The writers of these hate-filled tracts were endowed with star status in the West as they consistently appeared as authoritative voices on everything Muslim in the media and were integrated into positions of authority by being given various institutional roles either as advisors to governments, members of government, or references for specialized agencies within government. Part of the very widespread phenomenon of religious bigotry was the opportunistic and parasitical celebration and promotion of so-called native informants—people who fit the Muslim ethnic and cultural profile, claimed either that they are

Muslim or used to be Muslim, and above all were willing to perform the dramatic role of the archetypal Muslim who gazes in the mirror only to discover his/her hideous ugliness (contrasted of course to the beauty of the non-Muslim other), and then overcome by tragic destiny, he/she plunges in cathartic self-flagellation (or more precisely, Islam flagellation), which comes to the entirely predictable realization that all the ugliness in the mirror after all is Islam's fault. Of course, for the bigoted, but paying, reader's ecstatic enjoyment, the native-informant climactically confesses Islam's sins and bombastically declares, lest it be damned, Islam and of course Muslims too, must repent! The classic and also the most indulgently obnoxious examples of this pornographically-oriented exploitation of non-religiosity, or perhaps anti-religiosity, are the money-raking books of Hirshi Ali and Irshad Manji.

What fuels the Islam-hating industry in the West is that many sincerely believe that they are reacting rationally to a cultural, political, and militaristic threat. But it is important to remember that every social movement that has demonized a feared and hated other has constructed its hate-narrative as an unpleasant but necessary defensive response to a perceived threat—whether real or imagined. The very nature of bigotry and prejudice is that they are paranoid reconstructions of reality—they grossly exaggerate a kernel of truth into an enormous lie. So, for instance, bigots do not imagine that Muslim terrorists exist but they imagine that terrorism is the prevailing reality of Islam.

What is especially troubling about Islam-hating is that it is a powerful indication that the West, which led the world into modernity, has been unable to overcome its own historically rooted religious prejudices and bigotry. Islam-hating and Islamophobia are among the few remaining sanitized and legitimate social pathologies in the West not because bigotry against Islam and Muslims is practiced or tolerated, but because it is affirmatively honoured and even glorified as part of the analytical discipline of national security and interest.

In some regards, Islam-hating and Islamophobia is fairly unremarkable because like all prejudices, it is rationalized from a defensive posture and it thrives in a fertile ground of misinformation and ignorance. But what is remarkable about this particular form of prejudice and bigotry is that despite its deep roots in history—although it was exploited in the past to rationalize and incite numerous acts of aggression and violence and although it continues to do so today, there is remarkable resistance in the West to acknowledging its existence or to coming to terms with the crimes committed because of it, leave alone to attempt to atone for its consequences. A person who openly advocates racism, for instance, or anti-Semitism will be seen as a pariah and an outlier to mainstream society. No mainstream publisher or media outlet will broadcast speech that is openly racist or anti-Semitic not because these social ills do not exist. They do exist! But there are social processes that shame, ostracize and hold accountable those who blatantly indulge these pathologies. The same is not true for those Islam or Muslim-haters. For example, intellectuals and policy makers are admirably frank about studying, admitting, and atoning for the Western legacy of anti-Semitism. Studies that document and analyze the pathology of anti-Semitism have emerged into a sophisticated critical discipline, and no serious intellectual would question whether anti-Semitism has been a

recurring form of prejudice and bigotry in Western history. Logically, however, if one admits that anti-Semitism is a widespread social pathology that must be resisted and not encouraged, it would seem to follow that substantially the same position should be adopted in regards to anti-Muslim prejudice and Islamophobia. Put simply, one can hardly imagine any place or time in Europe where Jews were persecuted while Muslims were tolerated. Without exception, any time Jews were the target of persecution in Western history, this persecution included the archetypal representative of Islam of the time—whether that archetype was the Turk, Arab, Saracen, Morisco, or the Mohammedan. Moreover, as is well illustrated by the complex and problematic notion of a Judeo-Christian culture or civilization, the history of Jews in the West was a complex one—it ebbed and flowed and went back and forth between begrudging tolerance to outright persecution to eventual efforts at reconciliation and, at times, to atonement as in the Western guilt-ridden support for the Zionist movement. But the history of Muslims in the West has consistently ranged from slaughter to begrudging tolerance to extermination and eventually to total and unequivocal hegemony and domination. My point is that if examined from a historical logic, the reluctance, dead-silence, and quiet avoidance that confronts the Muslim victims of religious persecution in the West and that confronts researchers in the pathology of Islamophobia and Islam-hating is itself a shocking manifestation of the pathology. What is rather symptomatic of the deeply engrained prejudice is the continuous effort to justify Muslim suffering as an unfortunate but necessary cost for security, or to understate and minimize the existence of actual concrete and harmful results to the existence of such a prejudice. An example of this is the insistence on the part of some that the use of torture against Muslims in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere is not linked to deeply rooted prejudices as to the ego, pride, sexuality, religiosity, and body of a Muslim man or woman. Another common tactic that is actually symptomatic of the deep entrenchment of the problem is to admit that anti-Muslim prejudice exists but to minimize it as a passing condition instead of a pathology with a stubbornly persistent history, or to dilute its particularity and distinctiveness by dismissively equating it to other prejudices and biases minorities suffered, and that in due time, defeated. The relatively muted response of the intelligentsia in the West at the widespread occurrence of civil rights violations against Muslims in the West, and also in reaction to the documented humanitarian violations and war crimes inflicted upon Muslims in several countries and contexts in the name of the war on terror is again a strong indication of the de-sensitization and suppressed consciousness of the West towards the presence and wrongfulness of anti-Muslim prejudices. Sadly, the West has managed to confront many of the demons of its history, but its fear of Muslims and hate of Islam is one demon that has proven too powerful to confront.

The one thing that the so-called war on terror has shown is the fragility of the Western ego, which as already explained, was inordinately shaped by its antithesis to Islam. After the terrorist attack of 2001 on the USA, it is truly remarkable how quickly so many intellectuals and policy makers were willing to abandon the arduous human labour that took human beings through two world wars, and that painfully created the structure of

legitimacy for the world in the 21st century, only to revert back to the dichotomous paradigms of the good versus evil, the forces of light against the forces of darkness, the knights of Christendom versus infidel barbarians, the clash of civilizations, and ultimately, the satanic religion that is out to haunt the world with demonic forces. The fragility of the Western ego leaves one wondering: if murderous terrorist attacks can generate such a powerfully effective and lucrative hate culture in the enlightened West what could centuries of colonization, occupation, and brutalization produce in the Muslim world?

This, however, seems to me to be the wrong kind of question or at least, it seems to be a dangerous question. As the Qur'an consistently teaches, one injustice cannot justify another—in the same way that no amount of terrorism committed by people who affiliate themselves with the Islamic faith may possibly justify religious prejudice and bigotry, no amount of persecution or oppression may excuse or justify the harming or terrorizing of civilians in order to protest an injustice. I believe that the most rudimentary and basic moral order would recognize that if injustice is reciprocated by further injustice, we do not somehow miraculously end up with a just situation or with justice achieved. But this itself points to a quintessential affinity between all acts of terrorism—no matter the trappings, the ugliness remains the same. Whether terrorism is committed by a particular group holding a person hostage in order to win certain concessions, or by an army holding a population hostage in order to force submission to its will, the moral quality of the act is the same. This, of course, is in moral theory alone; reality is very different. In legal theory, for instance, the rich and the poor are treated according to the same standards of justice—although an ideal, it is seldom fulfilled. Nevertheless, the ideal must remain the normative yardstick and the failures of reality must never be treated as normatively correct.

This is precisely why I find Islamophobia and Islam-hating so unsettling—it is not a concession to reality while upholding the ideal; it is a corruption of reality while deforming the ideal. Islam-hating is extreme in its ugliness because it stands everything on its head; it twists and distorts the space that Muslims are pushed into occupying in the modern age. If it is allowed to persist then the whole Muslim experience since Colonialism becomes nothing but a deceptive fantasy. This prejudice does not only mean the failure of the ideals upon which modernity was built; and a regression to the exploitatively religious wars of the Crusades and counter-crusades, but worst of all, it means that religion will be denied the role of the medicinal healer to the jahiliyya suffered in this age.

Among its endlessly circular and incoherently inconsistent long list of wrongs, Islamophobia rationalizes the continued victimization of disempowered people by dreaming-up conspiracy theories in which the offenders pretend to be the victims. It claims that because Muslims are plagued by paranoid conspiracy theories, Muslims have a weak grasp of reality, but simultaneously, Islamophobes imagine every Muslim with a pulse to be a co-conspirator in a massive plot for world domination. Islamophobes smugly declare that Muslims do not have cultural commitments to human rights and self-servingly, announce that any commitment to human rights by a Muslim culture is

not authentic, and therefore, insincere. By the same logic, Shari'a is denounced as fundamentally inconsistent with human rights, but at the same time, any jurisprudential doctrine consistent with human rights cannot be an authentic part of Shari'a. This circular logic goes on and on: Islamophobia perpetuates violence and many abuses against Muslims by claiming that Muslims are not really victims because Muslims are inherently violent; it re-affirms its lies by accusing every challenge to its hate-filled view of Muslims to be a lie. It justifies the disproportionate and indiscriminate slaughter of Muslims as moral and just while contently claiming that Muslims lack a just war tradition. Islamophobes preach hate against Islam because by definition Islam only teaches hate. Islamophobes will gloat about how they belong to cultures that cherish the idea of liberty but as a matter of course, will denounce any Muslim movement that claims the right to self-determination or that demands the right to live free of foreign occupation. Islamophobes will accuse Muslims of despotism and of being incapable of practicing democracy but at the same time, they will seek to exclude Islamic parties from participation in democratic governance. Similarly, Islamophobes will vigilantly support the right of Christian parties or Christian organizations to be actively engaged in the political field and will defend Jewish religious parties calling for the application of Jewish law as a necessary part of the exercise of democracy. Meanwhile, they transform a bogeyman labelled political Islam into the embodied reincarnation of fascist ideology. Islamophobes pretend to honour the right to freedom of belief but spew nothing but venom at those who believe in Islam as their spiritual and moral system of guidance. Sadly, however, as is the case with most prejudices and biases, the problem is not the absence of reasoning or the paucity of accurate information. Most prejudices and biases persist because of the lack of moral will—the will to adopt conscientious and ethical positions towards others, especially those who because of habit or interest we have a reason to hate.

For those who have the moral will, the book I introduce here will prove to be an invaluable reference source on the Islamic faith. For those who do not wish to be participants in the perpetuation of religious bigotry and hate, this book will provide an accurate, thoughtful, and reliable introduction to Muslim beliefs and practices. I wish we lived in a world in which this book would become a standard reference source for students of religion who are interested in an accurate introduction to the religion of Islam. The best thing I can say about this book is that it is the product of a labour of love that lasted for more than a decade. The authors do not offer a personalized view of their own religiosity; they explain in a very straightforward and accessible fashion what mainstream Muslims believe in and especially, what the Qur'an itself teaches. Non-Muslims will understand why well over a billion people call themselves Muslim and also how Islam inspires Muslims to deal with and improve upon the world in which they live. Indeed this book manages to translate the Muslim vision or the way that Islam heals the ailments of humanity in the current age and every age. Readers who wish to learn the theological and moral dogma of Islam will find this book indispensable. But this book is not just an informative tool for the fair-minded and interested reader. This book is an educational tool for both Muslims and non-Muslims—it is an authoritatively reliable

text to teach young Muslims, or even Muslims who never had the time to study the Qur'an, or the fundamentals of their religion. The book is written with the kind of balance and fair mindedness that makes it equally valuable for Muslim and non-Muslim students of Islam. The least I can say about this text is that it was written by two ethically conscientious and principled Muslims in order to share their religion with every ethically conscientious and principled reader in the world. They must be heard.

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conservative Muslim of the older generation engaged in Qur'anic studies for over a decade went through the entire draft and gave a green signal. The work has also benefited from a computer based indexing exercise that one of the authors had conducted and published as this work was in progress.

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Finally, the authors also register their thanks and appreciation to their family members, relatives and friends for their consistent help and support.

Glossary

Transliteration Notes:

1. Reference material: A Glossary of the Qur'an, Aurnag Zeb Azmi, New Delhi 2003.
2. Rendition of verses and transliterated Arabic terms are italicized, while those normally adapted in English (Qur'an, Hadith, Shari'a, the Prophet's Sunna, Sura, Ka'ba), are in Roman, capitalized, and the terminal silent 'h' where present is omitted
3. Extra-literal typographic symbols such as dots and over bars are avoided except for i) indicating the Arabic ayn (') - such as in 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab, 'Uthman Ibn 'Affan, and ii) the Arabic hamza or the glottal stop ('). The names of historical figures adapted in English, such as Umar, Uthman, Ali are, however, typed as such, except when giving their full Arabic names.

A.H. [After hijrah]: Islamic calendar (Lunar, 360 day-year), beginning the year, the Prophet migrated (did hijrah) from Mecca to Medina. It was introduced some 17 years after the Prophet's death (by Caliph Umar) and the dates of all the preceding events were allocated backwards and represent the best judgment of the historians of the era.

x : y: Classical numbering of Qur'anic verses. 'x' refers to the Sura (chapter) number, and 'y' refers to the ayah (verse) number.

- An underline under the Sura (chapter) number denotes the Medinite origin of the verses based on the generally agreed chronology of the revelation.

ahl al-kitab: 'People of the Book', notably, the Jews and Christians, and in a broader sense all religious communities who had received divine scriptures before the Qur'anic revelation.

ayah (pl. ayat): The text of the Qur'an is made up of ayat (pl. form of ayah) – more than 6000 altogether. The Qur'an also connotes this word with a 'sign' or 'message' of God, depending upon usage.

din: In the generic sense, religion; though the Qur'an also connotes it with judgment, divine law, law of the land, obedience or devotion, faith, and moral responsibility.

hadith: As a generic term hadith (pl. ahadith) is an account or narration that embodies a model or normative behavior or practice (sunnah).

Hadith: The accounts or narration in the form of sayings of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh that were put together from oral accounts in circulation more than two hundred years after his death. The accounts are popularly referred to as 'traditions.' The earliest and most authentic of compilations is known as Sahih al-Bukhari - after the name of its compiler.

hajj: Muslims' yearly pilgrimage to the Ka'ba in Mecca.

Halal: Lawful, whether in food, in earning livelihood, or in other pursuits of life.

Haram: Normally connoted with 'prohibition' - such as Qur'anic prohibition against grave crimes, usury, swine's flesh etc; the Qur'an also connotes this word and its other roots with 'sacred' or 'binding'.

hijrah: Literally, 'migration', the term is the popular shortened form of 'after hijrah' (See A.H. above).

jihad: An ongoing struggle to face the hardships and challenges of life, and to overcome the social, moral, material, intellectual and spiritual deprivations of the community.

Ka'bah [Ka'ba]: The cubicle shrine in Mecca that was originally built by Abraham and is regarded as the most sacred structure (house) in Islam.

kitab: A book, divine writ, or a scripture. When used for the Qur'an or other revealed scripture in the text, it is capitalized, such as, 'People of the Book' for ahl al-kitab. [See above]

khalifah: A successor, heir, deputy or a viceroy. Its anglicized form is Caliph

kufr: Willful rejection or denial of any self-evident or irrefutable proposition. The Qur'an refers to its recalcitrant audience by the plural noun forms **kafirun**, **kafirin**, which, for want of any appropriate English counterpart have been rendered as disbelievers or deniers as appropriate. The Qur'an also connotes kufr with canceling or effacing something (29:7, 47:2), being thankless or ungrateful (17:27, 76:24).

mu'min: One who has embraced the true faith; any believer in one God.

muslim: Anyone who submits his will and purpose (orients himself or herself) to God. It is capitalized in the text when specific to the followers of Islam (the Muslims).

muttaqi (pl. **muttaqin**, **muttaqun**): One who practices Taqwa (See definition below.)

salah (pl. salat): The daily ritual prayer of the Muslims. The word and its other roots (SLH) also connote peace, protection, blessings etc.

Shaytan [Satan]: In the Qur'anic discourse Satan is the personification of man's evil impulses - intrinsic to his nature or externally induced that drive him to defy the divine/universal moral tenets inspired in him as recipient of some of God's breath, tempts him to commit evil.

Shari'ah [Shari'a]: A divinely ordained way or path covering all facets of life.

Shar'ia law/Shar'iat: By definition, it is the Islamic law derived from the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet by use of reasoning, analogical deduction and consensus. In practical terms, it is a juristic tradition based on the discourses and traditions left by the jurists of different law schools of Islam.

SAW: Acronym for the Arabic benediction for the Prophet ('May God's blessings and peace be upon him')

surah [Sura]: Each chapter of the Qur'an is called a Surah (pl. Surat/Suras). There are 114 Suras in the Qur'an

sunnah: As a generic term, sunnah (pl. sunnat) means a normative or model behavior, or proven example or path, for others to follow.

Sunna: Denotes a sunnah that is specific to the Prophet Muhammad pbuh.

Taqwa: Piety, God consciousness, or heedfulness to God's commandments, and in a broader sense, compliance with one's universal social, moral, and ethical responsibilities, with faith in God and the Last Day.

'ulama (pl. form of 'alim): Religious scholars of Islam.

wudu: Ritual washing of hands, feet, face and symbolic mopping of head before performing a prayer (salah).

zakah: The term zakah, and its different roots and plural form, zakat, are used in the Qur'an with the dual connotation of 'spiritual purification', and 'care and concern for humanity.' Traditionally, its plural form, zakat is however translated in a restrictive sense as charity.

Zakat: The compulsory charity that the Muslims having income in excess of a threshold level are required to pay.

Preface

The Arabic Qur'an

For Muslims the world over the Qur'an is the infallible Word of God - a divine litany of unparalleled beauty and grandeur. They read, recite and memorize the Qur'an – partly or even wholly, to please God, to experience the transcendent, and to seek peace and tranquility. However, they seldom make any attempt to study the Qur'an to comprehend its message. There is a tradition that "one who discusses about the Book of God, (the Qur'an) makes a mistake, even if he is correct."¹

The non-Muslim scholars of Arabic in the Christian West also acknowledge the extraordinary literary merit of the Qur'an,² but they often find its contents confusing and even alienating. Even secular Arab Muslims reading the Qur'an out of context may find it very challenging. This is due to some unique features of its text as summarily illustrated below.

The Qur'an engages a wide range of subjects and themes, which, barring a few exceptions, appear repeatedly either in their entirety, or in bits and pieces across the text, without any apparent order or organization. Thus, diverse themes may be interwoven in the same paragraph without any logical order.³

The Qur'an is an oratorical discourse with God as the speaker. However, God's mode of address shifts from first person singular and plural forms (I and We) to third person singular: He, Your Lord, al-Rahman(the Benevolent). It also constantly switches between its addressees: thus, a passage may open with an address to the Prophet, but the

subsequent verses may be addressed to his followers, the People of the Book (Christians and Jews), the pagans, the disbelievers who persistently denied the revelation, and humankind in general.⁴

The language and style of the Qur'an also changes abruptly. Sometimes it is very clear and precise, sometimes it is condensed and elliptic, and sometimes it is highly context-specific. Besides, some of the Qur'anic passages, especially those from an early period of the revelation have a cosmic perspective, and are deeply mysterious, while others evoke God's transcendence and are profoundly mystical. There are many evocative passages in the Qur'an where "what is left unsaid is as important as what is said,"⁵ and the reader is left wondering what the Qur'an really means by such and such example or pronouncement.⁶

Moreover, the Qur'an evolves the various elements of its broader message in stages, and therefore, reading any passage in isolation can be highly misleading.

Thus, the Arabic Qur'an can be very challenging and can even disorient and misguide a casual reader, not aware of its subtleties, nuances and various contexts. However, the Qur'an leaves sufficient clues for the reader to help comprehending its guidance and broader message. Thus, the Qur'an affirms that it contains some clearly stated verses that form 'the essence of the Book' (3:7).

"He is the One who has revealed to you (O Muhammad,) the Book which contains (some) clear verses that (form) the essence of this Book, while others are allegorical. As for those with perversity in their hearts, follow that which is allegorical seeking confusion and seeking an interpretation. No one knows its interpretation, except God. Those, who have knowledge, say: 'We believe in it; it all comes from our Lord;' yet none is mindful of this, except the prudent"(3:7).

Furthermore, the Qur'an spells out its role and credentials, loud and clear, luring the seekers of knowledge and challenging his intellect to probing it. Thus, it claims to be:

- A book of wisdom⁷ that is made clear and distinct,⁸ with all kinds of illustrations,⁹ and explanations.¹⁰
- An Arabic recital (Qur'an) for those who have knowledge, and use their reason.¹¹
- Guidance and mercy for those who believe in God,¹² and who do good.¹³
- Guidance for the heedful (muttaqi) ;¹⁴ and truth, guidance and message for humanity.¹⁵
- The divine criteria of right and wrong,¹⁶ and the balance of justice for humanity.¹⁷
- Verifier of a part of the Scripture that came before it.¹⁸

The Qur'an however asserts that only those stand to benefit from it, who approach it with a pure heart,¹⁹ probe into its verses,²⁰ and seek the best meaning in it.²¹

The Translated Qur'an

The Arabic Qur'an is generous with idioms, metaphors, allegories and similes and features a complex construction of words, and therefore, its literal translation can hardly be meaningful. This, together with its extraordinary textual features, makes it almost

impossible to render without grievous distortion in the meaning of many of its expressions, passages and themes. Traditionally, Muslim scholars have inserted additional words into the text to attain a meaningful rendition, and added explanatory notes in the margins to explain the message of the Qur'an in historical and thematic context. However, dictated by the traditional principle of taqlid (blind conformity with the works of the past scholars), practically all Qur'anic exegetes have referenced the work of an exegete of their choice as their primary source material, and embellished and adapted it to their immediate circumstances and world view. The traditional interpretative works (tafsir) have therefore been influenced by the personal and doctrinal background of their authors, and their choice of mentors, leading inevitably to varying interpretation of the Qur'anic message.

The Objective of this work

This book attempts to interpret the various facets of the Qur'anic message by drawing explanations primarily from its (the Qur'an's) own text. Thus, the meanings of the critical words, idioms, figures of speech, and phrases of the Qur'an have been derived from their usage across its text. Likewise, the essence of its guidance and its criteria of right and wrong, permissible and forbidden have been derived primarily from its own illustrations to provide the reader with a broad moral trajectory of the Qur'an. The work is thus designed to eliminate the influence of the personal, educational, and doctrinal backgrounds of its authors and their choice of source materials. This is consistent with the Qur'an's claim of representing the best interpretation.²² Accordingly, many Qur'anic scholars have advocated it since the early centuries of Islam. However, it never gained popularity, first because the orthodoxy was fully satisfied with the traditional exegetic discipline, and secondly because this approach is inherently more difficult and challenging than the classical exegesis. The long-outstanding need for a clear understanding of the essential message of Islam, independent of personal exegetic influences, and the scope of using computer database for comprehensive and accurate scrutiny of the Qur'anic text as adopted in this work, provide the impetus and background for the compilation of this volume.

Coverage

The book covers about a fourth of the Qur'anic verses, partly rendered, and partly referenced/implied. It attempts to review, by topic, the Qur'an's clearly stated verses that constitute its core message (3:7 above). However, the listing of its repetitive exhortations under any topic can appear dull and flat, and therefore, in all such cases only a few verses are rendered to illustrate the Qur'anic message, while the rest of the verses are indicated in the footnote for the inquisitive to consult in their copies of the Qur'an.

The portion of the Qur'anic text that is not covered in this exposition relates to various Qur'anic illustrations, God's glorification, stories of the past prophets, fate of some of the ancient tribes, and tales and parables. This, however, does not undermine the scope of the work to any significant extent, as the lessons embraced in such verses are largely covered in the clearly spelled out directives, which the Qur'an commands its believers to follow (3:7).

Layout and Organization

The book is divided into 48 chapters, organized as follows:

Chapters 1-2 cover the salient features of the revelation and the text of the Qur'an.

Chapter-3 attempts to evolve a biography of the Prophet by drawing primarily on the Qur'anic allusions (some 250 verses) to contemporaneous events – an exercise that is designed to give a far more accurate representation of the Prophetic mission than the classical biography.

Chapters 4-14 relate to the Qur'anic reflections on the creation of the physical world, humans; its warnings about the Day of Judgment, and other concepts and notions of a universal nature.

Chapters 15-42 focus on the various facets of the Qur'anic guidance and message.

Chapter 43 recapitulates and summarizes all Qur'anic precepts relating to the rights and duties between all human relationships under a modern heading, 'Principles of human rights'.

Chapters 44-48 review the canonical five pillars of Islam, specifically for the Muslim readers. This has been placed towards the end as the Muslims are fairly familiar with them and need to have a better understanding of the broader message of the Qur'an, as covered earlier in the book, to derive greater benefits from the Islamic rituals.

The ordering of the topics, however, is somewhat arbitrary. As the Qur'anic message must be comprehended as a whole, there is no basis to give any ranking to its various elements.

Some critical issues and developments that have led to distortion of the Qur'anic message or confusion in religion have been covered in the Enclosures (four topics), and the book is concluded with an Afterword that evaluates two current issues: the relevance of Islamic (Shari'a) law in today's multi-religious societies, and Sectarianism in Islam, in light of the Qur'anic message, and ends with a general appeal to both the Muslims and non-Muslims.

The Common Era has been used throughout the book, while in many places Islamic calendar is also noted, separated by a slash.

Last but not least, the classical division of the revelation into Meccan period (610-622) and Medinite (622-632) period has been maintained corresponding to the venue of the revelation (Mecca and Medina), and the chronology of Qur'anic chapters (Suras), where mentioned, is based on Noldeke's grouping,²³ which are generally agreed among the scholars.

Lingual Etiquette/ Nuances

A number of things that may sound somewhat academic but could be contentious need clarification:

1. Muslim scholars differ on whether Allah, the Supreme Deity of the Qur'an, can be rendered as 'God', and whether sanctifying adjectives should be used while referring to the Qur'an. We have followed Yusuf Ali, Thomas Irving (Talim Ali), Ahmed Ali and

Muhammad Asad in using the English word 'God' for Allah - across this book, and excluded the sanctifying adjective 'Holy' while referring to the Qur'an.

2. The oratorical nature of the Qur'an reflects in the following dialectical nuances that may be noted for easy reading of the rendition of the verses presented in the book.

- 'Say' means God is asking the Prophet to announce to his people.
- 'You' may mean the Prophet himself or his Arab audience, by implication the reader himself, depending upon the Arabic verb-form (singular or plural form).
- 'They', 'them', refer to the Prophet's followers or opponents depending upon the text.

3. The Qur'an features a rich vocabulary for different shades or categories of 'goodness' and 'badness',²⁴ with each word contributing to the lyrical harmony of its text. Any attempt to capture the different shades of meaning of the Qur'anic words for 'good' and 'bad' could compromise with the literary merit of translation. Therefore, in many places, the commonplace words 'good/kind' and 'evil' are used to convey all shades of 'goodness' and 'badness'.

4. For want of a common gender second person pronoun, the masculine form ('he'/'He') is adopted as per normal usage, without any gender bias, and likewise the generic word 'man,' is used, where appropriate, to denote both the sexes.

Finally, as a prelude to this exposition, a key mystical passage of the Qur'an is listed below to help the readers meditate on the Author (God) of the Arabic Qur'an.

"God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. A likeness of His light is a niche that has a lamp in it, and the Lamp is in a glass, and the glass is (dazzling,) as it were, a radiant star. (The Lamp is) lit from a blessed olive (tree), neither of East nor of West; its oil almost glows, though fire has never touched it. Light upon light! God guides to His Light anyone He Wills, and God gives people examples, for God is Cognizant of everything"(24:35).

Muhammad Yunus & Ashfaque Ullah Syed

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Notes, Complimentary Verse references

1. Sanan Abu Daud, Urdu translation by Wahiduz Zaman, Vol.3, Acc. 253, p. 118.
2. Following are the quotations from some of the most eminent non-Muslim Arabic scholars of the modern era:

"It is by far the finest work of Arabic prose in existence" - Alan Jones, The Koran, London 1994, opening page.

"The sublime rhetoric of the Arabic Koran ... its richly varied rhymes... constitute the Koran's undeniable claim to rank among the greatest literary masterpieces of mankind." - Arthur Arberry, The Koran Interpreted, London 1956, p. x.

(Its language is) "the richest and most harmonious in the world." - Savary. Extracted from: Sliman bin Ibrahim and Etienne Dinet, The life of Muhammad, London 1990, p. 71.

“.. the recited Qur’an is a distinctively compelling example of verbal expression.” - Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur’an*, 2nd edition, Oregon 2007, p. 2.

3. For example, the passage 45:13-16, opens with a statement that God has made serviceable to humans whatever is in the heavens and the earth, (45:13), and this is followed in sequence by a bidding to the believers to forgive the disbelievers (45:14), a declaration on the individual accountability of humans to God subject to their deeds (45:15) and God’s favour on the Children of Israel.
4. God’s opening address to the Prophet in the passage (5:67-71) is followed sequentially by the Prophet addressing the People of the Book (5:68), God promising reward to all adherents of monotheistic faiths subject to their deeds (5:69), and God speaking about the rebellious attitude of the Children of Israel (5:70).
5. Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur’an*, 2nd edition, Oregon 2007, p. 45.
6. Examples:

hawiyah (101:7). The 101st Sura (al Qari’a) - a short lyrical composition, opens with a brief glimpse of the apocalyptic calamity (101:1-5), and then warns its audience that “whoever’s scales weigh light’ (101:8), his mother is hawiyah” (101:9). It then asks: “And what can tell you what she is” (101:10)?, and concludes with the answer: “narun hamiah (raging fire)” (101:11). Totally lost in foreign rendition, the term hawiyah, presented in the feminine mode (101:10), preceded by a powerful imagery of a cosmic cataclysm, evokes a sense of profound loss or agony and can mean ‘a fall into an abyss’ or ‘a woman bereft of her child.’ The sense of loss is stressed phonologically by the sound figure of the word and leaves the Arab audience wondering what the Qur’an really means by this term. The Qur’anic answer does not fully satisfy his curiosity as the expression narun hamiah is without the definite article al (the): narun hamiyah is not ‘the raging fire’, rather simply ‘raging fire’ - Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur’an*, Oregon, U.S.A, 1999, p.113.

sijjil (105:4). In the 105th Sura (al-Fil), the Qur’an alludes to the destruction of an army with elephants approaching Mecca by birds showering them with sijjil. This is a mysterious term that has been variously interpreted as ‘a writing’, ‘rock’, ‘baked bricks’, ‘rock-hard clay’, and, metaphorically, as ‘a writing on the wall’, something that had been decreed (by God). - Muhammad Asad, *Message of the Qur’an*, Gibraltar 1980, Chap. 105, Note 2.

7. 10:1, 31:2, 43:4, 44:4.
8. 12:1, 15:1, 16:64, 26:2, 27:1, 36:69, 43:2, 44:2.
9. 17:89, 18:54, 30:58, 39:27.
10. 7:52, 11:1, 41:3.
11. 12:2, 41:3, 43:3.
12. 7:52, 16:64, 27:77.
13. 31:3.

14. 2:2, 3:138, 24:34.
15. 2:185, 10:108, 14:52.
16. 2:185, 25:1.
17. 42:17, 57:25.
18. 5:48.
19. 56:79. Literally, the verse states: "None but the pure (of heart) can touch it (the Qur'an)", but given that the Qur'an was an oral revelation, the verse suggests that only those pure (of heart) can draw benefit from it.
20. 38:29, 47:24.
21. 39:18, 39:55.
22. 25:33.
23. Noldeke's classification is as follows, though some scholars place the opening Sura (1) in the Medinite period.
 - o Early Meccan: 1, 51-53, 55-56, 68-70, 73-75, 77-97, 99-109, 111-114. [48 Suras]
 - o Middle Meccan: 15, 17-21, 23, 25-27, 36-38, 43-44, 50, 54, 67, 71-72, 76. [21 Suras]
 - o Late Meccan: 6-7, 10-14, 16, 28-32, 34-35, 39-42, 45-46. [21 Suras]
 - o Medinite Suras, in (extrapolated) chronological order: 2, 98, 64, 62, 8, 47, 3, 61, 57, 4, 65, 59, 33, 63, 24, 58, 22, 48, 66, 60, 110, 49, 9, 5. [24 Suras]

Alan Jones, The Koran, U.K. 1994, [Reprint of the original translation of the Qur'an by J.M.Rodwell, 1861]; p. xx.
24. Typically, the Qur'an uses the words *sualehah*, *khayrah*, *hasanah*, *taiyibah*, *birr* for different categories of goodness, and the words, *khabisah*, *sharr*, *sayyi'ah*, *munkar*, *fahishah* for different categories of badness.

1. The Quranic Revelation and Compilation

1.1. Social and moral setting of pre-Islamic Arabia

Barren sandy desert, extremely hot climate, and scarcity of water resources made the heartland of the Arabian Peninsula an inhospitable abode for man since ancient times. Its original people were pagans, except for some Unitarians (*ahnaf*) who contemplated on the Oneness of God. In the post Judeo-Christian era, pockets of wet fertile land attracted Jewish and Christian settlers from the adjoining regions, and became isolated centres of trade and commerce. However, the vast stretches of the desert heartland that only sustained a nomadic life, remained in a primitive state until the advent of Islam. The nomadic tribes had preserved their ancestral paganism, with each tribe having its own idol; and the Ka'ba, a cubical shrine at the heart of an ancient sanctuary (Haram) in Mecca, was the centre of idol worship. The nomadic Arabs were largely unlettered, had no notion of central state or kingdom, and their social and moral norms were based on traditions (*Sunnah*) and dictated by the struggle for survival.

The Qur'an does not offer any details on the social and moral conditions of the time. However, as part of its dialogue with the pagan Arabs, it touches on the major vices of the era, as summarized below.

The Arabs abhorred the birth of a female child and would rather bury it alive than bear the shame and ignominy of raising it.¹ They also slaughtered their own children,² as sacrifice to idols, or on account of poverty.³ They forbade certain crops and animals to common people, reserving them only for the priests.⁴ They reserved some livestock for men, but allowed the women to share only that which was born dead,⁵ and forbade four kinds of cattle of either sex for food.⁶

The menfolk did not take any financial responsibility for their wives, and so when they were away on trading missions, their wives cohabited with other men to maintain themselves,⁷ and the vestiges of incest had lingered on.⁸

The poor, orphans, and travellers in distress were left uncared,⁹ slavery was institutionalized,¹⁰ and the sick and the mendicant were ostracized.¹¹

Offences against members of rival tribes were avenged by 'like for like' injury resulting in an unending cycle of avenge and blood vendetta often lasting for generations,¹² while economic injustice and immoral commercial practices were rampant.¹³

1.2. The Qur'anic revelation

As a Hanafi (believer in the Oneness of God), Muhammad had taken to periodic meditation in a mountain cave above Mecca. During one of these meditations, he heard a voice saying:

"Read! (O Muhammad,) in the name of your Lord who creates (96:1), (who) created man out of a clot (2). Read! Your Lord is Most Noble (3). He taught humans the use of the intellect (4). He taught man what he did not know" (96:5).

This was the beginning of the Qur'anic revelation (610). The next revelation, comprising the first seven verses of the 74th Sura (al- Muddaththir), came after a pause (fatarah) of two to three years, commanding the Prophet to proclaim his Prophetic mission, and setting out some of the core concepts of Qur'anic message:

"O you enwrapped (Muddaththir) (in your thoughts) (74:1)! Arise and warn (your people) (2). Magnify your Lord (3). Purify your inner self (thiyab) (4).¹⁴ Shun all defilements (5). Do not bestow favour, seeking gains (6). And turn to God in patience" (74:7).

The revelations came in phases,¹⁵ and at an early stage of the revelation, it assured the Prophet that he would have no difficulty in remembering and reciting the Qur'an.¹⁶ This enabled verbatim recording of the revealed passages. The revelation continued for almost twenty-three years (610-632) until it declared its own completion, and the 'perfection of its laws' (5:3):

"...This day, those who reject (this Qur'an) despair of (ever harming) your religion. Therefore, do not fear them; fear Me. This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favour on you, and have chosen Islam for your religion..." (5:3).

1.3. Genesis, literary grandeur and consistency

The revelation came like ad hoc passages, without any continuity of theme or rhythm. Moreover, no attempt was made by the scribes to record the revealed passages in a chronological order: the Prophet directed their exact location in the Qur'an. This led the Prophet's Meccan enemies to question his claim to be God's messenger. The revelation responded by challenging its audience to produce a chapter like it (2:23/24):**17**

“If you (O people,) are in doubt concerning what We have revealed to Our Servant, then produce a chapter like it; and call on your witnesses besides God – if indeed you are truthful (2:23). But if you do not do (it) - and you can never do (it), then heed hellfire, whose fuel is human beings and stones - prepared for the disbelievers” (2:24).

The Qur'an also claims that no one can even forge it (10:38),**18** and asserts that it is of such a literary grandeur that only God Almighty could be its Author (10:37):

“This Qur'an could not possibly have been devised by (anyone) other than God – rather, (it) is a confirmation of what was (revealed) before it; and a fuller explanation of the Book in which there is nothing doubtful, from the Lord of the worlds (10:37). Do they say, he [Muhammad] forged it?’ Say (to them): ‘Then bring a chapter like this, and call upon anyone besides God you can - if indeed you are truthful’”(10:38).

At the height of literary eloquence, the Arabs had great poets and poetry was big part of their lives, but they recognized in the Qur'an, the most eloquent language they had ever heard. The Qur'an virtually cast a spell on the listeners, so much so that the Quraysh asked people to chat and make noise during Qur'anic recitation, understandably, to foil its magical effect.**19**

The Qur'an also challenged the priests and the learned among its audience to probe into it and find any contradiction in it (4:82) and asserted that its self-consistency is yet another illustration of its divine character (18:1):**20**

“Don't they ponder over the Qur'an? Had it been from (someone) other than God, they would have surely found much contradiction in it” (4:82).

“Praise be to God who has revealed to His devotee the Book, and did not put any distortion in it” (18:1).

As the revelation progressed, the seemingly unrelated passages fell in place and created an immensely intricate and inexplicably harmonious pattern of the Qur'anic text. This fully convinced the Arabs, who had opposed Muhammad for almost two decades, of the divinity of the Qur'an, and they came to the Prophet in large numbers from all over Arabia to embrace the new faith.

1.4. Memorization / recording during the Prophet's lifetime

Early Qur'anic revelations were generally short, and were memorized by Muhammad's followers, as pieces of a divine litany. In later years, revealed passages became longer. They were not only memorized, but also recorded. The scribes wrote them down on dry palm leaves, camel hides, paper scroll etc. When any writing material was not at hand, they inscribed them on white stone, animal bones, hardened clay, wooden tablets etc.

These early records and inscriptions were then written down on sheets (Suhuf), which were held in reverence (80:11-16).

“Nay! The Qur’an is a message (80:11) for anyone who wants to remember (12), (retained) in honoured pages (Suhuf) (13), elevated and immaculate (14), (written) by the hands of scribes (15) – noble and virtuous” (80:16).

As the pagans put pressure on the Prophet to alter the wordings of the revelation such as by accommodating their deities, the Qur’an declares (6:115, 85:21/22):**21**

“The Words of your Lord will be fulfilled truthfully and justly: none can change His Words, for He is All-Knowing and Aware” (6:115)

“Surely We have sent down this Reminder, and surely. We will protect (preserve) it” (15:9).

“Nay! This is a Glorious Qur’an (85:21). (Inscribed) in a Tablet (well) guarded (lauh al-Mahfooz) **22** (against corruption)” (85:22).

These Qur’anic pronouncements serve as irrefutable proof of the integrity of its text. Had there been any alteration in the Qur’an, the Prophet’s enemies as well as the general Arab public would not have embraced Islam during his lifetime; and even if, for the sake of argument, they did so under the prevalent historical setting, they would have definitely rejected the Qur’an immediately after the Prophet’s death. However, this did not happen. The Prophet’s immediate successors were as intense in their faith in the Qur’an as their predecessors during the Prophet’s lifetime. Thus there can be no iota of doubt that the Qur’an was handed down to the Prophet’s successors and through them to the posterity in its original form.

1.5. Final compilation and authentication

While some of the Prophet’s companions²³ compiled their own manuscripts (masahif), Zayd bin Thabit, the foremost among the Prophet’s scribes collated all the original sheets (suhuf) within two to three years of the Prophet’s death (632). These were retained originally by the first Caliph, Abu Bakr (632-634), then by the second Caliph, ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattab (634-644), then by Hafsa bint ‘Umar, one of the Prophet’s widows, and finally authenticated by the special committee set up by the third Caliph, ‘Uthman Ibn ‘Affan (644-656).

The personal manuscripts of the Prophet’s companions showed nominal differences in spelling, arrangement and numbering of chapters (Suras) and synonyms. Uthman’s commission cross checked Hafsa’s original sheets (suhuf) with each of these manuscripts as well as with the memorized litany, and arrived at a ‘singular’ text, which had the concurrence of all the companions of the Prophet, and was declared authentic without doubt (mutawattir). Some of Uthman’s manuscripts are preserved. He made five copies and sent one copy each to Egypt, Syria and other dominions of Islam. Three of the copies have survived, and modern secular research has also established that except for dots and orthographic marks that were introduced later, **24** they are identical to what we have today.²⁵

1.6. Historical accuracy of Qur’anic records

The Qur'anic records of the social, moral and political setting of the revelation, and its references to contemporaneous events must be necessarily true, because its verses were recorded as well as memorized during the lifetime of the Prophet. If this was not so the very premise of the Qur'an as a book of Truth²⁶ and Wisdom,²⁷ as it repeatedly claims, would have been challenged in the Prophet's lifetime, and Islam would never have spread out of the townships of Medina and Mecca, let alone to the farthest corners of the Arabian peninsula, in the very limited span of the last few years of his life.

This intrinsic accuracy of the Qur'anic records of contemporaneous events is of great significance. They can be used to verify the authenticity of Islamic theological records, which date at least a hundred and fifty years after the revelation, and are not always accurate because of their sole dependence on oral accounts, transmitted across the preceding generations.

It is also worth noting that since the Qur'an reflects the social circumstances of the time of revelation, it could not have been written in historical stages and increments as some orientalist argued, because then social and historical circumstances of a later era would have been inevitably reflected in the text.

Notes

1. 16:58/59, 43:17, 81:8.
2. 6:137, 6:140, 60:12.
3. 6:151, 17:31.
4. 6:138.
5. 6:139.
6. 5:103, 6:143/144.
7. Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, English translation by Ismail Ragi, 8th edition, Karachi 1989, p. 319.
8. 4:23.
9. 2:215, 4:36, 17:26, 30:38.
10. 2:177, 4:25, 4:92, 5:89, 9:60, 24:32/33, 58:3, 90:13.
11. 24:61.
12. 2:178.
13. 2:188, 2:275, 4:29.
14. The word *thiyab* in 74:4 literally connotes clothes that one wears, and accordingly most commentators have linked the verse 74:1 with the verses 74:4/5 to imply that the Prophet, who used to be enwrapped (74:1) in his cloak, is commanded to keep his cloak clean of all filth and pollution (74:4/5). However, Muhammad Asad observes quoting early scholars, that in classic Arabic the word *thiyab* is used metaphorically to denote the inner self, and that according to most of the (earlier) commentators, "the meaning of (the verse 74:5) is to 'purify thy heart of all that is blameworthy.'" Muhammad Asad, *Message of the Qur'an*, Gibraltar 1980, Chap.74, Note 2.
15. 17:106, 25:32.

16. 75:16-19.
17. 17:88, 52:34.
18. 11:13, 52:33.
19. 41:26.
20. 39:23, 39:28.
21. 6:34, 18:27, 41:42.
22. This is the only verse with the phrase *lauh al-mahfuz*, rendered as 'Tablet (well) guarded'. Many scholars take the literal meaning of the word and advocate that the Qur'an has been preserved in the heaven since eternity in an imperishable Tablet. However, others hold that this expression implies God's promise to protect the Qur'anic text from any corruption. In the early centuries of Islam, this generated much debate and confusion as it bore on the highly contentious and sensitive issue of whether the Qur'an is created or uncreated and that of divine predestination. These are, however, purely theological questions and God best knows their answers.
23. Ibn Mas'ud, Ubayy Ibn Ka'b and Zayd Ibn Thabit, 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib - to name the noted ones.
24. Caliph Malik al-Marwan (d. 68/686) introduced the dots and orthographic marks into the plain text of the Qur'an to enable the non-Arabs to differentiate between the different Arabic words as without these marks, many words look identical.
25. Ahmad von Denffer, 'Ulum al-Qur'an, U.K. 1983 / Malaysia 1991, p. 163.
26. 2:176, 39:2, 39:41, 42:17.
27. 10:1, 31:2, 43:4, 44:4. [Same as Note 7, Preface]

[27 references]

2. The Text of the Qur'an

2.1. Essence of Faith

An unqualified and wholesome belief in the One Almighty God (Tawhid), without the slightest association of anything with Him (shirk) distinguishes the Qur'an as the epitome of the purest form of monotheism. The Qur'an repeatedly asserts the transcendence of God and uses a rosary of attributes to convey the multifarious manifestations of His Words (kalimat). It recounts almost a hundred attributes of God such as, the Sustainer (Lord), the Sovereign, the Holy, the (source of) Peace, the Secure, the Preserver (of safety), the Mighty, the Inexorable, the Supreme, the Eternal Source (of everything), the Complete, the Fearless, the Exalted, the Wise, the Permanent, the Merciful, the Independent, the Omnipotent, the Originator of Heaven and Earth etc. The Qur'an however makes it clear that all Words are due to Him:

"Say (O Muhammad!): 'If the ocean were an inkwell for the Words* of my Lord, sooner would the ocean be exhausted than my Lord's Words (kalimat), even if We brought the same to replenish (it)'" (18:109). *[Scholars have connoted the

word *kalimat* in this verse with ‘wisdom’ or ‘knowledge.’ It can also mean manifestations.]

“If all the trees on earth were (made into) pens and the oceans (were ink), with seven oceans for replenishment*, the Words (*Kalimat*) of God will not be exhausted. Indeed God is Almighty, Wise” (31:27). *[Lit., ‘after that’]

The Qur’an calls upon humankind to submit [orient themselves] to God, and to seek His forgiveness. It advocates belief in the ‘unseen:’ what is impenetrable to human perception (the angels, jinn), and affirms the certainty of the Day of Judgment.

2.2. Reference to past and Biblical Prophets / Scriptures

The Qur’an states that God sent messengers to different communities from time to time (10:47),¹ and declares that Muhammad is the seal of the prophets.²

“And there has been a messenger for every community, and when their messenger comes, judgment is passed among them justly, and they are not wronged” (10:47).

It calls upon Muslims to believe in all the prophets and previously revealed scriptures, and to make no distinction between any of the Prophets (4:152),³ and affirms that all the messengers are not mentioned in the Qur’an (40:78).⁴

“As for those who believe in God and His messengers, and do not make a distinction between any of them – it is they who will be given their rewards, for God is Most Forgiving and Merciful” (4:152).

“Certainly We have sent messengers before you (O Muhammad!): Some of them We have mentioned to you, while there are others that We have not mentioned to you...” (40:78).

The Qur’an enjoins the same true religion as the Judeo-Christian prophets had preached (2:136),⁵ but it unequivocally rejects the notion of divine incarnation and trinity (Nicene Creed) which describes Jesus as Son of God, and one of three among a multiple deity (4:171).⁶

“Say, ‘We believe in God, and in what was revealed to us, and in what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes; and in what was given to Moses and Jesus, and all the prophets from their Lord. We do not make a distinction between any of them. To God alone do we submit” (2:136).

“O People of the Book, do not commit excess in your religion, and do not say anything about God but the truth. The Messiah Jesus, the Son of Mary, was a messenger of God, and His Word that He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit from Him. Therefore, believe in God and His messengers, and do not say ‘Trinity’ - it is best for you to refrain (from this). God is one sole deity, too glorified to have a son. To Him belongs everything in the heavens and everything on earth, God is enough of a Patron” (4:171).

The Qur’an mentions twenty-four of the Biblical prophets by name, such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, to name the noted ones. However, the Qur’an does not tell the story of its prophets in a linear fashion. With the exception of the story

of Joseph (Sura 12), the Qur'anic allusions appear in bits and pieces scattered across its text. Thus for example, Jesus is spoken of some 35 times either by his name Isa, or by some other title (Messiah, the Son of Mary),⁷ and some aspects of the story of Moses occur in 44 different passages.⁸

At the time of the Prophet, varying versions of Biblical accounts were held by diverse Christian sects,⁹ but the Qur'anic references to the missions of Biblical prophets, though fragmentary, are fully consistent. Accordingly many Christian priests and Rabbis saw the truth in the Qur'anic revelation (2:146),¹⁰ and listened to it with overwhelming awe, admiration, and devotion (17:107).

“Those to whom We have given the Book, know this (to be true) as they know their own sons...” (2:146)

“Say: ‘Whether you believe in it - or you do not believe, indeed, those who are given knowledge before this (Qur'an), fall down prostrating on their faces when it is recited to them’” (17:107).

2.3. Qur'anic guidance is broad based and universal

The Qur'an sets out the highest principles of belief and a framework of moral values and social guidelines. However, its guidance is timeless, designed for universal communities, and is therefore broad based, and not spelled out in any details. For example, it lays great emphasis on good deeds and Zakah (traditionally rendered as charity) - but does not define either. Its treatment of social and civil norms, finance etc. is in general terms. It does not give any detailed instructions in civil law or administration of justice, though it touches on the punishment for some of the major prevalent offences and crimes, while emphasizing on justice and equity in general terms. However, the Qur'an is specific when it radically changed what existed at the time. Accordingly, it clearly spells out the various facets of family and inheritance laws, thereby ensuring the rights and privileges of women in different capacities: as an independent person, a wife, a mother, a widow, or as an inheritor of property from the next of kin.

The Qur'an remains silent about the physical setting of life, as the latter changes with time, place, and state of civilization. Thus, it refers to man's eternal need for eating but does not say how to prepare the food. It refers to man's eternal need for lodging, but does not say a word about the type or nature of his abode. It refers to man's need for traveling to distant lands, but does not prescribe any mode of communication. It refers to man's eternal need for harnessing the forces of nature for his use, but does not elaborate on the methodology or the process to accomplish this.

To put it in a word, the Qur'an is practically silent about the myriad of objects, articles, gadgets, tools, instruments, and equipment that man has been developing with the progress of civilization. Contrary to the once popular notion, the Qur'an does not even condemn music, though of course good Muslims should be cautious as far as certain types of music are concerned (because they neatly go together with drugs, alcohol and prostitution).

Historically, the orthodox have been suspicious of all new things. Their objection, in the historical perspective, has ranged from the introduction of the handkerchief in the post

Prophetic era, to the use of printing machine in late medieval era and photography, microphone and television in more recent times. But the Qur'an does not provide any basis to prevent humans from using the God given faculty of their minds, and to change the physical setting of their life through enterprise, innovation, discovery and invention.

2.4. Qur'anic commandments are not gender biased

The Qur'an addresses its believers using a common gender pronoun, *aa'manu*, but the Qur'an also uses this word to denote the male believer. Therefore, to leave no ambiguity that its commandments are directed to both men and women, the Qur'an states:

“Indeed, for Muslim men and Muslim women, for believing men (*mu'minin*) and believing women (*mu'minat*), for devout men and devout women, for truthful men and truthful women, for patient men and patient women, for humble men and humble women, for charitable men and charitable women, for fasting men and fasting women,¹¹ for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who remember God a lot - God has prepared for them forgiveness and a great reward” (33:35).

“Anyone, whether a man or a woman, who does good deeds, and is a believer – it is they (who shall) enter the garden and will not be wronged at all” (4:124).

2.5. The Transformative human language of the Qur'an

Some of the Qur'anic verses regard the manifestations of nature as well as the day-to-day happenings of life as totally dependent on God's Will or Command. Any simplistic comprehension of such verses, typified below could lead to confusion and misinterpretation.

“...He sends down mountain-masses (of clouds) from the sky with hail in them, and He strikes with it anyone He wills and turns it away from anyone He wills...” (24:43).

“...God leaves straying anyone He wills and guides anyone He wills...” (14:4, 74:31).

“...God multiplies things for anyone He wills...” (2:261).

These stipulations seemingly suggest that man need not make any effort to do anything on his own, as everything depends on God's Will. But such an interpretation is totally out of line with the following Qur'anic assertions appearing in two of its verses:

“... God does not change the favour which He has bestowed on a people, unless they change themselves*...” (8:53).

“... God does not change the condition of a people, unless they change themselves*...” (13:11).

*[Lit., 'change that which is in themselves.']

These Qur'anic assertions point to both a divine law of cause and effect and to the fundamental premise of man's free will to choosing the right path out of the “two highways shown to him” (90:10/Ch.17.1).

The truth remains, God is above any comparison with any of His creations. Therefore, as Ali al-Tantawi explains, human attributes, such as 'will', 'wish', etc. when employed to

express God's Might and Power, cannot be interpreted to mean the same as when used in the context of human beings.¹²

2.6. Manual handling of the Arabic Qur'an

One of the verses of the Qur'an (56:79) declares: "None but the pure (mutatahhirin) can touch it (the Qur'an)." In the context of the revelation, this probably meant approaching the Qur'an with a pure heart (Note 19/Preface), the Muslims generally regard this as an instruction to attaining purity (Tahara) by doing the ritual ablution (Wudu) before touching any printed copy of the Qur'an, or a part of its text. The Qur'an however uses the word Tahara to denote the various dimensions of purity, such as purity or clarity of mind, spiritual purity, purity in sexual behaviour, purity of a drink, etc.¹³ Therefore, while applying the injunction to non-believers, the Qur'anic word Tahara may be understood in its broader sense. Furthermore, the Qur'anic guidance is for all humanity,¹⁴ and it is 'a reminder for all the worlds.'¹⁵ Therefore anyone of any faith, who may not feel obliged to comply with the Qur'anic injunction on ablution, may still touch and read it, and benefit from its guidance. It would therefore follow that the non-Muslims may touch, or read the written text of the Qur'an without undermining its sanctity.

2.7. The Qur'an's clue to its mysterious character

One of the earliest verses of the Qur'an (74:30) refers to the overlooking of hellfire by nineteen angels. The passage is allegorical, but the subsequent verse (74:31) has some clear stipulations that are worth pondering:

"Over it are nineteen (angels) (74:30), and We have made none but the angels the wardens of hellfire; and We have not set their number (at 19), except as a trial for those who deny (this revelation) - so as to convince those who were given the Book, and to strengthen the faith of those who believe; so that those who were given the Book and who have faith (in One God) may not be in doubt, and that those with sickness in their hearts, and the disbelievers may say: 'What does God mean by this example?' God leaves straying anyone He wills and guides anyone He wills..." (74:31).

If we ponder over the number 19, as the verse (74:31) apparently invites us to, we find some easily verifiable clues that point to a mysterious bearing of this odd prime number in the formatting and composition of the Qur'anic text. Thus for example:

The Qur'an's opening benediction, Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim [In the name of God, the Benevolent, the Merciful] has **19** letters. The Qur'an has 114 chapters (Suras) - the number is a multiple of **19**. The Qur'an's first revealed passage (96:1-5/Ch. 1.2) contains **19** words, 76 or **19X4** letters, and is located in the chapter (96) - which stands **19th** from the end (counting 114 as 1, 113 as 2...) and contains **19** verses, and 304 or **19X16** letters. The number of Qafs in the 50th chapter, Surah Qaf, which begins with the letter Qaf as a Qur'anic Initial (maqta)*, is 57, or **19X3**.

*[muqattat, (pl. form of maqta) are letters of unknown meaning which appear at the beginning of some of the Qur'anic chapters, as Qur'anic Initials.]

The number of Qafs in the 42nd chapter, Surah al-Shura, which is the only other chapter beginning with a Qur'anic Initial containing a Qaf (42:2), is 57, or **19X3**. The 42nd and 50th Qur'anic chapters having a Qaf in the Initial have 53 and 45 verses respectively, and the sum of the chapter as well as verse number in each case (42+53, 50+45) is 95, or **19X5**. 14 Arabic letters appear in 14 different combinations in 29 chapters as Qur'anic Initials, and the sum of these numbers is 57 (14+14+29), or **19X3**. Though the 9th Qur'anic chapter (Surah al-Tawbah) does not begin with Bismillah..., there is an extra Bismillah...in the text of Chapter 27, giving a total of 114, or **19X6** Bismillahs...in the Qur'an. The 27th chapter (which has an extra Bismillah...) counts **19th** from the 9th chapter, which does not begin with a Bismillah... The number of Qafs in the first 19 verses of the first Qur'anic chapter having at least 19 verses (Surah al-Baqarah, 2) is **19**. Given the innate incapability of human mind to comprehend a sentence or a passage with a predetermined arithmetical order to have a mathematical consistency of a completed work, it is just not possible to have the cited 15 easily verifiable examples as a mere coincidence.**16**

Notes

1. 13:38, 15:10, 23:44, 30:47, 35:24, 43:6, 57:25.
2. 33:40.
3. 2:177, 2:285, 57:19.
4. 4:164.
5. 3:3, 3:84, 42:13.
6. 5:73.
7. Geoffery Parrinder, Jesus in the Qur'an, Oxford 1996 reprint, p. 18.
8. Michael Sells, Approaching the Qur'an, 2nd edition, Oregon 2007, p. 15.
9. Geoffery Parrinder, Jesus in the Qur'an, Oxford 1996 reprint, Chap. 3.
10. 6:20, 28:52, 28:53, 26:197.
11. The underlined expression represents the traditional rendering of the words sa'imin and sa'imat, based on the Qur'anic usage of the word siyam for fasting in the month of Ramadan. However, the Qur'an also connotes this word with abstinence (19:26), and if this meaning is applied, then the underlined expression will read: "for men and women who abstain (from greed and vices)." - Muhammad Asad, Message of the Qur'an, Gibraltar 1980, Chap. 33, Note 38.
12. Ali al-Tantawi, General Introduction to Islam, English translation, Makkah 1994, p. 88.
13. List of different derivatives of the word Tahara used in the Qur'an:
 - mutahhir, tahhar: God purified Jesus (3:55) and Mary (3:42).
 - tahhir, tahhar: purifying one's thoughts (74:4) sanctifying the House (for worship) (2:125, 22:26).
 - athar: a pure mental state that is conducive to one's treating his divorced wife with honor and generosity (2:232), to give out in charity (58:12), and to

overcome sexual desire (33:53); purer sexual relationship between man and woman as against homosexuality (11:78).

- mutahhra: the pure and sacred contents of the revelation (80:14, 98:2); pure companions (2:25).
- yatatahhru: purity in sexual behavior (7:82, 27:56); spiritual purity of people attending the mosque (9:108).
- tahura: pure rain water (25:48); a most pure drink (76:21).
- yutahhir: God purifies the faithful (5:6); He does not purify the pagans (5:41); the charity offered to the Prophet purified the faithful (9:103); God purified the Prophet's wives (33:33).
- tatahhr: women's physically pure state outside their monthly courses (2:222).

14. 2:185, 10:108, 14:52 [Same as footnote 15, Preface]

15. 38:87, 68:52.

16. The statistical chance of such a repeated occurrence of 19 as a factor in all the above noted 15 instances is 1 in 1915 (15,000,000,000,000,000). In other words, if one was to go through more than fifteen million billion books, statistically he will find only one meeting the above arithmetical logic. It is indeed quite mysterious.

[16 references]

3. Muhammad and the Prophetic Mission

The Qur'an is almost silent about Muhammad's personal life: it does not name, nor bear any information about his parents, wives, offspring, friends or acquaintances, though it leaves the following record about his early life:

"Did He not find you (O Muhammad) an orphan and give shelter (93:6)? And He found you wandering, and gave guidance (7). And He found you needy, and gave sufficiency" (93:8).

On the other hand, the Qur'an is replete with comments on the immediate circumstances of the Prophet - but its commentaries are of very general nature - often oblique and fleeting, and barring exceptions, there is no mention of any names of characters, places, events, numerical figures or sequence of events that go with an historical record. Accordingly, it is not possible to construct the Prophet's biography in the historical lines from the Qur'anic allusions alone. Partly for this reason and partly for the reverential remoteness of the Qur'an, its references have not been probed in a focused manner, and are quoted only sparingly in classical biographic reports.

The details as we find today in the Prophet's biographic literature are largely based on the works of Ibn Hisham (d. 218/834), al-Waqidi (d. 206/822) and Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845). However, these works were characterized by the historical constructions of the era, and "are far from being certain historical fact."¹ Thus, the classical works on the Prophet's biography contain materials that can be misleading, incorrect and even legendary, notably, reference to Satanic verses, miraculous powers of the Prophet, exaggerated

accounts of the Prophet's actions against some of his most treacherous enemies – to cite some examples (Encl.1).

This work attempts to piece together a crystallized account of the Prophetic mission (610-632) by drawing primarily on the Qur'anic allusions (rendered or paraphrased in italics). As discussed earlier (Ch. 1.6) and conceded by Maxime Rodinson, a distinguished modern biographer of the Prophet, the Qur'an "does provide a firm basis of undoubted authenticity,"¹ and hence this exercise is expected to produce a far more accurate assessment of the major events of the Prophetic mission than the classical biography. The work, however, draws on the classical sources to provide the historical context that is essential to fill personal information and names of important figures and places, not furnished by the Qur'an. It has also received valuable inputs from Abou El Fadl, one the most distinguished scholars of Islam of our era.

The classical sources tell us that Muhammad was born in Mecca (570), a posthumous child, who lost his mother at age 6, his next guardian - his grandfather at 9. He was then reared and protected by his uncle, Abu Talib, the chief of the Hashim clan, who were the custodians of the Ka'ba and belonged to the powerful Quraysh tribe.² We are also told that at about age 25, Muhammad married Khadija, a widow, about 40 years old, who had already been married twice and had several children. She bore him six children: four daughters and two sons, of whom only the daughters survived. Muhammad led a stable and harmonious family life, and did not arouse any particular interest of the community until he experienced the first revelation (632).

3.1. Meccan Period (610-622)

Muhammad's wife, Khadija, and his cousin 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib, then a minor who lived in Muhammad's household were the first to believe in him. Muhammad's friend Abu Bakr and 'Uthman Ibn 'Affan, a brilliant young man of the Umayyad tribe, also readily acknowledged the truth of the revelation as the word reached them. Thus in its nascent stage, Islam recruited three of its Caliphs (Abu Bakr, Uthman and Ali) some two to three decades before the responsibility of governing the young Islamic nation was thrust on them (610 onwards). The egalitarian message of the revelation had particular appeal for the poor and the slaves and many of them converted to the new faith. However, the bulk of the community took Muhammad for a joke: they laughed at his followers, winking at each other as they passed by and made fun of them as they reached home.³

As the revelation progressed, it increasingly challenged idol worship and prevalent social and moral norms. This deeply hurt the sentiments of community leaders, who grew increasingly angry with Muhammad and bitterly resentful of the converts. They called Muhammad an impostor, a madman,⁴ and an insane poet,⁵ and ridiculed the Qur'anic revelation.⁶ They also found the revelation strange and unbelievable,⁷ and condemned it as the legends of the ancients.⁸

While the pace of conversion was slow, its social impact was alarming. By joining Muhammad's creed, the converts broke their clan loyalty - their tacit covenant of love and fellowship with all clan members. Therefore, in the eye of the community, they became traitors and the Quraysh leaders put enormous pressure on their families to revoke marriages or engagements with them. Thus, the revelation was destroying the love and affection in the families and the peace and harmony in the community. The

Quraysh leaders also feared that Muhammad's claims could bring disgrace to them during the annual fair, when the delegates of pagan tribes from all over Arabia came to Mecca for pilgrimage and trading and brought rich presents for them. Therefore, they had to isolate Muhammad and keep others from joining his camp. They now questioned why Muhammad could not show any miracles,⁹ and why the Qur'an was not revealed to a man of importance from the two cities¹⁰ - for Muhammad was neither wealthy nor powerful. They also declared that other people coached him or dictated to him morning and evening.¹¹ Furthermore, they argued that Muhammad had the power to separate a person from all his loved ones – his father, his mother, his spouse, his brothers and sisters and all the rest in the clan, and therefore he must be a deceitful liar and a great sorcerer. Accordingly they charged him with forging lies and witchcraft,¹² forging lies against God, forgery and making up tales,¹³ witchcraft,¹⁴ obvious witchcraft that was bewildering,¹⁵ and of being bewitched or possessed by a Jinn.¹⁶

As the revelation consistently challenged the prevalent social and economic norms, it became amply clear that its egalitarian message was tailored to do away with tribalism and remove the privileged class altogether. All this was extremely disturbing, and the community leaders watched the situation with growing alarm. The prevalent clan ties and fear of revenge prevented them from taking to violence, but they hoped for a misfortune to befall him any time,¹⁷ while they captured and persecuted those converts who were weak and helpless.¹⁸

Around the fifth year of his mission (615), the Prophet asked his followers to take refuge in Abyssinia - a neighbouring country with a flourishing Christian Arab civilization. When the Quraysh leaders approached the king of Abyssinia to return the refugees, the Muslim delegate recited the Qur'anic passage on the miraculous birth of Jesus, Son of Mary.¹⁹ The King was deeply touched and allowed them to stay on. This only made the Quraysh more hostile.

It was around this time that 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab, the most gifted and talented among the Quraysh youth and a fierce opponent of the Prophet publicly announced his conversion (616). The Quraysh knew something had to be done. They imposed a social and economic boycott (616-617) on the Hashim clan to isolate Muhammad and his followers from the rest of the community and force them into starvation. But it ran against the tradition of Arab hospitality and also affected the followers of the diverse clans and tribes who had joined the Prophet's faith, and as such, was eventually lifted.

(The Quraysh) then tried to induce the Prophet to forging what they wanted, attributed to God.²⁰ This aggrieved the Prophet but the revelation reminded him that it was not he but the message of God that they were repudiating.²¹ The revelation reminded him that messengers had been rejected before him, but they endured until God's help came to them, and declared that there can be no alteration in the Words of God.²²

The ninth year of the revelation (619) is referred to as 'the year of sadness.'

Muhammad's wife Khadija, as well as his uncle and guardian, Abu Talib died within a few days of one another. His new guardian, Abu Lahab, was sceptical of his mission, and treated Muhammad as the black sheep of the family, while his wife was openly hostile to him, as the Qur'an attests, though obliquely.²³ Muhammad was thus left at the mercy of

his opponents, with virtually no one to protect him. His Prophetic mission had almost stalled with barely over a hundred converts, while the whole of Meccan society had turned against him and his followers.

Unwavering in his faith in God, Muhammad travelled to Taif, a nearby town to seek new audience. The people of Taif however rejected his claims and rebuked him and he was forced to travel back to Mecca.

It was around this time that the Prophet had a vision that he was transported from the Sacred Mosque (Ka'bah) to the Furthest Mosque (in Jerusalem),²⁴ from where he ascended the heaven, passed through each of the seven heavens and finally encountered the Presence of God. In Islamic traditions, the experience is described in graphic details – though in many versions, and is commemorated as al-mi'raj.²⁵ The revelation attested that God had ordained this vision as a test to the people²⁶ so as to choose the most pious and the strongest believers among them. Accordingly, a number of his followers whose faiths were weak became suspicious of Muhammad and indeed left the Islamic faith, but the majority of the Muslims remained steadfast and believed in the Prophet while his close companion Abu Bakr most emphatically endorsed the truth of his vision. The Quraysh and the Prophet's enemies, however, grew even more sceptic of him: they thought, having failed to perform any miracles, he was feigning a vision.

Muhammad now turned his attention to the visitors from Medina who came during the annual fair, when nomadic tribes from all over the peninsula congregated to Mecca for pilgrimage (hajj, which was later adopted in Islam). First he met with a small group, who appeared quite sympathetic. In the subsequent years he met bigger delegates, and eventually concluded a treaty with them - known as the Treaty of 'Aqaba. According to the terms of this treaty, the Medinite Muslims were to provide shelter, sustenance and protection within Medina, and were described as Ansars, traditionally rendered as 'Supporters', and the Meccan Muslims in their midst were to enjoy the status of Muhajirin (i.e. Emigrants, who had permanently left their homeland for a new abode).

The Prophet's Meccan enemies were so infuriated at this new development that they conspired to confine him (to his home) or kill him or exile him.²⁷ Meanwhile small batches of Meccan converts slipped away, and made migration (Hijra) to Medina. Finally, when practically all the converts had departed, the Prophet left Mecca secretly (July, 622), in the face of grave danger. His enemies pursued him. He took shelter in an obscure cave along with his companion (Abu Bakr, not named in the Qur'an) when God sent divine peace (Sakinah) upon him and strengthened him with forces invisible.²⁸ (The revelation also) assured him that God would surely bring him back to the destination.²⁹

3.2. Medinite Period (622-632)

An enthusiastic Muslim community that had already flourished in Medina received the Prophet as its long awaited leader. His presence created an immense excitement and heightened religious zeal in the community and more and more people showed interest in the new faith and entered Islam. The Prophet now made a comprehensive peace and common defence treaty with the diverse tribes of Medina – Jewish as well as pagans. As history unfolded, the treaty virtually established the Prophet as the civil and political

leader and chief judge of the mixed community of Medina – a political victory of immeasurable proportions that has confused many eminent scholars.**30**

At this stage, the Jews were supportive of the Prophet as the revelation acknowledged them as believers (mu'minun), referred to them as the People of the Book (ahl al-kitab), and the Muslims faced Jerusalem, their spiritual centre, during prayers. Some of the Medinite converts, however, wavered in faith.**31** They pretended to believe but in their hearts mocked at the new faith.**32** (Referred to as) the hypocrites (munafiqun) (at a later stage of the revelation),**33** they opposed the Prophet**34** and unknowingly created disorder in the society.**35**

The Prophet's followers so far had been a purely religious or spiritual community, but in their present situation fighting had become unavoidable if they had to survive in their new habitat. The tribal mores permitted an aggrieved tribe to make a sporting raid (ghazu) on its adversary and seize goods to recover the losses inflicted by them. So, on one occasion a small band (some eight in number) of Emigrant Muslims conducted a ghazu on a caravan of a Meccan tribe and the encounter overlapped the traditional sacred months (the first, seventh, eleventh and twelfth months of lunar calendar).**36** This was a serious matter, but soon the revelation declares that more serious in God's sight was to block the way to the path of God, denying God, preventing access to the Sacred mosque and driving away its people.**37** (Within a year of their migration), the revelation grants the Emigrant Muslims permission to fight as they had been oppressed and expelled from their homes unjustly merely because they said, 'Our Lord is God alone.'**38** In the subsequent years, in the aftermath of offensives from their Meccan foes, the revelation endorses fighting,**39** and finally prescribes fighting and gives a clear mandate and convincing rationale to fight those who attacked them, allowing them to fight back if attacked in the traditional sacred months.**40**

Meanwhile, the Quraysh were greatly alarmed at Muhammad's turn of fortune and waited for an opportunity to get rid of him. Hearing reports that Muhammad had left Medina with his followers to attack their trading caravan returning with goods from Syria past Medina, they sent a powerful army to eliminate them once and for all. The stage was set for the first major battle in Islam.

3.3. Battle of Badr (625)

The commander of the Quraysh army (Abu Jahl, not named in the Qur'an) was boastful and took the expedition as an easy way to fame.**41** (The Prophet meanwhile had) summoned his people to accompany him (on a mission), but some were averse to it (not knowing the destination).**42** Many of his companions hoped that they were heading for the unarmed one (the Meccan trading caravan).**43** They camped at one end of the valley of Badr, while the Meccan army approached from the other end, and their trading caravan passed close by unnoticed as God had willed.**44**

(Just before the battle) the Prophet had a dream in which he saw the Meccans small in number. Had the Prophet seen their full strength, (and disclosed it), many of his followers would have been disheartened and would have disputed over the matter.**45** As the truth became clear to the Muslims (that they had to fight against the powerful Quraysh army), they were struck with horror,**46** without realizing that it was God's

scheme to verify the truth of His Words and to cut the root of the pagans.⁴³ The hypocrites and those weak in faith thought that their faith had deluded them.⁴⁷ The Muslims prayed for God's help, and were inspired with the hope that God will help them with one thousand angels, one after another.⁴⁸ God had ordained this hope in their hearts merely to reassure them,⁴⁹ while God covered them with drowsiness as security from the divine and showered rains to refresh them with it, to drive from them the defilement of Satan, and to strengthen their hearts and make their feet steady.⁵⁰ Furthermore, God inspired them through the angels that He was with them and He cast terror into the hearts of their pagan enemies.⁵¹

As the Muslims met the Meccan army, God made this army seem trifling in their eyes, just as He made the Muslims appear to be of little concern to the Meccans.⁵² (The revelation) commanded the Prophet to inspire his followers and assured them that if they persevered patiently, they would overcome the attackers, even if they were twice or ten times as many.⁵³

The revelation urged the Muslims to stand firm and remember God a lot when facing the army,⁵⁴ and exhorted them to obey God and His Prophet, and to avoid rifts, lest they lose courage and spirit, and to remain patient,⁵⁵ and not to retreat during the battle except as a strategic move, or to regroup.⁵⁶

(As the battle began) the devil who had assured them (the attackers) of success turned around and absolved himself of all his responsibilities and stood in terror of God.⁵⁷ (So, the Muslims won a decisive victory) and took many captives,⁵⁸ and the Prophet is asked to tell them (the captives) that if God recognizes any good in their hearts, God will give them better than what was taken from them.⁵⁹ (The revelation tells the Quraysh), if they wanted a judgment it was before them, and warns them to desist from any further attack and declares that their army, however large, will avail them nothing.⁶⁰ To console the Muslims at the loss of their next of kin and relatives who were among the attackers, (the revelation declares that) God had ordained the killing to test the believers, and to thwart the evil design of the pagans.⁶¹ As for the spoils that were collected from the battlefield, (the revelation prescribed) a fifth share for God and the Messenger, and the rest for relatives, orphans, and the needy and the traveler. ⁶²

The Muslims' victory at Badr coincided with the Christian Byzantines' victories against their powerful conquerors, the Persians, realizing a Qur'anic twin prophecy, made many years previously.⁶³ This must have strengthened the faith of the believers and put terror into the hearts of the Quraysh.

The Quraysh now made massive preparations, collaborated with the nomadic tribes hostile to Muhammad and sent a combined army, which camped at the plane facing Mount Uhud, a few miles from Medina. The second major battle against the Muslims was soon to begin.

3.4. Battle of Uhud (625)

(The revelation had meanwhile urged the Muslims) to prepare against their attackers with whatever arms and cavalry they could muster, and to avert fighting if their enemies were inclined toward peace.⁶⁴

Since the enemies were very powerful, the leaders of the community were keen to avert fighting. They argued that the invaders might eventually withdraw without a fight as was customary after a siege - as desert conditions were too harsh for sustaining any siege for long.

(The revelation commanded Muhammad) to urge the believers to fight without compelling anyone,⁶⁵ (and reminded the believers) that at Badr also they were weak and helpless,⁶⁶ and inspired them with God's promise of sending down three thousand angels,⁶⁷ and declared that if they stood firm and dutiful in the face of a sudden attack, God would assist them with five thousand angels, swooping down.⁶⁸ (As in the battle of Badr),⁴⁹ God had made this (promise) only to set their hearts at peace,⁶⁹ and thus to enable them to overthrow their enemies and repulse their attack.⁷⁰

On way to the battleground a faction of Muslims (led by Ibn Ubayy)⁷¹ withdrew saying, if they knew how to fight, they would have followed the Prophet.⁷² They also divulged matters of secrecy or alarm to others, instead of informing the matter to the Prophet and those with authority.⁷³

(On the day of the encounter), the Prophet left early in the morning to put his people at battle stations.⁷⁴ Initially, the Muslims made decisive gains, when some of the fighters weakened: they argued over the order and disobeyed after God showed them what they loved of this world (victory/booty).⁷⁵ They ran off, paying attention to no one and ignoring the Prophet calling them from behind. (The attackers struck back in full force and thus) God repaid them (the Muslims) with affliction upon affliction so that they would not sorrow over what slipped away from them.⁷⁶ Two of their factions almost lost hope.⁷⁷ (The revelation urged the defenders) not to despair or grieve⁷⁸ (and consoled them that) if they were wounded, their enemies had also sustained injuries, (and reminded them that) these were the days of changing fortune to which God subjects humankind to know which of them truly believe,⁷⁹ that He may purge those who believe and destroy the unbelievers.⁸⁰

Finally, the Prophet was struck unconscious and word spread that he was killed. The attackers took the rumour on face value and left the field in glory and pride. The survivors were traumatized, and lay wounded and lifeless in the field, struck with grief at the loss of some 62 of their men.

God sent down a sense of security – an inner peace over a group of them (who were firm in faith) while others who had been anxious about themselves, were assailed with the thoughts of pagan ignorance. They said, 'if we had any say in the matter our men would not have been killed.'⁸¹ Those, who had stayed back said of their brethren: 'Had they obeyed us, they would not have been killed.'⁸² (The revelation reminds them that) Muhammad was merely a messenger, other messengers had passed away before him, (and asks,) if he died or was killed would they turn on their heels? ⁸³

Soon after the initial confusion of the battle, the Prophet planned a chase of the Quraysh army on their way to Mecca. (The revelation promised) the wounded followers of the Prophet who responded to his call: those among them who did good and remained heedful (wattaqu), a splendid reward ⁸⁴ and exhorted them not to let up in

pursuit,⁸⁵ which however ended without any engagement, as they could not catch up with the Quraysh army.

3.5. The Hypocrites

The defeat at Uhud was very frustrating to the hypocrites (Ibn Ubayy and his followers). They used their faith as a cover to lead others away from Muhammad.⁸⁶ They were charming in looks, deceitful in speech and commanded profound self-confidence,⁸⁷ and turned away from the believers in arrogance.⁸⁸ They discouraged the people of Medina [Supporters] from spending anything for the Meccan Muslims [Emigrants] in order to force them out of Medina,⁸⁹ and looked forward to the expulsion of the humble ones (Muhammad and the Emigrants) after their return to Medina.⁹⁰

Some of them pretended obedience in public, but schemed against the Prophet by night,⁹¹ and befriended the disbelievers.⁹² The Prophet's followers were, however, in two minds about these hypocrites.⁹³ (The revelation commands them) not to argue on their behalf,⁹⁴ and asks the Prophet not to plead on their behalf.⁹⁵

It was due to mercy from God that the Prophet was mild to the dissenters (who harbored doubts against him during the Uhud battle and defied him).⁹⁶ (Later, the revelation reassures them that) no prophet could be false to his trust (by giving his own decision in God's name).⁹⁷

3.6. The Native Jews

There were three native Jewish tribes: the Qaynuqas, the Nadirs and the Qurayzahs. They lived in their respective settlements: the Qaynuqas in the heart of Medina, side by side with the Muslims and the pagans; the Nadirs, a few miles away; and the Qurayzahs in the outskirts of Medina. They had adopted Arab culture, spoke an Arabic dialect, and except for their Judaic faith, formed an integral part of the multi-tribal society of Medina, then an extended oasis, rather than a town in the modern sense.

While the Jews were a closed community and lacked unified leadership, the Muslims were a growing community (because of conversions) and were completely united under the supreme leadership of the Prophet. This was disturbing to the Jews, and they remained suspicious of the Prophet's ultimate motive. However, one day their suspicion turned into a great shock. During a prayer, the revelation commanded a change in the direction of prayer (from Jerusalem to the Ka'bah), ⁹⁸ signally a separate religious identity for the Muslims. Since the revelation had described the Ka'bah, as the first House of worship built by Abraham,⁹⁹ the new prayer direction (Qiblah) virtually appointed the Muslims as the true representatives or spiritual successors of the Prophet Abraham, the forebear of Moses, their Prophet, the first Patriarch of all Jewish people, and the archetype of pure monotheism. From their perspective, Muhammad had hijacked their spiritual heritage and laid the foundation of an independent Semitic faith that could claim greater genuineness and purity than their own. Not many months later, they got the news of Muhammad's victory at Badr. They were shattered.

Shocked and confused at the sudden change of qiblah towards a direction (Ka'ba) they identified with paganism at this stage,⁹⁸ the Muslims, by and large, failed to realize what went through the hearts and minds of their Jewish brethren. The revelation, however,

brings the truth across. The Muslims loved them, but they did not love the Muslims, and they wouldn't have done so even if the Muslims believed in the whole of their scripture. When they met the Muslims, they would pretend to believe but when they were alone, they bit their fingertips at them (the Muslims) in rage. Moreover, if any good befell the Muslims it grieved them; but if something bad happened to them, they rejoiced at it.**100** Thus they loved what distressed the Muslims, spoke maliciously against them, and what their breasts concealed was even worse.**101** However, malice alone could avail nothing. The Jews had to do something before it was too late.

The Qaynuqas reacted by refusing to accept the Prophet's arbitration in a local dispute, defying the treaty they had made with him upon his arrival.

(The revelation asked Muhammad) to break off relations with treacherous people, and inflict crushing defeat in war to those of their allies who repeatedly broke their treaty.**102** The Qaynuqas were made to surrender, and were allowed to leave Medina. The Nadirs watched the expulsion of the Qaynuqas with consternation and waited for their chance to act. Uhud gave them the opportunity: the Muslims had suffered heavy casualties and were demoralized. The hypocrites had turned against Muhammad. So, they broke their ties with him, and made an alliance with the Meccans; and to please them, declared that the idol worshippers were more rightly guided than the Muslims.**103** Meanwhile, an assassination plot leaked out, and the Prophet demanded their expulsion from the oasis for breaking their treaty, and finally on their refusal to comply, laid siege on their settlement. The Nadirs counted on the hypocrites for their pledged support, but they never turned up.**104** (Finally, as a prelude to an attack) Muhammad ordered his men to cut their palm trees down.**105** The Nadirs surrendered without a battle, and were allowed to depart in full dignity and complete safety with as much of their possessions as their camels could carry. However, the Muslims made material gains in terms of what was left by the people of the settlement (the Nadirs), without having to drive horses or camels for it. (The revelation reserved) it for God and His Messenger, relatives, orphans, the needy and the traveler, so that it didn't circulate among the rich in their midst.**106**

3.7. Battle of Confederates (The Trench war) (627)

With time, it became clear to both the Quraysh and the Jews that either they had to destroy Muhammad and his followers, or the reverse might happen. So they had no option but to go for an all-out war.

They [the Quraysh] formed a military confederation with the powerful Jewish tribe of Khaybar (a settlement some 85 miles from Medina) and the nomadic tribes opposed to the Prophet. Their armies approached Medina in a coordinated manner, while the powerful Qurayzah (Jews) of Medina stood by to strike or let the invaders attack the Muslims from the rear. It was almost check and mate in a war game. Muhammad consulted the matter with the community and upon the suggestion of a Persian convert, Sulman Farassi, got a deep trench dug around the town to keep the invaders at bay as he was in no position to face them. The attackers were soon to arrive.

They came on them, waves upon waves. (As the Muslims watched them from distance,) their eyes dimmed and their hearts rose up to their throats and they imagined (weird) thoughts about God.**107** This was a moment of trial for the believers as they were shaken by a most violent shock.**108** (On the other hand) the hypocrites and those with sickness in their hearts said what God and the Prophet of God had promised was mere illusion.**109** A party of them said to others to go back as it was no (safe) place for them, and a party of them sought the Prophet's permission saying that their homes were exposed, though they were not exposed and they only wanted to flee.**110** But had the enemy entered (the city) from the sides and asked them to dissent and join a civil war, they would have readily done so,**111** despite their oaths of allegiance.**112**

The siege lasted for a month, and it was only the Qur'anic exhortations and the Prophet's exemplary leadership that kept the Muslims from surrendering.**113** But finally God repulsed the pagans in their rage by a severe storm**114** and forces invisible.**115** By this time the attackers had run short of provisions, and more importantly, their tents and riggings were blown away by the storm. So they departed in a hurry, and the Muslims were spared a crushing defeat and virtual annihilation. God then brought down from their fortifications those People of the Book (the Qurayzah) who had backed the attackers and cast terror into their hearts: some of them were slain, some were taken captive**116** and their lands and houses and goods were seized.**117**

3.8. Hudaybiyah Peace Treaty (628)

In the sixth year of Hijra, the Prophet had a dream in which he saw himself and his followers entering the Sacred Mosque (the Ka'bah) in complete security, heads shaved (or hair cut short) and without fear, **118**and he declared his intention to perform the pilgrimage. The nomadic Arabs who were weak in faith preferred to stay back,**119** as they thought the Prophet and the believers would never be able to return to their families.**120**

The Prophet set off for pilgrimage with some one thousand of his followers, all in pilgrim garb, not geared for any combat. The Quraysh sent a cavalry squadron under the command of Khalid Ibn al-Walid, a veteran of the battle of Uhud and Trench, to intercept the caravan. The pilgrims made a detour and camped at Hudaybiyah, some nine miles from Mecca; and a powerful Quraysh army camped nearby threatening them with total destruction, as they had not come with any preparations for war. The pilgrims waited in gnawing uncertainty - tormented, agonized and utterly confused about the dire predicament their faith had brought them to, when God sent divine peace (Sakinah) down into their hearts to add faith to their faith.**121** Inter-tribal rivalry and politics helped the pilgrims, and one of the nomadic tribes (The Khuza'a) brought in provisions for the pilgrims and tried to mediate with the Quraysh on their behalf. Since uncertainty loomed large despite some exchange of envoys, the Prophet sought an oath of allegiance from his increasingly anxious followers. God was pleased with them (Muhammad's followers) when they swore allegiance to him under the tree for He knew what was in their hearts, and He sent divine peace (sakinah) down on them and rewarded them with a way out,**122** and soon a peace treaty was signed.

The Meccans dictated the terms of the treaty in a high-handed manner. It undermined the position of Muhammad as the Prophet of God, and was offensive and humiliating to

the Muslims and seemingly to the sole advantage of the Quraysh.¹²³ The Prophet's companions were quite perplexed, though they remained unwavering in their faith, and in their allegiance to the Prophet. However, soon the Qur'an declares:

Indeed, We have (now) given you (O Muhammad!) a clear opening.¹²⁴ God has promised you an abundance of gains that you will take, and He has expedited this for you, and it was God who held back the hands of your enemies from you as a sign for the believers.¹²⁵ Even if the pagans fight you, they will turn their backs and will not be able to find any protector or any helper.¹²⁶ This reassures the believers and their confusion was over.

As the revelation had declared, the Hudaibiyah treaty allowed for increased interaction between the Muslims and the nomadic tribes who were now free to form alliance with the Quraysh or the Prophet as they chose. This promoted conversion, and within one year of signing of the treaty, the Muslims had grown sufficiently in number to contain their perennial foes, the Meccans. Besides, the clauses of the treaty that were apparently unfavourable to the Muslims, worked in their favour and promoted conversion instead of restricting it.¹²⁷

3.9. Peace treaty with the Jews of Khaybar (629)

The Hudaibiyah treaty was no great reassurance to the Prophet. He knew well that the Jews and the members of the confederates hostile to him could reunite and wage yet another invasion. Meanwhile the revelation continued to warn the Prophet that the Jews came to him in disbelief and left in disbelief,¹²⁸ listened to lies and distorted his words from their context by listening to others.¹²⁹

The Jews had signed the treaty, mainly as a ploy to conspire against the Prophet. Accordingly, soon after signing the treaty they began organizing a large number of Arab tribes, hostile to the Prophet, to launch a surprise attack against Medina. As the Prophet got clear evidence of correspondence going back and forth between the Jews of Khyber and the Arab tribes, he decided to launch a campaign against Khaybar. The revelation had barred him from taking with him those Arab volunteers who had stayed back during the pilgrimage;¹³⁰ he therefore set off for Khaybar with a small group (reportedly some 600) of only those devout followers who had accompanied him in the pilgrimage. The Jews of Khaybar had a strong and well-trained army, their fortified settlements were considered impregnable, and it was their last opportunity to destroy Muhammad. Thus, in military terms, Muhammad was courting disaster. However, after a series of encounters and sieges, the Jews surrendered. The Prophet concluded a peace treaty with them granting full liberties and military protection against a levy that was no different from what they paid to their old Bedouin protectors.

3.10. Mecca Reconciled (630)

In the year 629, his ninth year in Medina, the Prophet performed the pilgrimage (though not in the hajj season) in accordance with the terms of the Hudaibiyah treaty. Soon after this pilgrimage, the two great Quraysh stalwarts, Khalid Ibn al-Walid, and 'Amr Ibn al-'As, who had fought against him at Badr and Uhud, entered the faith.

Muhammad now envisioned integrating his own people – the Quraysh, whom he loved,¹³¹ but could not bring to his faith.¹³² He was treaty bound not to interfere with

the Meccans, and waited for an opportunity to realize his vision. This came about when the Quraysh took up arms against one of the Meccan tribes who had treaty alliance with him for defending them when attacked. The Prophet set off for Mecca with all his men, all armed for battle if needed.

(As the Muslims began to enter the city), the most fanatic among the Quraysh tried to resist when God sent divine peace (Sakinah) upon His Messenger and on the believers, and imposed on them the Word of restraint (Taqwa), as they were entitled to it and worthy of it.**133**

God withheld the hands of the Meccans from the Muslims and the hands of the Muslims from the Meccans.**134** Had it not been so, the Muslims would have trampled on those believing men and believing women (among the Meccans) they were not aware of (as those Meccans had secretly become Muslims), and thus guilt and stigma would have befallen them unawares. Had the (Meccan) Muslims been separated out, God would surely have punished the disbelievers among them (the Meccans).**135**.

In the ensuing days, the Meccans came in groups to the Prophet to embrace the new faith,**136** and the revelation reminded the Prophet to glorify God and seek forgiveness (and thus to remain humble).**137**

3.11. The battle of Hunayn (630)

Shocked at the massive conversion of the Quraysh, the Hawazins, a powerful tribe proud of Arab paganism, sent a strong army (630) to retake the Ka'ba: it ambushed the advancing Muslim army at the valley of Hunayn.

The numerical superiority of the Muslims that delighted them came to no benefit, and the earth, spacious though it was, narrowed on them and they were forced to retreat.**138** God sent divine peace (Sakinah) upon the Prophet and on his followers and forces invisible and thus helped them to defeat the pagans.**139** With this victory and continued entry of diverse nomadic tribes into Islam, the Muslims emerged as the most powerful community (Ummah) within the outreaching borders of Arabia. But the Prophet had a formidable task ahead of him.

In the aftermath of the pilgrimage (628), or probably, the Khaybar expedition (629), the Qur'an had predicted a potential military encounter against a people of great might.**140** This had yet to be realized.

3.12. Tabuk Expedition (631)

At this moment in history, the neighbouring Byzantine Empire posed a serious threat. They had decisively defeated their mighty adversary, the Persians in successive major battles in the preceding years,**63** and now threatened the very survival of the Muslims under the Prophet, or after his demise. The Prophet knew that he must lead an expedition up north to the frontiers of Byzantium to realize the Qur'anic prophesy, and he asked his followers to make preparations for it. If there were immediate gains and a convenient trip, they would have followed the Prophet, but the destination was too far for them (about 350 miles).**141** Accordingly, the hypocrites ridiculed the Prophet in their hearts,**142** privately joked about him,**143** and tried to stir up discord and upset matters for him.**144** Many of the Prophet's followers preferred to stay back,**145** and some of them requested him not to put them to such a hard test.**146**

Some Bedouin Arabs came to the Prophet (who was based in Medina) with excuses seeking exemption while others, who belied God and the Prophet, remained at home.**147** The hearts of some of the believers nearly swerved, while three persons among the devout believers stayed back,**148** and some of the hypocrites aimed at something that was beyond their reach.**149**

Eventually the Prophet's company set off on this dangerous mission, and halted at Tabuk, about 250 miles from Medina.

Muhammad stayed there for ten days, made pacts with local rulers and important Jewish settlements and returned. This expedition demonstrated the Prophet's faith and conviction in his mission for there could be no military or political justification of this highly risky venture.

The Muslims had never fought against an imperial army and had no supply lines to sustain an attack and were thus poised to a crushing defeat, and in case of a rout, total annihilation. The Byzantines on the other hand had just re-established their military supremacy in the region, having defeated their powerful enemy, the Persians in many successive battles in the preceding years.**63** The fact that they did not challenge the 'nomad Arabs' as they must have thought of them, stationed at a day's march for their cavalry, speaks of the awe the Prophet must have evoked in the heart of the mightiest empire of the era.

3.13. Year of deputations (631)

The Prophet's safe return from his long and perilous journey to Tabuk, in sequel to his uninterrupted successes in the preceding years veritably crowned him as the king of the whole of Arabia.

Meanwhile the truth of the Qur'anic revelation was becoming increasingly clear as its seemingly unrelated passages were falling in place (Ch. 1.3). This created a great excitement all over the country and delegates came to Medina from faraway places to see the Prophet, to listen to the Qur'an, and to swear allegiance to the new faith. However, since there was no compulsion in religion, many nomadic tribes preferred idol worship, and remained hostile to Muhammad.

The Pilgrimages (631, 632)

As the Muslims were now settled in Mecca, the revelation adopted the yearly pilgrimage (hajj) as part of Islamic rite. They took part in their first pilgrimage - the great hajj as the Qur'an calls,**150** with great enthusiasm, jubilation and religious fervor. The Prophet, however, could not attend it and sent Abu Bakr to represent him.

As the Prophet's mission was nearing its end, urgent measures were needed to establish Islam as an historical reality, lest its powerful enemies could destroy it soon after the Prophet's death. (Therefore, the Qur'an) gives an ultimatum of four months**151** to all the hostile pagans who were breaking their treaty obligations.**152** As to those with whom the Muslims had a treaty, they were given time until the treaty term expired,**153** while those who sought peace were granted security and safe passage to a place of security (i.e. their tribal homelands).**154** (The revelation further declared) that the pagans were spiritually unclean and were not permitted to approach the Sacred

mosque after that year, and (since this meant loss of trade and gifts from the pilgrims), the Muslims were assured that God would enrich them from His bounty, if He wills.**155**

In the tenth year of hijra, the Prophet went to Mecca to perform the hajj. Meanwhile the Qur'an had declared its own completion (5:3/Ch. 1.2), and the Prophet died soon after his return from Mecca. This Hajj is remembered as the Farewell pilgrimage.

3.14. The Qur'an constantly guides and assures the Prophet

Throughout the Meccan period, Muhammad not only bore the wrath of the Quraysh but also lived under an immense burden of uncertainty lest the mystery of revelation might cease to recur. Therefore, the Qur'an devotes two early passages (including the 98th Sura) to console and reassure him:

“By the morning bright (93:1), and the night when it is still (2), your Lord (O Muhammad) has not abandoned you, nor is He displeased (3). And what comes later will be better for you than what came before (4), and soon your Lord will grant you, and you will be pleased” (93:5).

“Didn't We expand your chest for you (94:1), and removed your burden from you (2) which weighed heavily on your back (3), and raised your reputation for you (4)? (Remember,) relief comes with distress (5). Indeed relief comes with distress (6). So when you are free, remain steady (7) and turn towards your lord with longing” (94:8).

(The Qur'an attests that) Muhammad was indeed God's messenger on a straight path**156** - a witness, a herald and a warner, **157** inviting others to God by divine leave - an illuminating lamp.**158** (It declares that) the Prophet had neither strayed, nor was he misguided and did not say (anything) of his own whim, but was inspired with a revelation, taught by the mighty one (the Angel of revelation).**159** (It affirms that the Prophet) did not know the unseen, nor was he an angel, but he simply followed the revelation,**160** and it was not up to him to change the wordings of the revelation in any way.**161** It proclaims that God sent the Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, to distinguish it from all religions, however the pagans detested this.**162**

The Qur'an consoles the Prophet in his grief, **163** and anguish,**164** and (asks him) not to stretch his eyes to what God bestowed on others,**165** nor to feel depressed by their plots,**166** nor to be unsettled by them.**167** (It exhorts him) not to let his enemies obstruct him from the messages of God after it had been revealed to him,**168** and to endure patiently what they say. (It asks him) to avoid them in a graceful avoidance,**169** to ignore their insults and to trust in God,**170** and to seek refuge in Him,**171** and assures him that God was enough for him against those who ridiculed him.**172** (It declares that Muhammad) was not a poet,**173** nor possessed by a Jinn,**174** neither was he a fortuneteller,**175** nor insane;**176** but he was endowed with rank and power before the Lord of the Throne,**177** and was destined for an unending reward**178** and that soon he would see and his enemies would see,**179** which of them was demented.**180**

(The Qur'an asks its immediate audience) why they shouldn't probe the revelation (lit., speech) lest what came to them hadn't come to their ancient ancestors, and why have they not recognized the messenger of God and thus disavowed him?¹⁸¹ When one sign (revelation) replaced another and the Quraysh charged Muhammad with forgery, the Qur'an declares that only God knows (the scheme of the) revelation.¹⁸² (It exhorts the Prophet) to give the call, to be upright as he was commanded, not to follow their (his enemies') whims, to believe in any scripture God revealed and to treat them all justly.¹⁸³ (It, however, cautions him) that those who inherited the earlier revelations are themselves in doubt about the integrity of their scriptures and disturbed about it,¹⁸⁴ and declares that the Gospel and the Torah foretold the coming of the Prophet and his broader role.¹⁸⁵ Last, but not least, the Qur'an refutes any notion of an outsider coaching the Prophet on the ground that the Qur'an was in pure and clear Arabic whereas the tongue of the one they alleged was foreign.¹⁸⁶

3.15. The Prophet's status in the community

The Qur'an accords the Prophet the highest status in the community and declares that the Prophet had a greater claim on the believers than they had on each other, and his wives were their mothers.¹⁸⁷ It prescribes etiquette for addressing him, conversing with him, entering his private quarters and observing normal courtesies, and forbids marriage with his wives after his death (33:53, 49:2-5).

"You who believe, don't enter the Prophet's (private) quarters unless you are given permission (to come) for a meal, (but) do not be (so early) as to wait around for its preparation. But when you are invited, then go in, and when you have taken (your) meal, then disperse, without (seeking) social conversation (Hadith) that annoys (yu'dhi) the Prophet, and he feels embarrassed to ask you (to leave); but God is not shy to ask you what is right. And when you ask (his wives) for anything (you need), ask them from behind a screen. That will be purer for your hearts as well as their hearts. It is not proper for you to annoy God's messenger, nor to marry his wives after him: that would be serious with God" (33:53).

"You who believe, do not raise your voices over the Prophet's voice, and do not be loud (while speaking to) him the way you (speak) loudly to each other, lest your actions miscarry without your noticing it (49:2). Those who lower their voices in the presence of God's messenger are those whose hearts God has tested for piety (Taqwa); there is forgiveness for them and a great reward (3). Most of those who call out to you from outside (your) quarters do not use their reason (4). It would be better for them if they waited patiently until you came out to them, yet God is Most Forgiving and Merciful" (49:5).

This is a clear proof of the community's love for the Prophet – they wanted to be around him all the time, and as the community of believers grew, the rush on the Prophet was enormous. This over-taxed the Prophet. God not only wished to protect the privacy of the Prophet but also to teach the community important social norms.

3.16. The noble persona of the Prophet

Muslim as well as non-Muslim scholars tend to devote their scholarship to the institutional history of the Prophet, but as for the persona of the Prophet, they segment it, idealize it or merely glance through it, and shelve it - as something abstract pertaining to the private and personal aspect of the Prophet's life. However, it is imperative for Muslims to probe the persona of the Prophet as part of their fundamental religious obligation, as discussed later (Ch. 15).

One problem that is often faced in constructing the personality of the Prophet prior to the revelation from the illustrations of the Qur'an is its near silence on the matter as mentioned earlier. However, if we carefully study Qur'anic records, we can gain some clear insights into his personality.

First, we notice that the Quraysh brought numerous charges against the Prophet, such as those of fabricating the revelation, telling stories of the past, forging lies against God, and so on, but these were all centred around the revelation; they never ever questioned the integrity of his character. This clearly demonstrates that Muhammad must have been a person of impeccable moral character, who never gave himself to any form of vices – social, moral, political or ethical, indicating that he was a quiet and unobtrusive person, who never meddled in anyone's affairs. Early reports also tell us that he was known as al-Amin (The faithful, the trustworthy) throughout Mecca before the revelation.

(The Qur'an declares that) unless God willed, the Prophet would not have recited the revelation to his audience, nor God would have taught it to them, (and it asks his audience to reflect on this) as the Prophet had lived with them for a lifetime before the revelation.¹⁸⁸ This demonstrates that the Prophet had not displayed any literary or poetic genius, or any philosophical, psychological or theological insight prior to the revelation. This in turn indicates that the Prophet neither had any aptitude, nor grooming, nor ambition to found a faith or lead a faith community, let alone becoming the virtual ruler of the whole of Arabia towards the end of his life. His greatest gifts, apart from the power of revelation, were his noble personal qualities.

The Prophet was mild to his men even after their lapses in Uhud expedition.⁹⁶ He readily excused others from taking part in Tabuk expedition.¹⁸⁹ He offered food to uninvited guests, and cordially entertained them, even if they caused him annoyance, by staying on after the meal for socializing (33:53/3.15 above). The Prophet also displayed the most pristine form of generosity by praying for the forgiveness of his enemies.¹⁹⁰ Accordingly, the Qur'an describes him as a noble messenger,¹⁹¹ endowed with a sublime character,¹⁹² faithful to his trust,¹⁹³ and (a manifestation of God's) mercy to believers,¹⁹⁴ and to all humanity.¹⁹⁵

Furthermore, the fact that the Prophet's immediate company included the most eminent and learned men of the era - who were later to become caliphs, governors and generals - and that they all accepted his leadership as most humble and obedient followers clearly shows that there must have been something very extraordinary about the personality of the Prophet. According to early reports, the very presence of the Prophet had a compelling appeal, and his personality radiated some beautiful characteristics and aura (kiramat) that only those who were present in his company could perceive. As a result of these extraordinary virtues and characteristics, the Prophet developed a very special

relationship with his companions that impressed all the contemporaneous observers and has perplexed his opponents ever since. This goes to explain why his companions would defy and sacrifice everything for the sake of the Prophet.

However, on a personal level, the Prophet was a mortal like others.¹⁹⁶ He had no power to avert harm from himself, or to benefit himself, or to harm or guide others.¹⁹⁷ Like most of fellow Meccans, he was unlettered,¹⁹⁸ and could not read a book - for had it been so, the prattlers would have been skeptical.¹⁹⁹ He was a messenger of God and his only mission was to convey (God's message)²⁰⁰ with clarity;²⁰¹ that he may deliver humanity out of darkness into Light.²⁰²

The revelation also prepared the Prophet for his Prophetic mission. It commanded him to pray through the late hours of night,²⁰³ and recite the Qur'an distinctively and attentively.²⁰⁴ It taught him practical compassion by commanding him to return evil with good,²⁰⁵ to sacrifice for others,²⁰⁶ and, by reproving him for frowning and turning away from a blind man, as he had intervened his conversation with some rich citizens (Quraysh leaders).²⁰⁷ (Last but not least, the revelation gave him) an unshakeable stability that prevented him from the prompting of his enemies to making some compromises.²⁰⁸

To sum up, let this write up shed light on the noble persona of the Prophet and reassure the readers in general that no matter what the propagandist literature contrives, Muhammad was indeed a noble man, even if he is not given the credit of being God's messenger. As for the Muslims exposed to any unsympathetic account of the Prophet – they should take it in the spirit of the following Qur'anic pronouncements.

“Thus we made for every messenger an enemy - Satans from among men and jinn, some of them inspiring others with seductive talk (in order to) deceive (them), and had your Lord pleased, they would not have done it. Therefore, leave them and what they forge” (6:112)

“Thus we made for every messenger an enemy among the criminals - but enough is your Lord (O Muhammad,) as a Guide and Helper” (25:31)

Since propagandist literature abounds and pervades the globe, we have enclosed a brief review (Enc.4) on the historical background to the polemics that is being unremittingly kept alive to belittle and malign the Prophet of Islam. Since the Prophet took many wives after the death of Khadija (620) – his first wife, and there have been many speculations about his marriages, we have reviewed this in a separate write up (Enc. 2) to clarify the matter for all.

3.17. Extraordinary features of the Prophetic mission

Modern scholars explain the major events of the Prophetic mission in purely material terms based on their interpretations of the Prophet's motives and their construction of history. Maxime Rodinson attributes the Prophet's successes to his possessing “a patient and tireless cunning in the manipulation of men through the knowledge of their interests

and their passions.”**209** Ironically, they all fail to realize that the Prophet could’nt possibly plan or foresee many of the extraordinary events of his mission, which were, so to say, set up in such a way that defies material explanation. The major events of his life as reviewed in this discourse are recapitulated below chronologically for the readers to reflect if Muhammad could, by any stretch of imagination, set them up.

610 Despite Muhammad’s humble background, he readily attracted to his faith such eminent men as Abu Bakr and Uthman who were later to be elected (632 and 634 respectively) as the Caliphs of Islam.

616 The voluntary conversion of Umar, the most gifted of the Quraysh youth and fiercest of Muhammad’s enemies, who later became the most outstanding Caliph of Islam and extended its realm across to the neighbouring countries (Iraq, Persia, Syria and Egypt).

620 The Prophet claims to have a vision, that under the prevailing circumstances, was poised to increase the suspicion of the Meccans and to shake the confidence of his followers.**26**

620-621 The spontaneous spread of Islam in Medina through the ‘Aqaba visitors.

622 The Medinite delegates offer at ‘Aqaba to provide shelter, sustenance and protection to the Prophet and the Emigrants, though they knew full well that the largely urban Emigrants would have no means of livelihood in the agricultural economy of Medina.

622 Muhammad’s success in secretly leaving Mecca eluding the Quraysh.

622 The Qur’an predicts an eventual homecoming of the Prophet.**29**

623 Muhammad’s success in establishing himself as virtually the civil and political head of Medina soon after his arrival from Mecca.**30**

624 An abrupt change in Qiblah (direction of prayer) from Jerusalem to Ka’ba that shocked the Prophet’s followers (as at that moment they identified Ka’ba with Arab paganism),**98** and bewildered the Jews (as this virtually amounted to the hijacking of their Abrahamic heritage.)

624 The Medinite Muslims’ unexpected victory at Badr against an overwhelmingly powerful army, which realized Qur’anic twin prophecies made many years previously about the victory of the Muslims and the Byzantines.**62**

625 The Medinite Muslims’ willingness to fight against the enormously superior Quraysh army at Uhud at great personal risk, though, like one of their factions (Ibn Ubayy and his followers), they could hold back as they were not treaty bound to protect Muhammad outside of Medina.**71**

625 The readiness of the mostly wounded Medinite Muslims’ from the Uhud battle to accompany the Prophet, himself wounded, to pursue the victorious Quraysh army on their way back to Mecca.**85**

625 The Medinite Muslims’ unwavering commitment to the Prophet in the aftermath of Uhud battle that was veritably imposed on them by the Prophet and had left some 62 of them dead and practically the rest of the combatants, wounded.**84**

627 The failure of the combined forces of the Quraysh and their allies to overpower Muhammad in his besieged position in the Battle of Confederates.**114,115**

627 Muhammad sets off for Mecca with his followers in pilgrim garb, unarmed for combat, to perform the pilgrimage at the Ka'ba, risking annihilation at the hands of the Quraysh.

627 Despite seemingly humiliating and compromising terms of the Hudaibiyyah treaty, the Qur'an describes it as a 'clear opening' (victory),¹²⁴ and so it turns out as history unfolds.

628 The conversion to Islam of the two most brilliant military commanders of the Quraysh, Khalid and 'Amr, who had previously fought against Muhammad.

629 The assimilation of Mecca without the striking of a blow, that realized the Qur'anic prophesy of his eventual return to his destination.²⁹

627 The Qur'anic prophesy on Tabuk expedition that was realized in 630.¹⁴¹

If we take the odds at a minimum of one in thousand against the above listed 19 extraordinary events to happen in the career of a person, the collective odds against the Prophetic mission (encompassing all these extraordinary events) stand at 1000¹⁹ or 10⁵⁷. While this may sound empirical, theoretical or even outlandish, we must at least consider the concluding remarks of Maxime Rodinson, a great scholar and historian of our era, openly skeptical of the revelation:²¹⁰

"It is not belittling Muhammad to see him as a political figure – but to see him as no more than that would be a mutilation. And anyone who thus mutilates Muhammad is in fact mutilating himself in the domain of knowledge."

Notes

1. Maxime Rodinson, Muhammad, English translation, 2nd edition, London 1996, p.x [Foreword].
2. Two of the Qur'an's early Suras (105, 106), refer to the Quraysh as a tribe that sent trading caravans in winter (to the Yemen) and summer (to Syria), and allude to God's decimating, for their security, troops with war elephants, with 'flocks of birds' pelting rock-hard clay (sijjil) upon them. The event is reported in the annals follows:

Around 570, Abrahah, the Christian viceroy of Yemen led a powerful army against Mecca to destroy the Ka'ba, which, as the center of idol worship, attracted pilgrims from all over Arabia promoting trade and commerce in Mecca to the detriment of his country's interest. He had war elephants leading his army to overwhelm the Quraysh who were not expected to have ever seen this creature. His army was however decimated as 'decreed by God,' such as by some natural calamity - probably outbreak of a deadly epidemic, caused by an airborne virus, allegorically referred to as birds pelting 'rock-hard clay' (sijjil). The wordsijjil, is among the evocative words of the Qur'an as mentioned earlier (Note 6/Preface).
3. 21:36, 25:41, 83:29-31.
4. 30:58, 44:14, 68:51. [The word mubtilun in 30:58 is rendered as 'imposter', and majnun in the other verses as 'madman']
5. 37:36.

6. 18:56, 26:6, 37:14, 45:9.
7. 38:5, 50:2.
8. 6:25, 23:83, 27:68, 46:17, 68:15, 83:13.
9. 6:37, 11:12, 13:7, 17:90-93, 21:5, 25:7/8, 29:50.
10. 43:31.
11. 25:5, 44:14.
12. 34:43, 38:4.
13. 11:13, 32:3, 38:7, 46:8.
14. 21:3, 43:30, 74:24.
15. 10:2, 37:15, 46:7.
16. 17:47, 23:70, 34:8.
17. 52:30.

18. 8:26, 85:10. The Qur'anic summary statements compress a history of persecution lasting over a decade, and therefore some illustration is needed to give the reader an idea of the plight of the early converts in Mecca.

Barring a small group of believers, the whole Meccan society had turned against the Prophet. The most bitter of his enemies was Abu al-Hakam, whom the Muslims renamed Abu Jahal (Father of ignorance). A leading member of the Quraysh, he headed the opposition against Muhammad, actively persecuted the converts belonging to the lower strata of the society, and persuaded his powerful allies to torture and brutalize their weaker converts. Thus, Umayyah, one of the clan chiefs would leave his Abyssinian slave Bilal in the desert in blazing sun with a heavy stone tied to his chest; his groaning echoed across the plain and could be heard in the neighboring districts. Abu Bakr however relieved him of suffering by buying his freedom from his master. Others were less fortunate. Yassir and Sumaiya could not endure the sufferings and died.

19. 19:16-21. The passage reads as follows: "(Thus is) Mary mentioned in the Book: When she withdrew from her family to a place in the East (19:16), and secluded herself from them, We sent her Our Spirit, and he appeared to her as a man in perfection (17). She said: 'I seek refuge in the Benevolent against you, if you do heed (God).'- 20. 17:73.
- 21. 6:33.
- 22. 6:34, 6:115, 18:27.
- 23. Sura 111. The opening verse of this Sura (111:1) spells disaster for Abi Lahab, an expression that literally means 'one who flares up'. However, according to

traditions, one of the Prophet's uncles, 'Abd al-'Uzza was nicknamed Abu Lahab (lit., 'One of glowing countenance', because of his appearance). Tradition also tells us that Abu Lahab's wife bitterly hated the Prophet, so much so that she threw filth on him and put thorns on his path. The Sura concludes with damnation of his wife (111:4/5) thus indicating that Abi Lahab (111:1) is no other than Abu Lahab.

24. 17:1.

25. al-mi'raj: According to a popular version, the Prophet traveled on the back of a winged creature, Buraq, which bore him to the site of the ruined temple of Solomon (now the Dome of Rocks). There the Prophet led the greatest of the prophets in a congregation prayer, and then, mounted on his steed (Buraq), he ascended to the seventh heaven, passing each heaven one after another, meeting one or the other Prophet in each of them, and finally having an encounter with the Presence of God – all in a space of a few hours - Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, English translation by Ismail Ragi, 8th edition, Karachi 1989, p. 140.

26. 17:60.

27. 8:30.

28. 9:40.

29. 28:85.

30. Maxime Rodinson explains the most unexpected and inexplicable transformation of the Prophet's status in Medina – within a space of a few months - from the spiritual head of a minority Muslim community to virtually the civil and political head of all its diverse communities, including some prosperous Jewish and prominent pagan tribes, in these unsubstantiated words: "It was to take all the wits and adroitness of Muhammad and his counsellors, further aided by circumstances and social forces, to turn this [the Prophet's] moral authority into an effective practical power." Muhammad, English translation, 2nd edition, London 1996, p.155.

31. 4:142/143.

32. 2:8, 2:14.

33. 63:1.

34. 47:32.

35. 2:11/12.

36. Martin Lings (Abu Bakar Siraj al-Din), *Muhammad*, U.K. 1983, p. 136/137.

37. 2:217.

38. 22:39/40.

39. 8:39.

40. 2:216, 2:190-194.

41. 8:47.

42. 8:5. The Qur'anic record: some were averse to this expedition (of Badr), repudiates the traditional account that the Prophet planned to raid a Quraysh trading caravan returning home (Medina) with rich merchandize. Had this been the case, the Prophet's followers would have been enthusiastic about the mission, rather than averse to it.
43. 8:7. This verse attests that the Prophet's followers did not know where they were heading for.
44. 8:42.
45. 8:43.
46. 8:6.
47. 8:49.
48. 8:9.
49. 8:10.
50. 8:11.
51. 8:12.
52. 8:44.
53. 8:65/66.
54. 8:45.
55. 8:46.
56. 8:15/16.
57. 8:48.
58. 8:67.
59. 8:70.
60. 8:19.
61. 8:17/18.
62. 8:41. This is the only verse in the Qur'an that deals with the distribution of the 'gains' made in the war. There is one other verse 8:1, which specifically mentions about the spoils (of war) (anfal). However one of the most renowned and learned scholars of the era, Christopher Hitchens, connects the title of the 8th Sura (al-Anfal) with 'Koranic justification' 'for the despoilment and destruction of non-believers' – a remark that blatantly distorts the historical context of these two verses, and contradicts the message of the Qur'an on peaceful interfaith relations: god is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything, Toronto 2007. p. 26.
63. Between 613 and 616, which fell in the Meccan period (610-622) the Persians defeated the Byzantines in a number of major battles, successively, and almost destroyed their Empire. This greatly disappointed the Prophet's followers, who sympathized with the Byzantines, as they were Christians and believed in One God, while the Persians worshipped fire. At that moment, the Qur'an declared:

"The Romans have been defeated (30:2), in the nearby land, and after their defeat they will be victorious (30:3) within a few years: God's is the command in the past and in the future - and on that day the believers will rejoice" (30:4).

True to this prediction, by 625/626, following a series of decisive victories, Emperor Heraclius drove the Persian army out of the furthest regions of his Empire, and the Muslims defeated the powerful Quraysh at Badr.

64. 8:60/61.

65. 4:84.

66. 3:123.

67. 3:124.

68. 3:125.

69. 3:126.

70. 3:127.

71. 'Abdullah Ibn Ubayy was a prominent Medinite leader who would have been the head of all Medina had the Prophet not arrived: he embraced Islam for expediency, and waited to see how the movement grew.

72. 3:167.

73. 4:83.

74. 3:121.

75. 3:152.

76. 3:153.

77. 3:122.

78. 3:139.

79. 3:140.

80. 3:141.

81. 3:154.

82. 3:168.

83. 3:144.

84. 3:172.

85. 4:104.

86. 63:2.

87. 63:4.

88. 63:5.

89. 63:7.

90. 63:8.

91. 4:81.

92. 4:139.

93. 4:88.

94. 4:107.
95. 4:105.
96. 3:159.
97. 3:161.
98. 2:143: As this verse records, the change in qiblah was a great (shock) for the Muslims except those God had guided. The revelation had already endorsed the spiritual significance of Jerusalem in the Prophet's vision (24 above) and the change in qiblah virtually meant turning away from the focal point of their faith, and facing towards a pantheon of idols that the Ka'ba represented at that stage.
99. 3:96, 2:127.
100. 3:119/120.
101. 3:118.
102. 8:56-58.
103. 4:51.
104. 59:11/12.
105. 59:5.
106. 59:6/7.
107. 33:10.
108. 33:11.
109. 33:12.
110. 33:13.
111. 33:14.
112. 33:15.
113. 33:16-21.
114. 33:25.
115. 33:9.
116. 33:26. The classical biography of the Prophet suggests that some 800-900 Jews were slain for their betrayal. As argued in Enc. 1, this figure, in all probability, is highly inflated.
117. 33:27.
118. 48:27.
119. 48:11.
120. 48:12.
121. 48:4.
122. 48:18.
123. First, Muhammad was not mentioned in the document as God's Prophet. Second, the pilgrims were required to return to Medina without performing the pilgrimage and were permitted to visit after one year from the treaty date. Finally,

it called for the sending back of all new Meccan converts (as from the date of the treaty) joining the Prophet's camp without the permission of their guardians, but did not impose a reciprocal condition on the Quraysh, who were thus not obliged to send back any apostate deserting the Prophet and returning to Mecca.

- 124. 48:1. The word fatah in this verse rendered as 'opening' also connotes 'victory.'
- 125. 48:20.
- 126. 48:22.
- 127. True to the terms of the treaty the Prophet refused to accept the converts who fled Mecca in the aftermath of the treaty. So the new Meccan converts formed a parallel community of Muslims outside of Medina. Subsequently, some of the new Meccan converts stayed back in their native city secretly preaching Islam. The Meccans did not like this and in less than a year of signing the treaty, they unilaterally requested the Prophet to annul this clause, thus lifting a big hurdle from the path of Islam.
- 128. 5:61.
- 129. 5:41.
- 130. 48:11, 48:15.
- 131. 42:23.
- 132. 28:56.
- 133. 48:26.
- 134. 48:24.
- 135. 48:25.
- 136. 110:2.
- 137. 110:3.
- 138. 9:25.
- 139. 9:26.
- 140. 48:16.
- 141. 9:42.
- 142. 9:64.
- 143. 9:65.
- 144. 9:48.
- 145. 9:38/46/93.
- 146. 9:49.
- 147. 9:90.
- 148. 9:117/118. Some commentators connect the numerical reference (three) with three groups of believers, rather than three individuals - Muhammad Asad, Message of the Qur'an, Gibraltar 1980, Chap. 9, Note 155.
- 149. 9:74. Classical commentators regard the expression, something beyond their reach, as an allusion to an attempt by a group of hypocrites to kill the Prophet on

way to Tabuk. The imperial Byzantines army was massive in strength, well organized, well equipped and regularly drilled, had strong cavalry divisions and extensive combat experience, and did not risk any supply shortage as it stood on home ground. The Prophet's army on the other hand consisted of an assemblage of warriors drawn from diverse Arab tribes on a relatively short notice, and was no match to the Byzantine army. Any military strategist of the era would have instantly predicted an utter defeat and annihilation for the Prophet's army, attacking the mighty Byzantines - some 300 miles away from their own base (Medina). So the hypocrites must have questioned the Prophet's sanity, and planned to finish him off.

150. 9:3.

151. 9:1-3/5.

152. 9:8/10/12.

153. 9:4.

154. 9:6.

155. 9:28. The expression masjid al-Haram rendered as the 'Sacred mosque' literally means the Ka'ba, including the adjacent pavement and the place where Abraham stood for prayer, as it stands to this day. However, the Qur'an also uses this expression in a broader sense to denote the sacred precincts (2:191, 17:1) - the region covering a couple of square miles, centered round the Ka'ba, where the pilgrims must enter in pilgrim garb.

156. 36:3/4, 43:43.

157. 2:119, 5:19, 33:45, 34:28.

158. 33:46.

159. 53:2-5.

160. 6:50, 10:15.

161. 10:15, 69:44-46.

162. 9:33, 61:9.

163. 36:76.

164. 7:2, 15:97, 20:2.

165. 15:88.

166. 16:127, 27:70.

167. 30:60.

168. 28:87.

169. 73:10.

170. 26:217, 33:3, 33:48, 67:29.

171. 7:200, 41:36.

172. 15:95.

173. 36:69, 69:41.

174. 7:184, 34:46.
175. 52:29, 69:42.
176. 52:29, 68:2, 81:22.
177. 81:20.
178. 68:3.
179. 68:5.
180. 68:6.
181. 23:68/69.
182. 16:101.
183. 42:15.
184. 42:14.
185. The Qur'anic verse 61:6 quotes Jesus, heralding the arrival after him of 'a messenger by the name Ahmad, most praise worthy' whom it identifies with the Prophet Muhammad pbuh. Muslim scholarship claims that this Ahmed is the same messenger who is referred to as 'helper' or 'comforter' in the Gospel (John 14.16, 15.26, 16.7). They argue that the Aramic language, in which in all probability the original Gospel was revealed, has the word Mawhama for 'Praise worthy,' which translates into Greek as Periklytos, and claim that while translating from Greek into Latin the word Periklytos was corrupted to a similar sounding word Parakletos that connotes 'helper' or 'comforter,' and that the corruption persisted while translating from Latin into English (around the 14th century CE), and thus the messenger referred to as 'helper' or 'comforter' in the Gospel is no other than the Prophet Muhammad pbuh. In yet another passage, the Qur'an declares:
- "[God will confer His grace upon those who believe in His messages]* – those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet of whom they shall find written in the Torah and the Gospel that is with them – (the Prophet who shall) enjoin the good, forbid the evil, make lawful all good things and unlawful, all bad things; and shall lift from them their burdens and shackles that were upon them (before). Therefore, those who believe in him, honor him and help him, and follow the Light that is bestowed from on high through him – it is they who shall succeed" (7:157). *[The bracketed words draw on the preceding verse.]
186. 16:103.
187. 33:6.
188. 10:16, 42:52, 12:3.
189. 9:43.
190. 9:80/84/113. These verses demonstrate that the Prophet used to pray for the forgiveness of his enemies. In the verse 9:80 he is told that even if he prayed for them seventy times, God will not forgive them as they had rejected God and His Messenger.
191. 81:19.

192. 68:4.
 193. 81:21.
 194. 9:61.
 195. 21:107.
 196. 3:144, 18:110, 41:6.
 197. 10:49, 72:21.
 198. 7:157/158.
 199. 29:48.
 200. 5:99, 7:158, 13:40, 42:48.
 201. 5:92, 16:82, 24:54.
 202. 14:1, 57:9.
 203. 73:2/3.
 204. 73:4.
 205. 23:96.
 206. 108:2.
 207. 80:1-10.
 208. 17:74.
 209. Maxime Rodinson, Muhammad, English translation, 2nd edition, London 1996, p. 221.
 210. Ibid., p.xviii.
- [210 references]

4. Qur'anic Reflections on Nature

The Qur'an is alive with reflections on the beauty and harmony of nature and on its relationship with life as part of its ontological debate. These reflections are in the form of statements, which capture the laws of the cosmos in expansive open ways that captivate and beguile us by their beauty, majesty and accuracy. Thus for example, the following Qur'anic observations are picturesque and imaginative, and at the same time clearly indicative of the axial and the orbital rotations of heavenly bodies that science discovered many centuries later.

- Merging (yulij) of the night into the day and vice versa (31:29).¹
- Overlapping (yukawwir) of the night into the day and vice versa (39:5).
- The incapability of the night to outstrip (sabiḳ) the day, and all (the heavenly bodies) floating in an orbit (falak) (21:33).²
- Drawing of the night (as a veil) (yughshi) over the day, which it pursues ceaselessly (7:54).
- The sun and the moon being constant (dai'bayn) in their courses (14:33).

A cross-section of the verses including those referred to above are rendered below to give a broad overview of the Qur'anic treatment of the subject.

4.1. Movement of heavenly bodies in orbits

“Your Lord is God who created the heavens and the earth in six periods, and is established on the Seat of Authority. He draws the night (as a veil) (yughshi) over the day (which) it pursues ceaselessly. He has subjected the sun, the moon and the stars to His Laws. Aren’t the creation and order up to Him? Blessed be God, the Lord of all the Worlds” (7:54).

“He has made serviceable to you the sun and the moon, both constant (dai’bayn) (in their courses) and He has made serviceable to you the night and the day” (14:33).

“He is the One who created the night and the day and the sun and the moon – each floating in an orbit (falak)” (21:33).

“Haven’t you seen that God causes the night to merge (yulij) into the day and the day to merge (yulij) into the night and has subordinated the sun and the moon (to His laws) – each running (its course) for a determined term – and God is Informed of what you do” (31:29).

“(God) created the heavens and the earth in accordance with the truth (universal laws). He causes the night to overlap (yukawwir) the day and the day to overlap (yukawwir) the night and has subordinated the sun and the moon (to His laws) – each running (its course) for a determined term. Isn’t this God Almighty, Most Forgiving” (39:5).

4.2. Creation of Heaven and Earth

“In the creation of the heavens and the earth, (in) the alternation of night and day, (in) the ships that sail the ocean for the benefit of humanity, (in) the water which God sends down from the sky with which it enlivens the earth after its death and spreads out all kinds of creatures on it, (and in) the coursing of the winds and the clouds, compelled between the sky and the earth, are indeed signs for a people who use their reason” (2:164).

“God is the One who has raised the heavens without any pillars that you can see, and is firmly established on the Seat (of Authority). He has subjected the sun and the moon (to His laws), each running (its course) for a determined term. He regulates (all) affairs and spells out these signs that you may be certain about meeting with your Lord” (13:2).

“Don’t those who deny (God) see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (before), and We split them apart? We made every living thing from water. Won’t they still believe” (21:30).

4.3. Earth's geography

“He sends down water from the sky, so that the valleys flow according to their measure, with the stream carrying the swelling froth (on its surface). And what they heat in the fire to make ornaments or utensils produces similar froth. Thus does God demonstrate truth and falsehood: as for the froth, it goes away like the foam,

while what benefits humanity remains on earth. Thus does God draw comparisons” (13:17).

“(Say,) Who made the earth a settlement and put rivers in its clefts and set mountains on it, and placed a barrier between the two waters (sweet and saline): Is there any deity besides God? No, but most of them do not know” (27:61).

“He created the heavens without any pillars, you can see, and set firm mountains on earth - lest it might shake with you, and spread out on it all kinds of creatures; and We send down water from the sky, and We thereby produce every kind of noble species on it” (31:10).

4.4. Wind, rain and water cycle

“He is the One who sends the winds as good news heralding His mercy: when they have carried heavy laden clouds, We drive them to a dead land, sending down thereby water, wherewith We produce all kinds of fruits. Thus do We raise the dead, that you may be mindful” (7:57).

“Haven’t you seen how God drives the clouds, gathers them together, then piles them into layers, and you see a downpour emerging from within them? He sends down mountain-masses (of clouds) from the sky with hail in them, and He strikes with it anyone He wills, and diverts it from anyone He wills. The flash of its lightning almost takes away the sight” (24:43).

4.5. Plant and Animal World

“He is the One who sends down water from the sky; thereby We bring forth all kinds of sprouts. And We produce therewith green (crops), out of which We produce heaps of grains. And from the date palm and its spathes, (hang) clusters (of dates) within reach, (and We produce) groves of grapes, and olives, and pomegranates, similar but different (in variety). Look at their fruit when they bear, and in its ripeness! There are signs in this for a people who believe” (6:99).

“And what He has multiplied for you on earth are in different colours. There is a sign in this for a people who are mindful (16:13). He is the One who has made the sea subject (to His Laws) that you may eat fresh flesh from it, and you extract from it gems that you may wear; and you see the ships cleaving through it, that you may seek some of His bounty, and thus be grateful (to Him)” (16:14).

“Don’t they see how the birds are governed in the air of the sky: none holds them up but God. There are signs in this for a people who believe” (16:79).

“Among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the living creatures that He has spread out in either of them. He has the power to gather them together when He wills” (42:29).

4.6. God has created everything in pairs

“He is the One who has spread out the earth and set on it mountains and rivers; and He made fruits of all (kinds) in pairs. He draws the night (as a veil) (yughshi) over the day. There are signs in this for a people who reflect” (13:3).

“Glory to the One who created in pairs all of them, that the earth produces, as well as their own (human) kinds, and (those) of which they have no knowledge” (36:36).

“The creator of the heavens and the earth: He has made for you pairs from among yourselves and pairs from among the cattle; thus he multiplies you. There is nothing like Him and He is Observant and Aware” (42:11).

“We have made everything in pairs that you may be mindful” (51:49)

4.7. Human Embryology

A number of Qur’anic verses refer to the reproductive process in a woman’s foetus, touching on one or more stages of embryonic development. The stipulations of these verses are immaculately consistent and can be paraphrased into two statements: i) ‘Man is created out of a tiny drop (of semen), **3** which is established in a secured resting place,**4** and transformed first into a clot (22:5, 23:14),**5** then into a chewed (lump of) flesh - formed and unformed (22:5), then into bones, which are finally clothed with clean flesh (23:14). ii) God completes the creation of man in due proportions⁶ in his mother’s womb, through different stages of formation, within three (veils of) darkness (39:6).

“Surely We created man from an extract of clay (tin, inorganic matter) (23:12). We then placed him as a drop (of semen) in a secured resting place (13). We then transformed the drop into a clot and We transformed the clot into a chewed (lump of) flesh, and We transformed this chewed (lump of) flesh into bones, and We clothed the bones with flesh, and then We produced another creature from it. So blessed be God, the Best of Creators” (23:14).

“O people, if you are in doubt about the Resurrection, (consider) that We created you from dust (turab), then from a drop (of semen), then from a clot, then from a chewed (lump of) flesh, formed and unformed, that We may manifest (Our Power) to you; and We keep those We wish in the wombs for a determined term, then We bring you out as babies and then you (grow and) reach your prime. Some of you die (early) and some of you will be kept back until the feeblest age, so that they know nothing after having known (much); and (further), you see the earth barren and lifeless, but when We send down water on it, it is stirred (to life), it swells, and it puts forth every kind of beautiful species” (22:5).

“...He creates you in your mother’s womb - transformation after transformation, within three (veils of) darkness...” (39:6)

Any further elaboration of the Qur’anic stipulations to show their conformity with the latest scientific knowledge will be rather technical and detract from the subject, but it may suffice to quote the noted French surgeon, Maurice Bucaille quotation:⁷

“The Qur'anic description of certain stages in the development of the embryo corresponds exactly to what we know today about it, and the Qur'an does not contain a single statement that is open to criticism from modern science.”

4.8. Mysteries Of Nature That Have Come To Light Only In Recent Times

The Qur'an also makes fleeting references to diverse mysterious phenomena that have come to light only in recent times with modern scientific advancement in different fields. Such verses are therefore highly technical in nature, and sound scientific knowledge will be required to grasp the essence of these verses, as briefly listed below.

- Relativity of time: a 'day' in space may be as long as 1000 years **8** or 50,000 years.**9**
- Reduction in oxygen content of air at higher altitudes.**10**
- Three layers of tissues enclosing the embryo in a woman's womb.**11**
- Embryonic growth in a woman's uterus with progress of pregnancy.**12**
- Individual finger prints of humans.**13**
- Role of wind in carrying pollens for certain plants.**14**
- The 'barrier' between sweet water, and saline water.**15**
- Creation of the universe from a single mass,**16** and the evolution of all living things from water.**17**
- The universe is expanding.**18**
- Man's potential to explore space and ocean beds. **19**
- Human pain receptors are located on the skin.**20**
- The frontal lobes of the brain are responsible for lying and sins.**21**
- Graduated layers of darkness in ocean depths, resulting in such intense darkness deep down the ocean that one can't see one's own hand.**22**
- Participation of only female bees in the building of the hive.**23**
- The existence of communities among all animals and living creatures.**24**

Preservation of the Pharaoh's dead body with the parting of river Nile,**25** though until the archaeological discovery of mummies in late 19th century, the Pharaoh was known to have died and perished.**26**

4.9. Summing Up

The verses cited in the foregoing under different sub-headings clearly show the extraordinary accuracy and consistency of Qur'anic stipulations on natural phenomena. Muhammad, or for that matter, any mortal in that era, had no means to repeatedly make axiomatic pronouncements on the various facets of nature for more than two decades without any reference to the prevalent myths and legends; and this reflects the extraordinary in the Qur'an.

Notes

1. 35:13.
2. 36:40.
3. 35:11, 40:67, 53:46, 75:37, 76:2, 80:19.
4. 23:13, 77:21.

5. 40:67, 96:2.
6. 75:38, 82:7.
7. Maurice Bucaille, The Bible, The Qur'an and Science, 5th edition, Paris 1988, English translation, p. 218.
8. 32:5.
9. 70:4.
10. 6:125.
11. 39:6.
12. 23:14.
13. 75:4.
14. 15:22.
15. 25:53, 27:61, 55:19.
16. 21:30.
17. 21:30, 24:45.
18. 51:47.
19. 55:33.
20. 4:56.
21. 96:16.
22. 24:40.
23. 16:68, For explanation, see Jeffery Lang, Struggling to Surrender, 2nd revised edition, Maryland 1998, p. 35.
24. 6:38.
25. 10:92.
26. The Bible, Exodus 14:28.

[26 notes]

5. Creation of Human Being

The Qur'an reflects on the creation of human being in its typically condensed manner. Some of its verses relate to the Biblical episode,¹ while others refer to the corporeal growth of human species (Insan, Bashari) from earth,² and water;³ their procreation from their own selves,⁴ and the creative evolution of all living things from water.⁵

5.1. Creation of Adam as God's deputy (Khalifah) on earth

"When your Lord said to the angels: 'I will place a deputy (Khalifah) **6** on earth', they said: 'Will you place someone there who will spread corruption and shed blood, while we celebrate your praise and sanctify you?' (God) said: 'I know what you do not know' (2:30). He taught Adam the names (Asma'a) of all things and then placed them before the angels and said: 'Tell Me the names of these, if you are truthful' (31). They said: 'Glory to you (O Lord)! We have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, You are All-Knowing and Wise' (32). He said: 'O Adam! Tell

them the names of these. When he told them the names of those, God said: ‘Didn’t I tell you that I know the secrets of the heavens and the earth, and I know what you reveal, and what you have been hiding’ (33)? And We said to the angels: ‘Bow down to Adam’ and they bowed down, except Iblis: he refused, showed arrogance, and was among the ungrateful (34). We said: ‘O Adam! Dwell in the garden - you and your spouse; and eat from it plentifully when and as you please; but do not approach this tree, lest you become wrongdoers.’ (35) Then Satan made the two of them slip (and they ate of the forbidden tree) and got the two of them expelled from whatever state (of felicity) they were in. We said: ‘Clear out, all (you people), with enmity between yourselves, and you will have an abode and means of livelihood on earth for a time’ (36). Then Adam received the Words from his Lord who turned to him (in forgiveness); for He is Most Relenting and Merciful” (2:37). Narrated in a number of immaculately consistent passages¹ the Qur’anic crystallized reflections on Adam’s primordial episode can be very thought provoking, as illustrated below:

- Humans are created as God’s deputy or delegate (Khalifah) and thus given a very special position and responsibility in Creation, but they are prone to bloodshed and corruption (2:30).
- The angels celebrate the praise of God and sanctify Him (2:30).
- God taught Adam the names (Asma’a) of all things (2:31). The Qur’anic plural word Asma’a (sing. ism) traditionally rendered as ‘names’ also connotes knowledge, virtue, quality etc. Thus, this pithy statement can be interpreted to imply God empowering humans with the faculty to identify and characterize every object individually.
- Adam told them the names of ‘those’ he was shown before (2:33) indicates the power of human mind to recount things out of memory – a unique gift to humans.
- God’s command to Adam, “But do not approach this tree” (2:35) evokes in him a curiosity and temptation and haunts him with a conflicting thought – whether to approach the tree or to keep away from it – a freedom of choice given only to humans.
- Satan made ‘the two of them’ slip (2:36).
- God’s warning: ‘Clear out, all (you people), with enmity between yourselves’, implies a plurality of the addressee that imparts an allegorical undertone to the entire episode centred around Adam and his spouse (2:36).
- God forgives Adam (2:37).

Other related passages¹ add the following dimensions to our reflections:

- Upon eating of the forbidden tree “the two of them became conscious of their private parts (sexual morality)” (7:122, 20:122).
- The role of Satan as an eternal tempter.⁷

5.2. Man's Creative evolution from the elements

“He is the One who created you from clay (tin) (inorganic matter), then decreed a term, and there is a determined term with Him. Yet you remain doubtful”(6:2).

“... He (caused) you to grow from the earth (ard) and settled you in it...”(11:61).

“He is the One who created human being (Bashar) from water and established for him relations of blood and marriage...” (25:54).**4,5**

These reflections are in complete harmony with modern science and therefore need no further explanation.

5.3. God inspires humans with divine spirit

As the culmination of the creative process of human being (Bashar), God breathes some of the divine spirit into it (15:29, 38:72),**8** indicating that God alone is the source of all human virtues and intellectual potentials.

“And your Lord said to the angels: ‘I am going to create a human being (Bashar) from (dry) clay (Salsal), from a slimy mass (Hama) (organic matter) moulded (into shape) (15:28). When I have completed him (to perfection), and breathed into him from My Spirit, bow down to him’ (29). The angels bowed down - all together (30), except Iblis. He refused to be among those who bowed down” (15:31).

“And your Lord said to the angels: ‘I am going to create a human being (bashar) from clay (tin) (inorganic matter) (38:71). When I have completed him and breathed into him from My Spirit, bow down to him’ (72). The angels bowed down - all together (73) except Iblis. He refused, showed arrogance and was among the ungrateful” (38:74).

Notes

1. 2:30-37, 7:11-25, 15:28-40, 18:50, 20:116-123, 38:71-83.
2. 22:5, 23:12/Ch. 4.7, 30:20, 32:7, 35:11, 40:67, 71:17.
3. 25:54.
4. 30:21, 32:8.
5. 21:30.
6. khalifah connotes a successor - someone who has received an inheritance as a successor, and is varyingly rendered as deputy, delegate, vicar, agent etc. (6:165, 27:62, 35:39).
7. 7:17, 15:39, 38:82.
8. 32:9.

[8 references]

6. The Day of Judgement

The Qur'an states, in no uncertain terms, that God has decreed the Day of Judgment. On that Day, God will judge each soul depending upon what it earned during the lifetime through faith and deeds, and any form of recommendation or intercession will not be accepted (2:48),**1** except by divine permission.**2**

“Heed the day when no soul shall compensate for another* in any manner; when no intercession will be accepted from any (of them), nor ransom will be taken from any (of them), nor will they be helped” (2:48). *[Lit., ‘another soul’]

The Meccan Suras are full of warnings about the Day of Judgment and some of the Suras are wholly devoted to it.

6.1. Qur’anic description of the Day of Judgment

The Qur’an describes the Day of Judgment in an immensely beautiful, overwhelmingly forceful, and highly allegorical language. As such, their rendering in human language is not meaningful. However, some illustrative passages are listed below to give some ‘metaphorical glimpses’ of this Final Event.

“When the sun is folded up (81:1), when the stars darken (2), when the mountains vanish (3), when the ten months (pregnant) camels are neglected (4), when the wild beasts are herded together (5), when the oceans overflow (6), when the souls are sorted out (7), when the infant girl buried alive is questioned (8) for what crime she was killed (9), when the Scrolls are unrolled (10), when the sky is unveiled (11), when the flaming fire is set ablaze (12), and when the garden is brought near (13) - then each soul shall know what it has prepared (for itself)” (81:14).

“When the sky is split asunder (82:1), when the stars are scattered (2), when the oceans burst forth (3), and when the graves are overturned (4), each soul will know what it sent forth, and (what it) left behind (5). O People! What has lured you away from your Noble Lord (6), who created you and completed you (in) due proportions (7), having put you together in whatever form He wished (8)? Yet you belie the Judgment” (82:9).

6.2. Qur'anic description of Paradise and Hell

The Qur'an uses a highly allegorical and vibrant language to depict the delights of paradise, and the punishments of hell:

“God has promised the believing men and the believing women, gardens with streams running past, in which they will abide – goodly dwellings in the gardens of Eden – but approval from God is far greater (as a reward): that is the supreme triumph” (9:72).

“The foremost (sabiqun) (in faith and good deeds)³ will be the foremost (in reward) (56:10), and it is they who are drawn close (to God) (11) in gardens of bliss (12) - a multitude from the ancients (13), and a few from those of later times (14): on gilded couches (15), reclining on them, and facing each other (16). Around them will stroll immortal youths (17) - with glasses, goblets and cups (filled) from a fountain (18), which will not upset them, nor dull their senses (19). (They will have) any fruits they choose (20), and the meat of any fowl they wish (21), and companions (hur)⁴ with lustrous eyes (22) like the pearls hidden (in their shells) (23). (This will be) the reward for what they did” (56:24).

“When the sky splits open and becomes rosy like red hide (55:37) - which then of your Lord's bounties will you deny (38)? That day neither man nor any jinn shall be asked about his sin (39) - which then of your Lord's bounties will you deny (40)? The guilty shall be recognized by their features and will be seized by their foreheads and their feet (41) - which then of your Lord's bounties will you deny (42)? This is the hell, which the guilty denied (43). They will go circling round between it and boiling water (44) - which then of your Lord's bounties will you deny” (55:45)?.

6.3. The relevance of punishment in the Qur'anic discourse

The graphic description of the punishments of hell might suggest that the Qur'anic equation of reward and punishment worked as stick and carrot to its simple audience leading to their conversion to Islam. Such an assumption may be too simplistic. Practically all the passages depicting punishment of hell- more than a score as listed by Ashfaq, ⁵ date from the Meccan period, when the Quraysh vehemently rejected the revelation and derided the latter passages as the outburst of a crazy mind and the reflections of jumbled up dreams. Any significant conversion to the faith occurred only after the Hudaibiya Peace treaty, some twenty years into the revelation by which time all the passages referring to the punishment of hell had long been revealed. Besides, contrary to a popular belief, the Qur'an does not speak about any punishment or torture in the grave or in the span between death and resurrection.

The fact remains, as the Qur'an puts it, “man is intense in his passion for women, for hoarded up treasures, and glory, and power,” ⁶ and these instincts, when go out of bounds, drive him to committing acts that displease God. The fear of punishment - either from a temporal court, or at an ineffable final reckoning restrains his criminal instincts. If there were no courts of law and no punishment, the criminals will dominate society and the weak and the innocent will be oppressed. In other words, the deterrent of punishment is essential to establishing justice and morality. So the Qur'anic references to punishment awaiting the sinners – no matter how they are described, were essential to its discourse that primarily aimed at establishing justice in the society and protecting the weak and the historically oppressed classes.

The Qur'anic pronouncements are, however, a clear reminder to all humanity – including the high and mighty, who cause collateral damages and human catastrophes through their actions and or decisions that they cannot escape the punishment of God, though their temporal, ecclesiastical, theocratic or official positions may have spared them from any temporal trial or punishment.

6.4. Qur'anic explanation of its description of Paradise and Hell

The Qur'an clarifies that its graphical descriptions of the rewards of paradise and punishments of hell are parabolic and allegorical, and declares:

“A likeness of the garden which the heedful (muttaqun) are promised (is that) streams run below it, its food and its shade are everlasting...” (13:35).

“No soul knows what delights* are kept secret for them as a reward for what they did” (32:17). * [Lit., ‘delights of the eye’.]

“A likeness of the garden which the heedful (muttaqun) are promised (is that) in it there are streams of water never brackish, and streams of milk, whose taste never changes, and streams of wine – delicious to those who drink, and streams of honey, pure and clear...” (47:15).

While Islamic theological literature abounds in speculations about the rewards of paradise and the punishments of hell, these ‘expositions’ catered to the intellectual and emotional needs of the era, are not rooted in the Qur’an, and can hardly be of any help to the believer. To earn God’s blessings, a believer needs the glow of faith, the love of God, and compliance with divine guidance, rather than the attraction of **hur4** or fear of hell. However, the believers can take a lesson from the Qur’anic description of human state in hell and paradise, and in doing so, cultivate a behaviour pattern that can make their life pleasant on earth. Thus, for example, those in hell are described to be arguing, blaming, wishing to die, trying to rationalize, and also wondering why those they considered evil are not in hell, whereas people in the heaven are in peace and don’t utter wrong and are in deep gratitude.

6.5. The Qur’an’s reminder on the recreation of human being

The Prophet’s audience openly rejected the notion of resurrection and condemned it as the legends of the ancients (Note 8/Ch. 3.1). Those who deny it today are as skeptical of it, as the Prophet’s audience. Many questions may arise, even in the mind of believers, if they try to explain the resurrection, and all its potential ‘implications’. That is why believers are asked simply to believe in it as an article of faith (Ch. 2.1). The Qur’an, however, provides a rationale to reflect on the possibility of a second existence (56:62), and points to the divine scheme of transforming human being into some new form that we do not know (56:61, 21:104).

“Have you considered the seed* (56:58)? Is it you that create it or are We the Creators (59)? We have ordained death for you, and We are not to be prevented (60). Surely, We may change your forms and recreate you in (forms) that you do not know (61). You already know about (the miracle of) the first creation, so why aren’t you mindful” (56:62)? *[Lit., ‘what you emit’]

“On that Day We shall roll up the Heaven as the scroll is rolled up for books (completed); and just as We brought forth the first Creation, so shall We repeat it - a promise We have undertaken; surely We shall fulfil it” (21:104).

Notes

1. 2:254, 2:255, 2:281, 34:23, 40:18.
2. 2:255, 34:23.
3. The insertion of the bracketed expression ‘faith and good deeds’ after the word ‘foremost’ (sabiqun) is consistent with the concluding stipulation of the passage (verse 56:24) shown in bold, and is also supported by the Qur’anic usage of the root SBQ elsewhere in its text (2:148, 5:48):
“Everyone has a goal to which he turns: so vie (fastabiq) (with each other) in goodness ...” (2:148). [Full text in Ch. 16]

“...We have made for everyone of you a (different) code (shir’ah), and an open way (of action)... so vie (fastabiq) (with each other) in goodness...” (5:48). [Full text in Ch. 9.3]

4. As illustrated by Muhammad Asad (Message of the Qur’an), the word hur connotes the purest form of whiteness (Note 8, Ch. 56). The word also appears in the verses 44:54 and 52:20 with a qualifying epithet, ‘ayin, which means ‘the large eyed ones’. This has led the classical interpreters to associate this term with a female being - a woman, of fair complexion and large eyes. Such an interpretation has no Qur’anic basis, and is merely speculative, as the Qur’an promises paradise to the members of both the sexes (9:72/6.2 above). The Qur’an also uses the following gender-neutral terms/expressions to denote the companions of paradise:
 - a. qasirat at tarf in 37:48, 38:52, 55:56; literally, ‘such as restrain their gaze.’
 - b. atrab in 38:52, 56:37, 78:33; most commentators have connoted it with ‘well matched’ or ‘equal in age.’
 - c. khayratun hisan in 55:70. The expression combines two Qur’anic words on shades or categories of goodness: khayrah and hasanah (Note 24/Preface) and is thus suggestive of the noblest form of goodness.

As in the case of hur, the classical commentators have given the body of a woman to these allegorical expressions, and one can notice this even in modern translations by eminent scholars. Thus, Thomas Cleary, one of the most renowned translators of religious scriptures of modern era has translated qasirat at tarf as i) ‘demure women’ (37:48), ‘demure females’ (38:52), and ‘women who restrain their glances’ (55:56); atrabanas ‘wives’ (56:36) and ‘damsels’ (78:33); and khayratun hisan as ‘good women who are beautiful’ (55:70). – The Qur’an, A New Translation, USA 2004. Likewise, Michael Sells has translated khayratun hisan(55:70) as ‘women good and fair’ - Approaching the Qur’an, 2nd edition, Oregon 2007, p. 157.

Traditionally, some Muslim scholars have supported feminist personification of Qur’anic expressions on the ground that Qur’an refers to them in the feminine gender form. But this is not tenable. As with French, Arabic is grammatically gendered, and the Qur’an employs this grammatical nuance to create an evocative personification that leaves even the Arab readers puzzled (Note 8/Preface), and simply cannot be captured in a foreign rendition; example: ‘the earth grammatically feminine giving birth to its secrets.’ Those interested may consult Michael Sells work referred to and quoted above.

5. Ashfaq Syed, Index of the Qur’anic Topics, Maryland 1998, p. 589 to 616.
6. The expression under inverted comas combines the essence of the pronouncements of the verses 3:14 and 100:8 featured in Ch. 41.1.

7. The Broader Notion of Din Al-Islam

There can be no debate that din al-Islam is the religion of the followers of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh: Islam. However, the Qur'an also uses the generic word Islam, and its different roots, and the word din, with various shades of meaning. Thus the Qur'an uses the word 'din' to denote judgment (1:4), divine law (2:193), law (of the land) (12:76), obedience or devotion (39:3), faith, religion, moral responsibility (107:1), religion in the conventional sense (110:2) etc. Based on these Qur'anic illustrations, the term din would appear to embrace the broader notion of obedience (to God) or compliance (with God's commandments), as against religion in its popular sense.¹

The Qur'an uses the word Islam (root – SLM) in noun and verb forms with the connotation of orienting, submitting, surrendering, or committing oneself to God or to be at peace with God.² The Qur'an further declares:

“Indeed! Whoever commits (Assalama) his whole being [lit., face] to God, and does good deeds - will get his reward from his Lord. There will be no fear upon them nor shall they grieve.” (2:112).

“And who can be better in faith (din) than the one who orients (Assalama) his whole being [Lit., face] to God, and does good deeds, and follows the way of Abraham, the upright one, and God took Abraham as a friend” (4:125).

“And who is finer in speech than the one who invites to God, does good deeds and says: ‘I am of those who submit to God (Muslimun)’” (41:33).

In these verses, the Qur'an attributes the quality of doing good deeds to those who submit, or orient themselves to God (Assalama, Muslim).

7.1. Service to humanity as the essence of din al-Islam

Combining the foregoing underlined Qur'anic notions of i) din (primarily as obedience or devotion), and ii) the verb and noun forms of Islam (Assalama, Muslim), din al-Islam may be connoted with a faith system that calls for orienting oneself (asslama) to God for the doing of good deeds, or serving humanity. Accordingly the Qur'an describes 'din al-Islam', as the universal faith that was enjoined on earlier prophets, who were all true muslims (2:131-133),³ and conveyed the same essential message.

“When his Lord said to him (Abraham), ‘Submit (aslim)’, he said, ‘I submit (aslamtu) to the Lord of the worlds’ (2:131). Abraham enjoined his sons to do so, as did Jacob: ‘O my sons, God has chosen the religion (din) for you; so you should not die unless you have submitted (muslimun)’ (132). Were you witnesses when death came to Jacob? He said to his sons, ‘What will you serve after I am gone?’ They said, ‘We will serve your God; the God of your fathers, Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac - the One God; and to Him we have truly submitted (Muslimun)’” (2:133).

As if to leave no ambiguity on the cardinal significance of obedience to God through service to humanity, the Qur'an devotes a whole chapter to it:

“Do you see the one who belies the din (religion) (107:1)? It is he who rebuffs the orphan (2), and does not encourage feeding the poor (3). So, woe to those prayerful

(4), who are heedless of their prayer (5), who aim to be seen (in public) (6), but hold back from helping (others)” (107:7).

Muslims ardently believe in the ‘five pillars’ and are very particular to comply with them, but they are by and large not pro-active in serving humanity as required by their faith.

7.2. Corroboration from Islamic and secular sources

The foregoing exercise is no window dressing. Many eminent scholars of Islam, Muslims as well as non-Muslims, have acknowledged the pivotal role of service to humanity in Islam, as illustrated by the following quotations:

“The essence of Islam is to serve God and to do good to your fellow creature.” - Abdullah Yusuf Ali⁴ “To do the good in conviction or iman (true faith in One God) is the noblest form of worship that any rational creature can offer to God.” - Husayn Haykal⁵ “A Muslim is one who surrenders his or her whole being to the Creator. At first however, the believers called their religion ‘Tazaqqa’. This is an obscure word, which is not easy to translate. By cultivating ‘Tazaqqa’, Muhammad’s converts were to cloak themselves in the virtues of compassion and generosity; they were to use their intelligence to cultivate a caring and responsible spirit, which made them want to give graciously of what they had to all God’s creatures.” - Karen Armstrong⁶

Notes

1. Abdullah Abbas Nadwi, Vocabulary of the Holy Qur’an, Chicago 1983, p. 196.
2. 3:19, 3:52, 3:64, 3:80, 3:83
3. 3:52, 28:52/53.
4. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, The Holy Qur’an, Lahore 1934, reprinted, Maryland 1983, note 550.
5. Muhammad Husayn Haykal, The Life of Muhammad, English translation by Ismail Ragi, 8th edition, Karachi 1989, p. 56.
6. Karen Armstrong, Muhammad, London 1991, p. 97. An early Qur’anic passage (92:17-21) brings across the notion of tazaqqa implicit in the noted quotation.

[6 references]

8. The Broader Notion of Taqwa (Heedfulness)

The word Taqwa and its noun form, Muttaqi, and other root words appear in hundreds of Qur’anic verses with the connotation of heeding God, as well as His guidance. Scholars have translated it varyingly as: fearing God, heeding God, being conscious of God, preserving oneself from evil, guarding against evil, warding off evil, and piety. However, based on the Qur’anic versatile usage (as indicated in this work), its meaning may be best expressed by the opening verse of the second chapter (Surah al-Baqarah):

“This is the Book, in which nothing is doubtful: it has guidance for the heedful (Muttaqin)” (2:2).

In other words, those who follow the guidance of the Qur'an are imbued with Taqwa, or are Muttaqin. (sing. Muttaqi) Thus, heeding God, without heeding His commandments; or heeding the physical book or cassette containing the Qur'anic text or audio-recording, but ignoring, or even defying its guidance, can hardly meet the Qur'anic criteria for Taqwa.

8.1. Universal notion of Taqwa (heedfulness)

The Qur'an offers a universal connotation of this word in scores of its verses, many of which appear in this work: it is best captured in the verse 49:13 from late Medinite period, which states:

“O People! We have created you as male and female, and made you into races and communities* for you to get to know each other. The noblest among you near God are those of you who are the most heedful (atqakum). Indeed God is All-Knowing and Informed” (49:13). *[Lit., ‘tribes’]

The Qur'an also describes some of the ‘People of the Book’ (Christians and Jews), as Muttaqin (3:113-115).

“They are not the same: among the People of the Book is an upright community: they recite God’s messages through the hours of night as they bow down before Him (3:113). They believe in God and the Last Day; enjoin the good, and forbid the evil and hasten to good deeds - it is they who are among the righteous (114). Any good they do, they will not be denied it as God knows the heedful (Muttaqin)” (3:115).

Thus, in a broad sense, the term Taqwa and its other roots denote heedfulness of one’s universal social, moral and ethical responsibilities, with faith in God and the Last Day.

As the broader Qur'anic message is virtually centred around the concept of Taqwa – as underscored by its lead verse (2:2 above), we have indicated the Qur'anic exhortations to Taqwa in the listed verses in this book by showing its transliteration in bracket alongside the rendition.

9. Universal Brotherhood of Humanity

In a verse dating from the Medinite period, the Qur'an declares:

“Believers (Mu'minun) form a brotherhood; so reconcile your brethren, (whenever they are at odds,) and heed God, so that you may be graced with Mercy” (49:10).

Muslim scholars often cite this verse to claim a brotherhood of all Muslims, though strictly speaking, this verse is suggestive of the brotherhood of all believers in one God (Mu'minun). However, the Qur'anic universal notion of Islam (root – SLM) and Taqwa as reviewed in the preceding chapters (Ch. 7 and 8) and its pronouncements relating to (i) racial divergence, (ii) religious tolerance, (iii) plurality of faiths and (iv) the divine criteria of judgment, as explored below clearly and conclusively indicate its vision of a brotherhood of entire humanity - who are collectively appointed as God’s deputy on earth (2:30/Ch. 5.1).

9.1. Diversity Of Race, Colour And Language

The Qur'an recognizes the diversity of human race, language and colour (30:22)¹ and declares that if God willed, He would have made humanity into one community (10:19, 11:118),² guiding them all (6:149).³ It further affirms that humanity was initially one community, but later people differed (10:19).⁴

“Say (O Muhammad!): ‘With God (lies) clear argument. If He so willed, He would have guided you all’” (6:149).

“Humankind was but one community, but (later) they differed. Had it not been for an earlier decree from your Lord, their differences would have been settled between them” (10:19).

“If your Lord so willed, He would have made humankind into one community – (but He did not will so); so they will not cease to differ” (11:118).

“Among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity in your languages and your colours. There are signs in this for those who know” (30:22).

9.2. Religious Tolerance

The Qur'an forbids any compulsion in religion (2:256, 50:45, 88:21/22), and asks the Prophet not to compel people because if God so wished, everyone on earth would have believed (10:99).

“(There is) no compulsion in religion. Truth stands out clearly from falsehood; so whoever rejects false deities and believes in God, has grasped a firm handhold, which never breaks. (Remember,) God is All-Knowing and Aware” (2:256).

“If your Lord so willed, everyone on earth would have believed, all together. Will you then compel people until they become believers” (10:99)?

“We know best what they say; but you (O Muhammad,) are not to force them. So remind with the Qur'an those who fear My warning” (50:45).

“So remind (them, O Muhammad) – for you are one who reminds (88:21); and have no power over them” (88:22).

The Qur'an's position on religious freedom is amply demonstrated in a verse (60:11) dating from the Medinite period allowing pagan women to leave for Mecca, if they did not opt to convert to Islam along with their husbands:

“And if any of your wives should go over to the pagans, and then you have your turn (as many converted wives of the Meccan pagans left their pagan husbands and came over to Medina), then pay to those whose wives had left the equivalent of what they had spent (on their dower). And heed God in Whom you believe” (60:11).

9.3. No Discrimination against Non-Muslims

The Qur'an also commands Muslims not to discriminate against non-Muslims (4:94), nor to insult those whom they invoke besides God (6:108).

“You who believe, whenever you campaign in God's way, be discerning and do not say to anyone who offers you peace: ‘You are not a believer’ - seeking worldly gains (by exploiting him), for there are plenty of gains with God. (Remember,) you were like them before - till God favoured you. Therefore be discerning. Indeed God is Informed of what you do” (4:94).

“Don’t insult those whom they invoke besides God, lest they ignorantly insult God in enmity. Thus We have made their action seem pleasing to every community; then their return is to their Lord, and He will tell them what they had been doing” (6:108).

9.4. Plurality of Faiths

Towards the concluding phase of the revelation, when Islam was established as an historical reality and the pagans and the native Jews and Christians did not pose any threat the Qur’an expounds its message on the plurality of faith (49:13/Ch. 8.1; 5:48):**5**

“We have revealed to you this divine Writ (Kitab) setting forth the truth, confirming (whatever) remains of the divine writ (sent earlier), and determining what is true in it. Therefore, judge between them by what God has revealed, and do not follow their whims after what has come to you of truth. For each of you We have made a (different) code (Shir’ah), and an open way (of action) (Minhaj). If God so pleased, He would have made you (all) into one community. Therefore vie (with each other) in goodness (so that) He may test you by what He has given you. (Remember, you) all will (eventually) return to God, and He will tell you in what you differed” (5:48).

This is a critical verse that needs explaining:

- i. The Qur’an supplements the word (Shir’ah, or shar’iah) with Minhaj (an open way), thereby adding a far broader dimension to the combined expression shir’ah wa minhaj than to the rulings of the regional schools of Islamic law (Shar’iah laws) of the post Prophetic era (Appendix, 1.4/1.7).
- ii. Since by definition, the term Minhaj (open way) incorporates a freedom of choice, a scope to choosing the best way and changing the course of things to meet the exigencies of life, the combined expression **Shir’Ah Wa Minhaj** has a dynamic connotation. In other words, the Shar’iah of Islam enjoins a dynamic system of law, and code of life, that is accommodative of change with space and time - a priori encapsulated in the Qur’anic pronouncements on the need to change for the upliftment of human society (8:53, 13:11/Ch. 2.5)
- iii. The Qur’an claims to represent the Shar’iah of Islam (45:18) revealed to Muhammad as insights for humanity (45:20).
- iv. The Qur’an gives basic principles for a way of life individually and collectively (Ch.2.3), but leaves detailed laws for people to evolve to meet the exigencies of their lives according to time, place and needs.
- v. While the verse does not spell out the differences in divine law (shir’ah) and the way of action assigned to the divergent communities, it stresses on the common ground: the divergent communities are reminded to ‘vie (with each other) in goodness’

(2:148/Ch. 16). This, together with its emphasis on good deeds as reviewed below brings across the Qur'anic principle of unity in diversity and its acknowledgment of the plurality of faiths.

9.5. Good Deeds As A Common Criterion For Divine Approval

The Qur'an repeatedly declares that the divine approval is contingent to doing good deeds with faith, regardless of one's religion (2:62, 5:69, 22:17).⁶

"Those who believe, and those who are Jews, and Christians and Sabians - and (in fact) any who believe in God and the Last Day, and do good deeds - shall have their reward with their Lord. There will be no fear upon them, nor shall they grieve" (2:62).

"Those who believe, and those who are Jews, and Sabians and Christians - (in fact) any who believe in God and the Last Day, and do good deeds - there will be no fear upon them, nor shall they grieve" (5:69).

"Those who believe, and those who are Jews, and Sabians and Christians and Magians, and those who associate (others with God) - God will judge between them on the Day of Judgment. Indeed, God is Witness to all things" (22:17).

9.6. God May Pardon Those Who Had No Means Of Guidance

The Qur'an promises forgiveness to those people who were deprived of any true guidance because of their mental, physical, psychological or social conditions, or because they lived in mortal terror and were totally helpless in life (4:97-99):

"When the angels will take the souls of those who wronged themselves, they will say: 'How were you?' They will reply: 'We were helpless on earth.' (The angels) will say: 'Wasn't God's earth wide enough for you to flee somewhere (for refuge)?' As for those, the abode will be hell - an evil refuge (4:97); except those among men, women and children, who are helpless, have no means (for any guidance), and are not guided on (the right) way (98). Those God may pardon, for God is Most Forgiving and Pardoning" (4:99).

9.7. Brotherhood Of Humanity

Pieced together, the foregoing verses and those in the last two chapters bring across the Qur'anic vision of a universal brotherhood of humanity that will allow people of diverse faith, culture, colour and language to live together, to know each other and to assist each other to make life easy and peaceful for all human beings.

Some Muslim scholars, however, advocate that the non-Muslims (in its present day sense), who do not believe in the Prophet Muhammad pbuh, will not qualify for God's mercy. They interpret the generic word Islam (submitting/ orienting oneself to God, Ch. 7) in the verse 3:85 (underlined below), in its popular restrictive sense as the religion of the followers of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh. This is misleading as the preceding verses (3:83-84), demonstrate the generic character of the word islam appearing in 3:85.

“Do they seek any (religion) other than the din (religion) of God, to whom all in the heavens and on earth have submitted, willingly or unwillingly, and to whom they will all be returned (3:83)? Say: ‘We believe in God, and in what has been revealed to us, and in what has been revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes, and to Jesus and Moses and (other) prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them; and surely to Him do we all submit (Muslimun)’ (84). If anyone seeks other than Islam as a din (religion), it will not be accepted of him, and in the hereafter he will be among the losers”(3:85).

The foregoing argument also holds for the identically worded verses 9:33 and 61:9 (Note 162/Ch. 3), some scholars quote to claim exclusivity of Islamic faith:

“He is the One who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth (Islam - submission to God), that he may distinguish it from all religions, however the pagans detested this” (9:33/61:9).[48:28 is identically worded except for the underlined remarks.]

To leave no doubts about the universality of its message, the Qur’an warns those who take a restrictive view of their faith that their desires will not prevail and that whoever does evil will be requited accordingly.

“Neither your desires, nor the desires of the People of the Book (can prevail): whoever does evil will be requited accordingly, and he will not find any protector or helper besides God” (4:123).

9.8. The Case of Apostasy

There is a general belief that Islam prescribes capital punishment for apostasy. This is incorrect. The Qur’an does not recommend any temporal punishment for apostasy. It deals with the subject on several occasions, illustrated below, and makes it clear that apostates will be punished after their death (2:217, 16:106).⁷

“...Their deeds will be of no avail in this life, or in the hereafter; and they will be the inmates of hellfire and they will remain there” (2:217).

“...On them is the wrath from God and theirs will be a dreadful punishment” (16:106).

The Qur’an offers further illustrations against any temporal punishment for apostasy: It does not prescribe any punishment for a person “who believes, rejects faith and then believes (again), and again rejects faith, and goes on increasing in unbelief.”⁸ It does not prescribe any punishment for the women who left their Muslim husbands during the Medinite period, and went over to the disbelievers renouncing their faith.⁹ It assures Muslims that “if anyone abandons his religion, God will replace him with others whom He loves and who love Him.”¹⁰

Thus there is no Qur’anic basis to legislate capital punishment, or, for that matter, any punishment for apostasy.

In the historical perspective, apostates joined the enemy and conspired against the Muslims, thus committing high treason; so the punishment for apostasy was in true sense the punishment for treason rather than for abandoning faith.

Notes

1. 35:28.
2. 16:93, 42:8.
3. 32:13.
4. 2:213, 21:92, 23:52.
5. 5:44-47.
6. 4:124/Ch. 2.4, 64:9, 65:11.
7. 3:90, 47:25-27.
8. 4:137.
9. 60:11.
10. 5:54.

[10 references]

10. Universality of Knowledge

Addressed to a largely unlettered people and aimed at bringing about a quantum change in the social order of the world under the ambit of its monotheistic discourse, the Qur'an does not talk about pursuing universal knowledge in a direct and straightforward way. However, its broader message resonates with exhortations and inspirations to acquiring universal knowledge.

The very first revelation of the Qur'an is a commandment to reading and an affirmation of the intellectual potential of man (96:1-5/Ch. 1.2). With the progress of the revelation the Qur'an declares that: i) man is assigned the role of God's deputy on earth and endowed with the intellectual faculty to identify and characterize every object individually (2:30-35/Ch. 5.1), ii) granted special 'favours' above much of the creation (17:70), iii) fashioned in the finest model (95:4), and iv) whatever is in the heavens and the earth is made serviceable to him (31:20, 45:13).¹

"We have indeed honoured the descendants of Adam; carried them across land and sea; provided for them out of the good things; and favoured them above much of what We have created" (17:70).

"Don't you see that God has made serviceable to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on earth, and has lavished His bounties on you (both) seen and unseen? Yet (there are) among people (those) who dispute about God without knowledge, without guidance and without an enlightening book" (31:20).

"God is the One who has made the sea serviceable to you and the ships sail on it by His command, that you may seek of His bounty, and that you may be grateful (45:12). He has made serviceable to you whatever is in the heavens and

whatever is on earth - all (come from) Him. There are signs in this for a people who reflect" (45:13).

"Indeed, We have created humankind in the finest model" (95:4).

Furthermore, the Qur'an makes repeated references to a people: 'who use their reason, 'who reflect', 'who know', and 'who are prudent,' describes wisdom (Hikmat) as a great bounty (2:269), and promises to raise the ranks of those who are given knowledge ('ilm) (58:11).

"He gives wisdom to anyone He wishes, and he who is granted wisdom has indeed received a great bounty (*Khayran Kathirah*); yet none is mindful of this, except the prudent" (2:269).

"...God will raise by degrees those of you who believe, and those who acquire knowledge ('ilm)..." (58:11).

Last but not least, the Qur'an asserts that God verifies the truth of His Words.² And since the multifarious manifestations of nature are nothing but the reflections of the Words or Kalimat of God (18:109, 31:27/Ch. 2.1), Qur'anic assertion points to the principle of experimentation and verification that underlies all scientific advancement.

Taken together, these Qur'anic pronouncements constitute a clear and emphatic exhortation to pursue universal knowledge in all its dimensions and directions.

Accordingly, the early Muslims made remarkable advancements in practically all the prevalent fields of knowledge: medicine, astronomy, mathematics, chemistry, metallurgy, and geography, for example. They also acted as the transmitters of ancient Greek knowledge and Hellenistic sciences into the medieval Europe by translating these works into Arabic, which were later translated into European languages. Thus, in true sense, the early Muslims set the stage for the Renaissance in Europe, as most historians and scholars, including those, skeptic of the Prophetic mission, have acknowledged.^{3, 4}

10.1. Division of knowledge in medieval Islam

By the fifth or sixth century of Islam, the intellectual enterprise of the Muslims came to a virtual halt. The theologians had remained suspect of universal knowledge as it challenged many of their views and interpretations that were rooted in the pre-Islamic myths or faiths. They also popularized the juristic doctrine of taqlid (Precedence, App. 1.6) into a simplistic notion that all that had to be learnt had already been learnt during the Prophet's time, and was contained in the Qur'an and the Prophet's normative ways (Sunnah), and the posterity was expected to simply imitate them.⁵ This resulted in stagnancy of knowledge, abhorrence against any scientific advancement, and division of universal knowledge into Islamic and European categories.⁶ Thus, in the post Renaissance era, the Muslims persistently refused to acquire the so-called 'European' knowledge, and watched the phenomenal advancement of science and technology with silent skepticism. In fact, as reviewed by Murad Hofmann,⁷ the hostility of the orthodox theologians ('ulama) against the so called European knowledge, led them to, among others, burn down an observatory in Turkey in 1580 - just a year after its erection, and close down the first printing press in the Islamic world, in the same city in 1745. Even as recently as the later part of the nineteenth century, the 'ulama in British India fought

tooth and nail against the establishment of a modern university by Syed Ahmed. Ironically, to this day Muslims are bogged down with a religious education curriculum that often treats universal sciences in the sidelines.

10.2. Significance of scientific knowledge in Islam

Scientific knowledge is the very key to understanding the Qur'anic wisdom, let alone harnessing the resources of nature as enjoined by the Qur'an. Thus for example, we will not be able to understand many of the Qur'anic verses on natural phenomena, such as relating to the movement of the heavenly bodies, embryonic development in human fetus, darkness in the depths of oceans, barrier between sweet and saline water etc. as reviewed earlier (Ch. 4.8) without the knowledge of physical sciences. Therefore, from the Qur'anic perspective, the pursuit of scientific knowledge is integral to its message, and to set them apart as 'European or 'un-Islamic' could amount to a blatant distortion of its message.

It is therefore high time that the Muslim 'ulama abolish any division of universal knowledge that may still be in force in their religious institutions (madrassas), and incorporate the study of physical sciences and other universal faculties in the curriculum of the madrassas. Muslims must recognize that God alone is the fountainhead of all knowledge, and must heed that dividing the domain of knowledge between Godly and un-godly could be tantamount to ascribing partners to God – though God knows best.

Notes

1. 14:32, 16:12, 67:15.
2. The Qur'anic expression: yuhiqqul haqqa bi kalimatihi: 8:7, 10:82*, 42:24.
*[allahu also appears in this verse: yuhiqqullahu haqqa...]
3. "Islam, which is only half a dozen centuries younger than Christianity, created a long and brilliant civilization, which is responsible for much of the way we are today. ... When a few medieval monks were desperately trying to preserve what little they knew of Greco-Roman civilization, academies and universities flourished in the splendid cities of the Muslim lands" – Jonathan Bloom and Sheila Blair, *Islam, Empire of Faith*, BBC Series, UK 2001, p. 11.
4. "Science is the most momentous contribution of Arab [Muslim] civilization to the modern world; but its fruits were slow in ripening. Not until long after Moorish [Islamic] culture had sunk back into darkness did the giant to which it had given birth rise to its might. – Robert Briffault (1867-1948), *Making of Humanity*, p. 202, [Extracted from Muhammad Iqbal's *Reconstruction of Islamic thoughts*, 6th reprint, New Delhi 1998, p. 130.]
5. Abul Kalam Azad, *Tarjuman al-Qur'an*, 1931; reprint New Delhi 1989, Vol.1. p. 42,43.
6. Jamal Afghani, extracted from John L. Esposito's, *Islam in Transition*, New York 1982, p. 18.

7. Murad Hofmann, Islam the Alternative, UK 1993, p. 37.

[7 references]

11. The Universal Notion of Jihad

11.1. A broad definition based on Qur'anic illustrations

The word jihad (root, JHD) and its other derivatives are used in the Qur'an with a varying shade of meaning, which can be best understood by reflecting over the theme of the verses bearing JHD root words. Such an exercise, attempted below, bears out the following Qur'anic notion of jihad:

- On a personal level, jihad is a struggle to face the hardships and challenges of life with patience and determination, or to constantly endeavour to accomplish a lawful goal.
- On a community level, it is an ongoing struggle to overcome the social, moral, material, intellectual and spiritual deprivations of the time.

11.2. Jihad of the Prophet's followers in Mecca

During the Meccan period when the Muslims were small in number, and in no position to defend themselves, the Qur'an connotes the root JHD with a 'peaceful struggle' (25:52, 29:6, 29:69), as well as 'putting moral pressure' - such as, parents putting 'pressure' on their children (29:8, 31:15).

"Then do not obey the disbelievers, and wage against them (jahidhum) an intense struggle (jihadn kabir) with it [the Qur'an]" (25:52).

"Anyone who struggles (jahada), struggles (yujahidu) only for himself, for God is above any need of all Beings" (29:6).

"We have enjoined on humanity kindness to parents, but if they press (jahada) you to associate with Me that, of which you have no knowledge - do not obey them (in religion). (Remember,) you will (eventually) return to Me, and I will tell you what you did" (29:8).

"We will guide in Our paths those who strive (jahadu) for Us. Indeed God is with the compassionate " (29:69).

"If they press (jahada) you to associate with Me that of which you have no knowledge, do not listen to them (in religion)..." (31:15). (Full text in Ch. 17.4)

11.3. Jihad of the Medinite Muslims

In the Medinite period when the Muslims formed a growing community, the Qur'an commands the Prophet's followers to struggle with their wealth and their lives (8:72, 49:15, 61:11). This was suggestive of a call to take up arms, and predictably, the affluent among the Prophet's followers preferred to stay back (9:86).

“(As for) those who have believed, and have migrated and struggled (jahadu) with their wealth and their lives in God’s way, as well as those who sheltered and helped them – it is they who are the protectors of each other...” (8:72).

“When a Sura is revealed, (saying:) ‘Believe in God, and struggle (jahidu) with His Messenger,’ the affluent among them ask (exemption of) you (O Muhammad,) and say: ‘Let us (stay) with those who sit (back at home)’” (9:86).

“Only those are believers, who believe in God and His Messenger; then they do not doubt, and struggle (jahadu) in God's way with their wealth and their lives – it is they who are truthful” (49:15).

“You who believe, shall I lead you to a bargain that will save you from a severe punishment (61:10): that you believe in God and His Messenger, and struggle (tuhaidu) in God's way with your wealth and your lives; this will be good for you if you only knew” (61:11).

The community also continued its struggle (22:78), at times through physical labor, which was deemed lowly and undignified (9:79); and as the community grew, a bigger jihad was undertaken in God’s way (2:218, 5:35).

“(As for) those who believe, and those who have migrated and struggled (jahadu) in God’s way – it is they (who may) hope for God’s Mercy, for (indeed) God is Most Forgiving and Merciful” (2:218).

“You who believe, heed God, seek the means towards Him, and struggle (jahidu) in His way, that you may succeed” (5:35).

“Those [Hypocrites] who find fault with the believers that give charity voluntarily and with those who find nothing but their (physical) labor (juhдахum), and deride them - God will (return) them with derision, and there is a severe punishment for them” (9:79).

“Strive (jahidu) in God's (way) - a striving (jihad) due to Him. He has chosen you (to convey His message)...” (22:78). (Full text in Ch. 42.3)

To demonstrate the broader concept of jihad, the Prophet is reported to have told his followers after returning from a military campaign: “This day we have returned from a minor jihad to a major jihad,” and added that “by this he meant returning from an armed battle to the peaceful battle for self-control and betterment,” that is intellectual and spiritual regeneration and the eradication of social and moral vices.

11.4. The role of the greater struggle (jihadn Kabir)

The Qur’an was revealed at a time when the universal notions of liberty, justice and rights were yet to evolve. The rulers, feudal lords, tribal chiefs, and priests exercised unlimited power over common people, women were oppressed and had no legal rights,¹ while slaves formed an integral part of human society – to cite some of the major vices of the era. Islam stripped the ruling class of its power, empowered the oppressed class and eradicated the major vices of the society, and it achieved all this under the ambit of the greater jihad. Thus the early Islamic societies stood out as models

of justice, equity, compassion, tolerance and enlightenment; and this gravitated people of different faiths to its fold and led to the gradual spread of Islam and flowering of Islamic civilization. Since this raises the question what happened to the notion of the greater jihad, we would like to shed some light on it.

11.5. The demise of the notion of greater Jihad in Islam

The Qur'anic precepts were in direct conflict with the established norms of the era. In modern parlance, they were ultra-radical. Therefore, as often happens with such movements, reactionary elements became active soon after the Prophet's death (632). Within the next thirty years, the elective Caliphate was replaced by a dynastic rule (662). The dynastic rulers (Umayyads, 663-750, Abbasids, 750-1258) introduced old feudalistic values and set aside the Qur'anic dictates on social reform leading to gradual social and moral degeneration. The process of degeneration gained momentum with the transfer of power into the hands of the Tatars (13th century).² They "misinterpreted the Islamic doctrine of divine decree so as to frustrate human will and to choke every striving for action... principles which directly contradicted their religion and ran counter to its precepts, became the rule of the day, and were accepted without hesitation."³ This, with time, led to the erosion of the spirit of the greater jihad, and reduced the faith of Islam to "the Islamic ritual of prayer, fasting and pilgrimage, as well as some sayings, which have been, however, perverted by allegorical interpretations."⁴

This virtually brings us up-to-date on the status of the greater jihad in Islam.

Notes

1. Roman law treated women as the possession of their husbands who, under extreme circumstances, exercised the right of life and death over them.
2. Over a period of some forty years (1220-1258), the Mongol hordes fanned out westwards from Mongolia, and completely destroyed the various domains of Islamic civilization that had flourished in the eastern regions of the Islamic Caliphate, across the central planes of Asia. After the surrender of Baghdad, the capital of the Caliphate, to Halagu Khan (1258), the Mongols virtually occupied the conquered Islamic lands. However, before long they embraced Islam and became known as Tatars. The faith won with peace what its soldiers had lost in war.
3. Quotation from Muhammad Abduh, extracted from Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, English translation by Ismail Ragi, 8th edition, Karachi 1989, p. 584
4. Ibid., Quotation from Muhammad Abduh, p. 585.

[4 references]

12. Non-Violence and Defensive Warfare

12.1. Qur'anic model of non-violence

The Qur'an illustrates a model of non-violence in its last revealed Sura, al-Maidah in the following passage:

“Tell them with truth the story of the two sons of Adam: they offered a sacrifice; it was accepted from one of them and not accepted from the other, who said (to his brother): ‘I will surely kill you.’ (The brother) replied: ‘God accepts (offering) only from the heedful (muttaqin) (5:27), and even if you stretch out your hand against me to kill me, I shall not stretch out my hand against you to kill you for I fear God, the Lord of the Worlds (28). I would rather you bring upon yourself my sin as well as your own sin and become an inmate of hellfire, and that is the reward of the oppressors’ (29). The (selfish) soul of the other prompted him to kill his brother: he murdered him, and found himself among the losers” (5:30).

The Qur'an concludes its foregoing story with the following moral:

“For that reason We decreed for the Children of Israel that whoever kills any person - unless it be (in punishment for) murder or causing corruption on earth - it shall be, as if he had killed all humanity, and whoso saves a life, it shall be, as if he had saved the life of all humanity...” (5:32).

12.2. Resistance to persecution

As suggested in the underlined exception clause of the foregoing verse (5:32), the Qur'an recognizes the need for defending oneself against persecution. Thus one of the passages from the late Mecca period declares:

“The requital (jaza') for an affliction is a similar affliction, yet one who forgives and reconciles, his reward is with God for God does not love the oppressors (42:40). And whoever defends himself after being oppressed – it is they who are in no way (to blame) (41). The way (to blame) is only against those who oppress people and wreak terror (yabghyuna) on earth - it is they who (await) a grievous punishment (42). Yet anyone who is patient and forgives - it is they (who show) determination (in handling) matters” (42:43).

“And if you take your turn (to punish), then return with what you were made to bear; but if you are patient, it will certainly be best for those who are patient (16:126). So be patient, and your patience is only through God, and do not grieve over them, nor feel depressed by their plots” (16:127).

12.3. Permission to fight against oppression

During the 12-year span of the Meccan period (610-622) the Qur'an repeatedly asked the Prophet and his followers to endure oppression in a non-violent manner. But this proved to be of no avail, and eventually the Prophet and his followers had to abandon their home and exile themselves to Medina to avoid persecution (622). It was around this time – the first year of the Medinite period (623) that the Qur'an gives them permission to fight:

“Permission (to fight) is given to those who have been wronged and God is indeed Able to grant them victory (22:39): those who have been driven from their homelands unlawfully – only because they say: ‘Our Lord is God!’ Had God not driven people, some (communities) by others – monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques in which God’s name is regularly proclaimed, would have been demolished.(Remember,) God helps those who help His (cause). Indeed God is Powerful, Almighty” (22:40).¹

12.4. Exhortations to Fight An Attacking Army

As the upcoming Muslim community in Medina came under repeated attacks from its powerful enemies, the Qur’an tutored it to fight the invaders. Thus in the valley of Badr, when a motley crowd of the Prophet’s followers faced a powerful Quraysh army (624), the revelation prepares, encourages, reassures and inspires the Muslims to fight (Notes 48, 50, 53, 67/Ch. 3). In the immediate aftermath of Badr, when the Quraysh were preparing to attack Medina to avenge their defeat, the Qur’an declares:

“Say to those (O Muhammad,) who deny (the revelation) that if they desist (from attacking you), their past (violence) will be forgiven; but if they revert (to hostility), the example of the ancient people is already set (for them to take warning) (8:38). Fight them until there is no more persecution, and the religion (din) of God is fully established; but if they desist (from fighting), surely God will be Observant of what they do” (8:39).

The ensuing period saw the Mednite Muslims fighting against powerful armies at Uhd (625) and Trench (627). Later, at Hdaybiyah (628), an unarmed company of pilgrims, comprising practically the entire adult Muslim population at that time, risked annihilation at the hands of a mighty Quraysh army camping nearby. Each of these events found the Muslims in precarious condition, from moment to moment, and for days, and sometimes months together, as their enemies were overwhelmingly powerful, militarily poised to wipe them out. The revelation therefore gives them clear instructions to fight, even if it was to be in the traditionally sacred months or in the sacred precincts of Mecca, but urges them to keep within limits (2:190), and to cease fighting when there was no more persecution, and the din of God was established, or when their enemy desisted from fighting (2:193).

“Fight in God’s way those who fought against you, but do not exceed limits. Surely God does not love those who exceed limits (2:190). Kill them wherever you find them, and drive them out from where they drove you out - for persecution is worse than slaughter; but do not fight them in the precincts of the Sacred Mosque until they (come to) fight you in it. But if they do fight you, kill them: this is the recompense for the disbelievers (191). But if they desist (remember,) God is Most Forgiving and Merciful (192); and fight them until there is no more persecution, and the religion (din) of God is established - but if they desist, let there be no hostility except with the oppressors” (2:193).

12.5. Fighting Is Condemned but Justified On Specific Grounds

Imbued with the virtues of mercy and kindness enjoined by the Qur'an, some among the Prophet's followers disliked fighting. The Qur'an warns them that their judgment might be fallacious (2:216), and argues that while fighting was bad, religious persecution and forcing people into exile was even worse (2:217, 4:75).

“Fighting is prescribed for you though it may be abhorrent to you. But you may dislike a thing, which is good for you, while you may like something, which is bad for you. (Remember,) God Knows (what is good and what is bad for you), but you do not know (2:216). They ask you (O Muhammad,) about fighting in the sacred month. Say: ‘Fighting in it is a grave (offence), but graver still before God is to obstruct God's way, to deny Him, and (to deny access to) the Sacred Mosque and drive away its people - for persecution is worse than slaughter.’ They will never cease fighting you until they turn you back from your faith, if they could just do so. And if any of you do turn back from your faith and die in disbelief, their deeds will be of no avail in this life or in the hereafter, and they will be inmates of hellfire and they will remain there” (2:217).

“And why should you not fight in the cause of God and of the weak (and oppressed) – men, women, and children, whose cry is: ‘Our Lord, rescue us from this town, whose people are oppressors; and provide us a protector from You; and provide us a helper from You” (4:75).

It is clear from the foregoing Qur'anic illustrations that the Qur'an justified fighting on three major grounds: defence of faith, persecution and exile.

12.6. The Ultimate Goal Is Peaceful Coexistence

The Qur'an fully clarifies itself in a passage dating from the late Medinite period that asks the Muslims to be just and virtuous to those who did not fight against them over religion, nor expelled them from their homelands (60:8), and reminds them that their enemies could eventually turn their friends (60:7), thus predicting the eventual friendship of the Medinite Muslim community with their Meccan foes. The revelation also clarifies that it forbade the Muslims to befriend only those who fought against them over religion, and expelled them from their homelands and helped (others) in their expulsion (60:9).

“It may be that God will bring about love between you and those of them you (now) regard as your enemies. (Remember,) God is Able (to do anything) and God is Most Forgiving and Merciful (60:7). God does not forbid you to be virtuous (tabarru) and just to those who did not fight you over religion, nor drove you from your homelands. Indeed, God loves the just (8). God only forbids you to befriend those who fought against you over religion, and expelled you from your homelands, and backed (others) in your expulsion; and whoever befriends them – it is they who are unjust” (60:9).

The opening injunction of this passage is a general reminder to all warring factions for all times of the prospect of an eventual reconciliation. The Qur'an therefore cannot approve of any chemical, biological, or atomic warfare because their injurious effects can

outlast the war, and only intensify the enmity even after peace has been restored. Likewise, destruction of civil amenities, and planting of mines and booby traps or any form of explosives that threaten the life of ordinary citizens after the end of hostilities is not permitted by the Qur'an.

12.7. The Qur'an does not approve of violent acts

All Qur'anic verses relating to fighting came during the Medinite period, when the Muslims had formed an integrated community under the unified leadership of the Prophet, and were in a position to defending themselves in an organized and politically responsible manner. This was different from responding violently against injustice in an individual capacity or a fragmented manner. The Qur'anic Meccan period exhortations on jihad (Ch. 11.2) are also not supportive of any recourse to violence in an individual or splintered manner, when faced with corporate oppression. Accordingly, one of its verses describes goodness (non-violence) as a means to win the heart of the oppressors:

“Goodness (Hasanat) and evil (sayy'iat)* are not equal. Therefore, return the latter with that which is good, and then the one between you and whom there was enmity will indeed become your close friend (41:34). None is granted this except those who are patient; and none is granted this except the very fortunate” (41:35). *[The word has a broad shade of meaning - from minor lapses to abominable deeds.]

Moreover, the Qur'an does not furnish any example of a prophet raising arms against his opponents, or inciting his people into violence: one after another, the prophets are shown to have sworn to endure the injustices of their people until God made the truth manifest.

In sum, the Qur'anic message enjoins a peaceful and non-violent approach in the face of corporate oppression. It however allows politically responsible warfare under a duly vested authority on three grounds as mentioned above: i) for religious freedom and against ii) persecution and iii) forced exile. However, Islamic jurists have interpreted the Qur'anic message on resisting persecution to justifying violent rebellion, if persecution is unbearable, unrelenting, unending and endemic.

12.8. Read in Isolation, Verses On Contemporary Battles Can Be Misleading

Given the historical dimension of the Qur'anic references to fighting, reading a verse in isolation and out of context can be misleading and dangerous. Thus, for example, verse 9:5 reads:

“But when the sacred months are past, kill the pagans wherever you find them, and capture them, surround them, and watch for them in every lookout; but if they repent and establish regular prayer and give charity, then let them go their way, for God is Most Forgiving and Merciful” (9:5).

Read out of context, this is a call to take up arms against all pagans until they embraced faith. However, the very next verse states:

“If anyone of the pagans seeks your protection* (O Muhammad), grant him protection, so that he may hear the words of God; and then deliver him to a place,

safe for him. That is because they are a people without knowledge” (9:6) *[Lit., ‘seeks to become your neighbour.’]

Together 9:5/6 clarify that these verses relate to an ongoing state of war between the Muslims and the pagans, and that the instruction in 9:5 was in relation to those pagan Arabs (the Quraysh) who mounted an aggression against the Muslims, and was not meant for those who sought peace. The people who sought peace were to be given protection, and were not to be coerced to embrace Islam, as clearly explained by Muhammad Asad on the strength of al-Razi.²

12.9. Fighting against the People of the Book

One of the verses of Surah al-Tawbah declares:

“Fight those from among the People of the Book (Christians and Jews) who do not have faith in God, nor in the Last Day, and do not consider forbidden what God and His messenger have forbidden, and do not acknowledge the religion of truth - until they pay tribute (Jizyah) willingly as subjects” (9:29).

This is the only verse in the Qur’an, which gives an unqualified instruction to fight (qatilu) the People of the Book (Christians and Jews). Its directive, however, must be comprehended in the historical context of the revelation: the verse was revealed in the course of Tabuk expedition and enabled the Prophet to form peace alliances with the Christian and Jewish settlements of the southern regions of Byzantium without any military engagement - as noted earlier (Ch. 3.12). The question arises: does the verse constitute a Qur’anic injunction for all times? The Qur’an has the answer.

The inclusion of the Prophet in the verse lends it an existential character. If perpetual warfare was intended, fighting (qatala) might have been a compulsory duty for all Muslims for all times. But neither the Prophet, nor his immediate successors imposed any such condition on the community. Thus, from early decades of Islam, the Muslim soldiers were paid for their services. Hence, the Qur’anic foregoing instruction to fight against the People of the Book must be context specific, and cannot therefore be regarded as a Qur’anic injunction for perpetual warfare.

12.10. The broader notion of Jizyah

The Qur’an refers to the term Jizyah only in the foregoing verse (9:29). It uses the root JZY across its text with the connotation of a reward for good deeds, or a just recompense for something good or evil.³ As recorded in the traditions, jizyah was used as an exemption tax, which all able bodied non-Muslims were required to pay for their exemption from military services. Accordingly, women, under age and old men, sick or crippled men, and monks and priests were exempt from this tax. Those non-Muslims who volunteered military services were also exempt.⁴ This apart, jizyah also served as a balancing tax - as a partial substitute for the Zakat that Muslims were required to pay towards public funds. Thus, in effect, jizyah was a combination of welfare levy, and exemption tax. Through the medieval ages, the Western scholarship has ignored this social and political equation and presented jizyah as somewhat of a punitive tax on a vanquished community. However, historical facts dating from early decades of Islam demonstrate that the vanquished communities were indeed happy to pay the jizyah, as it

gave them such protection and security, as they had never seen before.⁵ The concept of jizyah was however abused with the forging of a document in the fifth century of Islam, and many vanquished Christians communities were subjected to whole range of restrictions.⁶ But that is history, the course of which is set by political ambitions, clash of interest, and power equations. This summary focuses at the Qur'anic notion of jizyah as illustrated by the Qur'an and applied in the early years of Islam, and therefore historical developments and distortions are excluded.

Notes

1. The underlined stipulation underscores the Qur'anic sanction of religious freedom, and complements the Qur'anic message on religious tolerance (Ch. 9.2).
2. Muhammad Asad, Message of the Qur'an, Gibraltar 1980, Chap. 9, Note 11.
3. Illustration on the Qur'anic use of the root JZY:
 - Jaza' (32:17, 34:37, 39:34), yajzi (24:38, 30:45), yujzo (25:75), najzi (29:7): a reward for good deeds
 - Yujza (6:160) : a recompense or a just award
 - tujza (92:19): a reward in return for a favour
 - jaza' (4:93, 42:40), yujza (40:40), yujzo (6:120): a recompense for an evil deed
4. Thomas W. Arnold, Preaching of Islam, 2nd revised edition 1913, reprinted Delhi 1990, p. 61.
5. Here are some historical glimpses extracted from the works of Philip K. Hitti, and Thomas Arnold.
 - i. The terms of surrender of Jerusalem and Damascus to Khalid Ibn al-Walid and Caliph Umar demonstrate that jizyah was collected in lieu of security of life, property, and the churches of the dhimmis (people of other faiths under covenant of protection), and for the protection of their city walls against any aggressor. The principle was so noble, and its application was so honest, that many Christian settlements looked forward to their integration with the Islamic state. - Philip K. Hitti, History of the Arabs, 1937, 10th edition, London 1993, p. 152.
 - ii. In the face of an imminent aggression from Emperor Heraclius, Caliph Umar's General, Abu Ubaidah issued a proclamation to returning the money (jizyah) that was collected from the Christian subjects of the conquered cities of Syria, fearing his inability to protect them. The order was put into effect and enormous sums were paid back to the people out of the state treasury, so much so that the Christians called down blessings upon the Muslims, saying: "May God give you rule over us again, and make you victorious over the Romans; had it been they, they would not have given us back anything, but would have taken all that

remained with us.”- Thomas W. Arnold, Preaching of Islam, 2nd revised edition, 1913, reprinted Delhi 1990, p. 61.

6. Thomas W. Arnold, Preaching of Islam, 2nd revised edition, 1913, reprinted Delhi 1990, p. 56-58.

[6 References]

13. The Qur'an and The People Of The Book

13.1. Historical context of inter-faith relation

The Christians and Jews had remained sympathetic to the Prophet through his early years in Medina as he claimed to be preaching the true faith of their prophets and posed no political threat to either of them. So the revelation had no complaints against them. However, as he emerged the civil and political head of Medina and changed the direction of prayer¹ from Jerusalem to the Ka'ba signalling a separate religious identity of his followers, the Jews grew hostile to him and conspired against him with his Meccan foes. The tone of the Qur'an also changed (Ch. 3.6). However, the verses revealed in the concluding phase of the Qur'an are of utmost significance, as they were not specific to any context and represented the culmination of the Qur'anic message. It is therefore important to note that a passage (5:44-47) from the last revealed chapter (Surah al-Maidah) refers to the Torah and the Gospel as revealed scriptures, and thus acknowledges the Jews and Christians as people of faith. However, the Qur'an asks them not to twist the message sent down to them, and to be guided by them.

“Indeed We have revealed the Torah (to Moses) with guidance and Light in it. The prophets who submitted themselves (to God), judged thereby those who were Jewish, and (so did) the rabbis and scholars, who were entrusted with the preservation of God's Book of which they were witnesses. So do not fear people but fear Me; and do not sell My messages for a petty price. (Remember,) those who do not judge by what God has revealed – it is they who are the deniers (of God) (5:44). We prescribed in it for them, a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and wounds like for like. But whoever (forgives as a gesture of) charity, this is the expiation for him. (Remember,) those who do not judge by what God has revealed – it is they who are unjust” (5:45).

“We caused Jesus, the Son of Mary, to follow in their footsteps confirming what was there before him of the Torah, and We gave him the Gospel with guidance and Light in it, confirming what was there before him of the Torah, and as a guidance and a lesson for the heedful (muttaqin) (5:46). Let the people of the Gospel judge by what God has revealed in it. (Remember,) those who do not judge by what God has revealed, it is they who are perverse” (5:47).

13.2. The Qur'an approves of some of the People of the Book

The Qur'an acknowledges that some among the People of Book are righteous and heedful (muttaqin) (3:113-115/Ch. 8.1), attests the honesty and integrity of others (3:75, 3:199) and describes them as a moderate people (5:66).

“Among the People of the Book is one, that if you entrusted him with a fortune, he would return it to you, while there is among them (yet) another, that if you entrusted him with a tiny gold coin, he would not return it to you unless you constantly chased him. This is because they say: ‘It is not our way to (deal with) these unlettered folks.’ They are telling a lie against God while they realize it” (3:75).

“There are among the People of the Book those who believe in God, and in the revelation sent to you (O Muhammad,) and in the revelation sent to them. They fear God, and do not sell God's messages for a petty price: it is they who have their reward with their Lord. Indeed God is Swift in reckoning” (3:199).

“If only the People of the Book had believed and heeded (Our message), We would have erased their evils from them and admitted them to gardens of bliss (5:65). If they had only upheld the Torah, and the Gospel, and whatever was revealed to them, they would have availed of all the blessings of life*. There is a community of moderates among them, but vile indeed is what most of them do” (5:66). [Lit., ‘from above them and below them.’]

13.3. On dealing with the People of the Book

The Qur’an calls upon Muslims to debate with the People of the Book in the most beautiful and logical manner (16:125, 29:46), except with those of them who oppress others (29:46).

“Invite (all) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and pleasant counselling, and debate with them in the best manner. Indeed God knows best who is straying from His path, and He knows best the (rightly) guided” (16:125).

“And do not debate with the People of the Book, but in a way that is better (than theirs), except with those of them who oppress (others); and say ‘We believe in what was revealed to us, and what was revealed to you, for our God and your God is One (and the same), and it is to Him that we (all) submit (Muslimun)’” (29:46).

The Qur’an however censures the Christians and Jews for giving too much authority to the clergy (9:31), and for their claims to exclusivity (2:111, 2:135).

“They say: ‘None shall enter the garden, unless he is a Jew or a Christian.’ These are their desires. Say: ‘Bring your proofs, if indeed you are truthful’” (2:111).

“They say: ‘Be Jews, or Christians and you will be (rightly) guided.’ You say: ‘Nay, (we belong to) the creed of Abraham, the *true (believer in One God), and he was not among those who associate (others with God)’” (2:135). [Lit., ‘who turned away from all false notions about God’.]

“They take their priests and their monks for lords instead of God, as well as Christ, the Son of Mary, though they were commanded to serve none, but One God. (Indeed), there is no god but He - unparalleled is He in Glory beyond all that they associate with Him” (9:31).

In the immediate context of the revelation, the Qur'an cautions the Muslims that the People of the book would never be happy with them, unless they followed their religion (2:120). Accordingly, it refrains them from allying with those of the People of the Book and disbelievers who ridiculed their religion (5:51, 5:57); and reminds them that their real allies were no other than God and the Prophet, and the fellow believers (5:55).

“Neither the Jews, nor the Christians will be satisfied with you (O Muhammad,) unless you follow their creed. Say: ‘Indeed, the guidance from God is (true) guidance’, and if you were to follow their whims, after what has reached you of the knowledge, you will not have any protector or helper against God” (2:120).

“You who believe, do not take the Jews and Christians for your allies (awliya’)*: they are but the allies (Auliya’)* of one another, and any of you who allies with them, becomes, one of them. Indeed God does not guide the unjust people” (5:51). *[The word is the plural form of wali, which is also rendered elsewhere as ‘protector’, ‘friend’ as fitting the text.]

“Your only ally (Wali) is God, and His Messenger, and those who believe: those who keep up prayer, and give charity, and bow down (in prayer) (5:55). Therefore, whoso allies with God and His Messenger and (with) those who believe, (belong to) the party of God, and will be victorious (56). (Therefore) you who believe, do not take as your allies those, who take your religion for a joke and a sport, be they among those whom the Book was revealed before you, or among the disbelievers; but heed God, if you are (truly) faithful (57). When you call to prayer, they take it as mockery and amusement. This is because, they are a people who do not use their reason” (5:58).

13.4. There is no Qur’anic basis to hate Christians and Jews or any community

The verses 5:51, 5:55/56 above are often cited in isolation and out of historical context to imply that for all times, the Muslims should not take the Jews and Christians as their friends or allies. But the Qur’anic pronouncements under 13.2/3 above and its broader message on universal brotherhood of humanity (Ch. 9) rule out any such notion.

Moreover, the Qur’an offers further illustrations to leave no ambiguity on this matter.

In the context of the revelation, the Qur’an forbade the Muslims to ally with only those who fought against them for religion, and expelled them from their homelands, and helped (others) in their expulsion (60:9/Ch. 12.5). Accordingly, it did not forbid Muslims to be virtuous and just to those who did not fight against them for religion, nor drove them from their homelands (60:8/Ch. 12.5). In its concluding phase, the Qur’an allows Muslim men to marry Christian and Jewish women (5:5/Ch. 32.3), and thus make them their benefactors or allies. (9:71/Ch. 33.6).

Thus, any generalization of the noted Qur’anic verses to foment hatred against contemporary Christians and Jews will be tantamount to distorting the message of the Qur’an. To the critic however, this may sound apologetic, as it contradicts the ground reality of the present day Muslim world, where anti-Semitic sentiments run high. It may therefore be useful to clarify this by drawing on modern secular scholarship. Thus to quote Karen Armstrong:²

“Anti-Semitism is a Christian vice. Hatred of the Jews became marked in the Muslim world after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. It is significant that Muslims were compelled to import anti-Jewish myths from Europe and translate into Arabic such virulently anti-Semitic texts as the Protocols of the elders of Zion, because they had no such tradition of their own. Because of this new hostility towards the Jewish people, some Muslims now quote the passages in the Qur’an that refer to Muhammad’s struggle with the three rebellious Jewish tribes to justify their prejudice. By taking these verses out of context, they have distorted both the message of the Qur’an and the attitude of the Prophet, who himself felt no such hatred of Judaism.”

Notes

1. 2:143, [Note 98/Ch.3.]
2. Karen Armstrong, Islam, A short history, New York, 2002, p. 21/22.

[2 reference]

14. Only God Knows the Rightly Guided

Since the Qur’an calls for orienting oneself to God (Ch. 7), true faith and intent are very important for earning God’s approval for all our acts and deeds. Accordingly, the Qur’an repeatedly asserts that only God knows who all are rightly guided (16:125/Ch. 13.3; 6:117, 17:84).¹

“Indeed your Lord knows best who is straying from His path, and He knows best the rightly guided” (6:117). [The underlined statement is repeated in the verses 28:56, 28:85 and 68:7.]

“Say, ‘Everyone acts according to what suits him, but God knows best who is guided on the (right) path’” (17:84).

14.1. None Can Claim Spiritual Superiority

Many so-called ‘spiritual guides’ claim spiritual supremacy over fellow Muslims by citing the verse 42:23 (Note 131/Ch. 3.10). This verse dating from the Meccan period has a very clear message: the Prophet is asking his close friends and relatives (Qurba) from among his hostile audience, to extend him the love and respect that he expected from them:

“...I do not ask you any payment for this except love from (fi) the relatives (al-Qurba)...”

However, if the particle fi is rendered as ‘to’, instead of ‘from’ the verse can be read as a call to all Muslims to show love and respect ‘to’ the Prophet’s relatives and descendants. While technically, such a rendering may not be wrong, the Qur’an does not offer any illustration to support any claim to exclusivity or spiritual supremacy by the Prophet’s descendants. In fact, the Qur’an’s clear illustrations rule out any such notion:

- i. Over a score of Qur'anic verses tell us that neither the Prophet Muhammad pbuh, nor any other prophet expected any payment or special favour from their people for themselves or their descendants.
- ii. Some verses state this in the affirmative:² "...I do not ask of you any payment..."; "...You do not ask them for any payment (Ajara)...".
- iii. Others put this in the interrogative: "Do you (O Prophet) ask them for a payment (Ajara)...?" ³ "Do you (O Prophet) ask them for a recompense (Kharaja) ...?"⁴
- iv. Not a single verse in the Qur'an is suggestive of a prophet asking for a payment or a special favour from his people for himself or his descendants.
- v. There are verses⁵ affirming that the Prophets Noah, Hud, Salih, Lot, Shu'ayb did not expect any payment or special favour from their people for themselves or their descendants.
- vi. Through scores of verses (Ch. 16), the Qur'an makes it absolutely clear that every soul, whether male or female will be judged by God on the basis of faith, and deeds.
- vii. The Qur'an further declares that no one can intercede with God, except as He Wills.⁶ This spirit is also reflected in God's disapproval of Prophet Noah's prayer for the forgiveness of his pagan son.⁷

From all these illustrations, it is absolutely clear that there is no Qur'anic basis to extending any special favour or according any spiritual superiority to an individual just because he or she is, or claims to be, a descendent of the Prophet, and that there is absolutely no Qur'anic basis for anyone, no matter his line of descent from the Prophet, to claim intercession with God on anyone's behalf as a spiritual guide.

Note

28:56, 28:85, 53:30, 68:7. 6:90, 12:104, 25:57, 34:47, 38:86. 52:40, 68:46. 23:72. 10:72, 11:29/51, 26:109/127/145/164/180. 2:255, 10:3. 11:46.

[7 references]

15. The Prophet As A Role Model

"Certainly, you have in God's Messenger, an excellent model (Uswatun Hasanah) for anyone who looks forward (with hope and fear) to God and the Last Day, and remembers God a lot" (33:21).

Most commentators agree that the verse relates to the noble principles and exemplary moral conduct and behaviour of the Prophet that distinguished him from the rest of his community (Ch. 3.16). The question that keeps the Muslim community divided is, how best they can follow the Prophet's example.

Traditionally orthodoxy has insisted on imitating the Prophet's physical habits and pursuits including his daily rituals, such as: washing and bathing, brushing of teeth, clipping of nails, grooming of beard and hair, manners of eating, drinking, sitting, wearing of clothes and turban etc. as recorded in the traditions (Hadith literature).

The Qur'an however makes it absolutely clear that the Prophet's mission was to convey God's message¹ with clarity;² and to deliver humanity out of darkness into Light.³ The Qur'an has also been unequivocal about its own singular role as guidance for the believers in God,⁴ the compassionate,⁵ the heedful (Muttaqi),⁶ and for humanity at large.⁷ Furthermore, the Qur'an has projected the Prophet as a mortal human being like others, though inspired with the revelation.⁸ Therefore, as the majority of Muslim scholars advocate, Muslims ought to take guidance from the Qur'an, while emulating the Prophet's noble principles and exemplary moral conduct and behaviour. His companions must have attempted to emulate him in this spirit, and therefore they earned God's accolade as 'the best community (*Khairah Ummatin*)'. (3:110/Ch. 29.1). Thus they succeeded in founding a vibrant and tolerant civilization that preserved the intellectual heritage of Hellenic, Greek and Roman civilizations (thanks to massive translation undertakings), made remarkable contribution to the advancement of knowledge and progress of civilization, and most importantly, allowed the native religions and civilizations to survive and flourish in the lands they conquered. Thus Aramic is still spoken in Syria, near Damascus, the capital of the first Islamic dynasty (the Umayyads) and the native faith-communities have flourished in India and Spain – to give just a few examples.

The orthodox quote the Qur'anic oft-repeated exhortations to love, obey and follow the Prophet⁹ as an indication to follow his normative behavior (Sunna). The Qur'an, however, does not connect the generic termsunnah to the Prophet but uses it to refer to universal laws and patterns in both physical and moral realms. As there is a subtle but sharp distinction between the concepts of Sunna of the Prophet and the Hadith literature, the matter needs clarification to avoid any confusion in the interpretation of Islamic message. We have taken this up in the enclosure (Encl. 4) to avoid distraction from our main theme.

Notes

1. 5:99, 7:158 13:40, 42:48. [Note 200/Ch. 3]
2. 5:92, 16:82, 24:54 [Note 201/Ch. 3]
3. 14:1, 57:9. [Note 202/Ch. 3]
4. 7:52, 16:64, 27:77. [Note 12/Preface]
5. 31:3. [Note 13/Preface]
6. 2:2, 3:138, 24:34. [Note 14/Preface]
7. 2:185, 10:108, 14:52. [Note 15/Preface]
8. 3:144, 18:110, 41:6. [Note 196/Ch. 3]
9. 3:31, 3:32, 3:132, 4:69, 4:80, 5:56, 5:92, 24:52, 24:54, 24:56, 64:12.

16. Good Deeds

In the early years of the Medinite period, 'not disobeying any bidding to do the good (ma'ruf)', was regarded as one of the pillars of faith.¹ But as the revelation was underway, it was excluded from the list of pillars as conceivably the pagan Arabs identified the new faith with this core requirement, and hardly needed any reminding during conversion, as we have reviewed later (Ch. 44.1). Thus in a way, this pillar has remained latent since the early years of Islam.

The doing of good deeds is by far the most repeated of Qur'anic exhortations - which appears either singularly, or in combination with prayer and, or other commandments. The significance of good deeds can be best appreciated by the fact the Qur'an describes it as a common criterion for divine approval for all people regardless of faith (Ch. 9.4) and accordingly, the Qur'an asks Muslims to "vie (with each other) in goodness" (2:148).

"Everyone has a goal to which he turns: so vie (with each other) in goodness, (and remember,) wherever you may be, God will bring you all together. Indeed God is Capable of everything" (2:148).

The Qur'an's repeated reference to good deeds as distinct from purely religious obligations, such as salat, Zakat, hajj and fasting; and its exhortations to people of other faiths to do good deeds clearly indicate that the Qur'an treats all those deeds as good, which bring about material good to human beings.

16.1. Verses on Good Deeds from early Meccan Suras 2

"Indeed, the heedful (Muttaqin) shall be in shades and springs (77:41), and (will have) fruits as they desire (42). (It will be said to them): 'Eat and drink to (your) satisfaction for what you did (43). Thus do We reward the compassionate'" (77:44).

"By this City of Security (95:3), Indeed We have created human being in the finest model (ahsani taqwim) (4), but then We debased him to the lowest of the low (5) - except those who believe and do good deeds: theirs is a reward unending" (95:6).

"Man is indeed at a loss (103:2), except those who believe and do good deeds, and exhort to truth, and exhort to patience" (103:3).

16.2. Verses from mid and late Meccan Suras 3

"Those who believe and do good deeds and feel humble before their Lord – it is they (who are) the inmates of the garden, and they will remain there" (11:23).

"This Qur'an guides to that (which is) upright, and gives good news to the believers who do good deeds that theirs is a great reward" (17:9).

“He will reward those who believe and do good deeds: it is these that shall have forgiveness and a noble provision” (34:4).

“You will see (O Muhammad,) wrongdoers fearing on account of what they have earned, and it must befall them; and those who believe and do good deeds shall be in the meadows of gardens: they shall have anything they please from their Lord - that will be a great grace (42:22). That is the good news God gives to those servants who believe and do good deeds. Say: ‘I do not ask you any payment for this except love from (fi) the relatives (al-qurba). (Remember,) anyone who earns any good, We add goodness to it. Indeed God is Most Forgiving and Appreciative’” (42:23).

This particle fi in the verse has been often conveniently but misleadingly rendered as ‘to’ instead of ‘from’ thereby implying that Muslims should extend love and affection to the Prophet’s relatives at all times. However, for Muslims there is nothing wrong in doing so, though there is no Qur’anic injunction to do so (Ch. 14.1).

16.3. Verses from Medinite Suras 4

The substance and tone of the revelation had changed with the Prophet’s change in role from a mere preacher, talking to a hostile audience in Mecca, to the head of a community and the lawgiver in Medina, but it maintained its emphasis on good deeds. Thus one of the verses (24:55) from a mid-Medinite Sura (al-Nur), addressed to the Prophet’s struggling followers promises an eventual success and security in lieu of the fear in which they had been living for so long, but makes its promise contingent to their doing of good deeds. It was also during this period that the Qur’an declares the doing of good deeds as a common criterion for divine approval for all believers, including the Christians and Jews (Ch. 9.4).

“As for those who believe and do good deeds, He will grant them their reward in full. (Remember,) God does not love the wrongdoers” (3:57).

“God has promised those who believe and do good deeds that they shall have forgiveness and a great reward” (5:9).

“God will admit those who believe and do good deeds into gardens with streams running past. Surely God does anything He wishes” (22:14).

“God has promised those of you who believe and do good deeds that He will make them successors on earth, as He made successors before them, and that He will establish for them their religion which He has chosen for them, and that He will change their (state of) fear into (one of) security: they shall serve Me (alone) and not associate (others) with Me - and whoever is ungrateful after this, it is they who are perverse” (24:55).

16.4. Cardinal Significance Of Good Deeds In Islam

The foregoing verses on good deeds, and scores of others listed in the Notes, drawn from across the revelation calendar, clearly indicate the cardinal significance of good deeds in Islam. The primacy of good deeds in the Qur’an can be best demonstrated by its following key illustrations:

i) In its sole verse on the virtues of the Prophet's companions, the Qur'an promises divine forgiveness and reward to only "those of them who believe and do good deeds."

"Muhammad is the Messenger of God, and those who are with him are firm against the disbelievers, and compassionate among themselves. You will see them kneeling down and prostrating themselves, seeking God's blessing and approval. Their marks are on their faces due to the effect of prostration. Their parable in the Torah, and their parable in the Gospel is that of a crop-seed that sends forth its sprout, and then strengthens it, and grows strong, and stands firmly on its stem to the farmers' admiration, enraging the disbelievers at them. God has promised those of them who believe and do good deeds, forgiveness and a great reward" (48:29).

ii) God's promise to the wounded followers of the Prophet who responded to his call to chasing the victorious Quraysh army on their way home (to Mecca) from Uhud was specifically for "those among them who did good and remained heedful (Wattaqu)" (Note 84/Ch.3).

iii) Its sole verse on the spiritual merit of those who were first to emigrate from Mecca to Medina, distinguishes them as the doers of good deeds:

"As for the vanguard (of Islam): the first of those who emigrated (muhajirin) and those who supported them (Ansar), and (also) those who follow them in good deeds – God is pleased with them, and they are pleased with Him: He has prepared for them gardens with streams flowing past, to remain there for ever: that is the supreme triumph" (9:100).

Finally, it is noteworthy that in a foreign rendition such as the foregoing, the Qur'anic exhortations on good deeds appear repetitive, but in the Arabic Qur'an, each verse occupies its distinctive place in the text and displays its own linguistic subtlety, internal assonance, and rhythmic flow and movement, which simply cannot be captured in translation, and therefore the Qur'an cannot be blamed for any repetitiveness.

NOTES

1. Sahih al-Bukhari, English translation by Mohsin Khan, New Delhi 1984, Vol.1, Acc. 17.
2. 84:25, 85:11, 99:7/8.
3. 7:42, 10:4, 10:9, 10:26, 13:29, 14:23, 18:2, 18:30, 18:107/110, 19:59/60, 19:76, 19:96, 20:75, 20:112, 21:94, 28:67, 28:80, 29:7, 29:9, 29:58, 30:14/15, 30:44/45, 31:8, 32:19, 34:37, 35:7, 38:28, 39:10, 39:33/34, 40:58, 41:8, 41:33, 41:46, 42:26, 45:15, 45:21, 45:30, 67:2.
4. 2:25, 4:57, 4:122, 4:173, 22:23, 22:50, 22:56, 22:77, 47:2, 47:12, 98:7.

[4 references]

17. Social Responsibility

17.1. Qur'anic warning against selfishness

In some of its early passages (Suras 89 and 90),¹ the Qur'an warns its audience of their innate selfishness, their inordinate greed for riches, their eagerness to consume their inheritance, and their lack of concern for the poor.

"As for man, whenever his Lord tries him by honouring him, and bestowing favour on him, he says: 'My Lord has honoured me (89:15). But when He tries him, and restricts his provision for him, he says: 'My Lord has disgraced me' (16). Nay! But you do not respect the orphan (17), nor do you encourage (others) to feed the poor (18) and you consume inheritance with all-consuming greed (19) and you love wealth with intense passion" (89:20).

"We have created man in distress (90:4). Does he think no one has power over him (5)? He says, I have used up much wealth (6). Does he think that no one sees him (7)? Did I not make for him two eyes (8), and a tongue, and two lips (9), and guided him to the two highways (10)? But he does not brave the steep (one) (11). And what will make you understand what the steep (one) is (12)? (It is) freeing a slave (13), or feeding during famine (14) an orphaned relative (15), or the needy (lying) in the dust (16). Then he will be of those who believe, who exhort to patience, and exhort to mercy" (90:17).

17.2. Broader social responsibilities

With the progress of the revelation, the Qur'an becomes more explicit and categorical in reminding its audience of their broader social responsibilities, and declares:

"Give their due to relatives, and to the needy and the traveler (ibn al-sabil),² and do not squander wastefully (17:26), for those who squander are the brethren of Satan, and Satan is ungrateful to his Lord (27). But if you (have to) turn away from them awaiting God's mercy which you may expect, then (at least) speak to them courteously (28). Do not keep your hands chained to your neck, nor stretch it out to (the limits) of its reach - lest you sit back blamed and destitute" (17:29).

"Give their due to relatives, and to the needy and the traveler.² This is best for those who seek God's favour,* and it is they who shall succeed" (30:38). *[Lit., 'Countenance of God'.]

17.3. Kindness to people of all faiths

In its legislative phase in the Medinite period, the Qur'an reiterates its precepts on social responsibilities (2:215, 2:177, 4:36-38), warns against miserliness and ostentation (4:37/38) and enjoins helping out all people regardless of faith (4:36).

"They ask you (O Muhammad,) what they should spend. Say: 'Whatever fair (earnings) you spend, should be on (your) parents, relatives, orphans, the needy and the traveler'² (Remember,) whatever good you do, God remains Cognizant of it" (2:215).

"(God does not love) those who are miserly and encourage people (to be) miserly, or hide what God has given them of His bounty. (Remember,) We have prepared a

humiliating punishment for the disbelievers (4:37): those who spend their wealth for publicity, but have no faith in God or the hereafter. (Remember,) anyone who takes Satan for a friend, has an evil companion” (4:38).

“Serve God; associate none with Him; be kind to parents, relatives (Qurba), orphans, and the needy; to the neighbour close to you (Qurba) and the neighbour who is a stranger, to the fellow (sahib)³ by your side and the traveler,² and to those under your lawful trust. Surely God does not love the arrogant and the conceited” (4:36).

The verse speaks about two categories of people described as Qurba: a word that traditionally connotes relative, as rendered in its first appearance. However, the word literally means ‘the close ones.’ Therefore, in the second instance it understandably stands for people who are close enough, but not necessarily relatives.⁴ The subsequent reference to the neighbour who is a ‘stranger’ neither a relative, nor ‘close enough,’ must therefore include anyone, regardless of religion, nationality, or race. In other words, this verse explicitly calls for kindness to all people including strangers who may belong to other faiths, nationalities or races.

17.4. Kindness to parents

Due to various reasons - social, economical and financial, children often ignore or do not take care of their parents and are at times harsh and rude to them. Hence, to maintain family harmony and justice, the Qur’an commands the believers to be kind to parents (29:8/Ch. 11.2; 17:23/24, 31:14/15, 46:15).

“Your Lord has decreed that you serve none except Him, and be kind to parents. If one or both of them reaches old age with you - never say uff*, nor scold them, and speak to them in noble words (17:23); and lower your shoulder (of humility) to them with affection, and say: ‘My Lord! Have mercy on both of them - as they nurtured me (when I was) small’” (17:24). *[An Arabic utterance, indicative of deep frustration.]

“We have enjoined on man (kindness) to his parents. His mother bore him with spell after spell of weakness, and his weaning takes two years. So be grateful to Me and to your parents, and (remember,) the journey is to Me (31:14). If they press you to associate with Me that, of which you have no knowledge - do not obey them (in religion,) but give them company in this world decently, and follow the path of one who turns to Me. (Remember,) you will (eventually) return to Me, and I will tell you what you did” (31:15).

“We have enjoined on man kindness to his parents. His mother bore him with hardship, and gave him birth painfully. His bearing and his weaning are for thirty months,⁵ until he grows strong. Then when he attains full maturity reaching forty years, let him say: ‘My Lord, inspire me to be grateful for the favour you have bestowed on me and on my parents, and (dispose me) to do good deeds that you approve, and be gracious to me in respect of my offspring. Indeed, I turn to You (in repentance), and I am among those who submit (muslimun)’” (46:15).

Notes

1. 107:3/Ch. 7:1; 51:19, 69:34.
2. The expression *ibn al-sabil* literally means 'the son of the street.' Traditionally, it is translated, befittingly, as traveller, as at the time of the revelation (and through to the recent centuries) many travellers ended up as destitute and homeless in foreign lands, without any means to returning to their homelands. In today's context the expression may be applied to the countless homeless people that may be found taking shelter on street sides, parks, under highways and on the pavements near railway stations in many parts of the world.
3. The word *sahab* connotes any human being - an inmate, a companion, colleague, an associate, or anyone for that matter, who comes our way.
4. Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, Gibraltar 1980, Chap. 4, Note 47.
5. The 30-months period of hardship mentioned in 46:15 as against two years (24-months) in 31:14 for only weaning is due to inclusion of six months of 'bearing' period (*haml*) in 46:15. This is understandably because the embryo is barely six centimeters long at the end of ten weeks, and forms an effective burden of pregnancy only after the third month of pregnancy. [W.J.Hamilton, *Introduction to Biology*, 3rd edition, U.K. 1976, p. 115.]

[5 references]

18. Spending Money on the Needy

At an early stage of the revelation, the Qur'an introduces its revolutionary concept of sharing of one's income with the needy in a highly poetic imagery:

"By the night as it covers (the day) (92:1), by the day and its glory (2), and by the creation of the male and the female (3) - your striving is to diverse ends (4). As for him who gives and heeds (5), and endorses goodness (6), We shall facilitate for him the easy (way) (7). And as for him who is miserly and (feels) self-sufficient (8), and belies goodness (9), We shall facilitate for him the (path to) hardship (10). His wealth will be of no avail as he goes down (to his grave)" (92:11).

The bulk of Qur'anic verses on spending for the needy were revealed in the Medinite period when Muslims were flourishing and many of them were in a position to spend for their needy relatives and fellowmen. Its statements take into account the behavioural aspects and crafty machinations of human mind, as can be clearly seen in the renderings of its verses.

18.1. To spend in one's lifetime 1

"Who is it that will lend God a generous loan, which He will multiply for him many folds? (Remember,) God can take away as well as give in abundance, and you (all) will (eventually) return to Him" (2:245).

“You who believe, spend of what We have given you before there comes a Day in which there will be no bartering, no friendship, and no intercession; and as for the disbelievers - they are the unjust” (2:254).

“You who believe, let neither your wealth nor your children distract you from God’s remembrance. Those who do so – it is they who will be the losers (63:9). So spend (in charity) out of what We have given you before death comes to any of you, and he says: ‘My Lord, why not grant me delay for a short while that I give in charity and be among the righteous’” (63:10).

18.2. To Budget the Charity within One’s Means

“Spend in God’s way, yet do not expose yourself to ruin through your own hands, and do good – for indeed, God loves the compassionate” (2:195).

18.3. Charity May Be Given Openly or Secretly

“And whatever you may spend (in charity) or promise you swear, surely God knows it; but there are no helpers for the unjust (2:270). If you (give in) charity openly, it is fine, but if you keep it secret and give it to the needy, it is even better for you, and it will atone for some of your sins. (Remember,) God is Informed of what you do (271). It is not up to you (O Muhammad,) to guide them, since God (alone) guides whom He wills. Whatever you spend for a good (cause) is for yourself - as you do not spend but to please God - and whatever you spend for a good (cause), shall be repaid to you in full, and you shall not be wronged” (2:272).

“Those who spend their wealth (in charity) - night and day, secretly and openly - they have their reward with their Lord: there will be no fear upon them nor shall they grieve” (2:274).

“Those who are patient in seeking the favour* of their Lord and keep up prayer and spend (in charity) of what We have given them, secretly and openly, and repel evil with good – it is they who shall attain (fulfilment in) the eternal abode” (13:22). *[Lit., ‘Countenance’.]

18.4. Not to Hurt the Recipient’s Sentiments

“Those who spend their wealth in God’s way, and do not follow up on what is spent with reproach or with abuse - for them, their reward is with their Lord - there will be no fear upon them, nor shall they grieve” (2:262).

“Kind words and forgiveness are better than an act of charity followed by abuse. (Remember,) God is Self-Sufficient and Gracious” (2:263).

“You who believe, do not nullify your charity by reproach or abuse, like someone who spends his wealth only to be seen in public - while he does not believe in God, nor in the hereafter. His example is that of a boulder with some soil on it; when rainstorm strikes it, leaves it barren: they can do nothing with whatever they have earned. (Remember,) God does not guide the disbelieving people” (2:264).

18.5. Ignoring Ill Feelings While Helping Others

“Let not the resourceful among you who have abundance swear not to give to relatives, needy, and those who fled along God’s way. Let them forgive and overlook. Don’t you like that God should forgive you? (Remember,) God is Most Forgiving and Merciful” (24:22).

18.6. Giving Only The Good Things In Charity

“You who believe, spend (in charity) of the good things you have earned, and from what We have produced for you from the earth. Do not choose the bad things from it for your spending, that you would not take except with disdain; and know that God is Self-Sufficient and Praiseworthy” (2:267).

“You can never acquire virtue (birr)* unless you spend (in charity) what you care for. (Remember,) whatever you spend – surely God remains Cognizant of it” (3:92). *[Lit., ‘moral excellence’]

18.7. Curbing One’s Inborn Greed And Desires

“Your wealth and your children are only a trial, while God (holds) a splendid reward with Him (64:15). So heed God as best you can, listen, obey and spend (in charity) for your own good. And anyone who curbs his inborn greed – it is they who shall succeed (64:16). (Remember,) if you give a generous loan to God, He will multiply it for you, and forgive you, for God is Appreciative and Gracious” (64:17).

“Anyone who fears (to face) the Presence of his Lord and restrains his soul from lowly desires (79:40) – surely the garden will be (his) abode” (79:41).

18.8. The Recipient Categories of Charity

“Charities are for the poor (Fuqara’) and the needy (Masakin) and the workers (who administer) them, and for those who have embraced faith*, and for (freeing) the slaves, and for (assisting) debtors, and (for spending) in God's way, and for the traveler (ibn al-Sabil)² – an ordinance (Faridah) from God. (Remember,) God is All-Knowing and Wise” (9:60). *[Lit., ‘whose hearts have reconciled’].

Explanations:

1. The underlined stipulation of this verse from Surah al- Maidah revealed in the concluding phase of the revelation, legislates charity (sadaqah) as a compulsory obligation (faridah) for all Muslims, who can afford to give charity. Later Caliph Umar institutionalized it as the Zakat (Ch. 46)

2. According to a written clarification of Caliph Umar to the Custodian of the Zakat fund,³ the words Fuqara’ and Masakin in the opening part of the verse, rendered as ‘the poor and the needy’, represent the poor and needy from Muslims (Fuqara’), and non-Muslims (Masakin) respectively. Thus the rendering of the verse should ideally read: “Charity is (meant) for the poor (Muslims,) and the poor (of any other religion)...”

3: The verse calls for giving charity to, among others, i) those who have embraced faith, and ii) slaves for buying their freedom. The slaves who embraced faith are included in the former category (i). Therefore, the slaves who are to be given charity to buy their freedom (ii above), must be the non-Muslim ones.

18.9. The Qur'an Discourages Beggary

“(Charity is for) the poor (Fuqara’), who being confined in God’s cause, are unable to exert on earth (for livelihood). The ignorant think them to be self-sufficient because of their modesty, but you shall know them by their looks, as they do not beg of people with impunity. (Remember,) whatever good (things) you spend – surely God remains Cognizant of it” (2:273)

The verse indicates the Qur'an's general disapproval of beggary. The Qur'an however does not emphasize this point in its broader message as disasters and calamities force their victims to ask for help.

Notes

1. 57:11, 57:18.
2. See Note 2/Ch. 17 for broader meaning.
3. Shibli Noumani, al-Faruq, 1898, Karachi reprint 1991, p. 250.

[3 references]

19. Moral Ethics

19.1. General moral precepts

An early passage, beginning with a statement on the innate instability of human mind, interweaves a set of moral precepts, including wealth sharing (as discussed in the preceding section) and sexual and ethical morality.

“Man (insan) has been created restless (70:19). He is panicky when evil befalls him (20) and ungrateful when something good happens to him (21), except the prayerful (22): those who are regular in prayer (23), and in whose wealth, there is a definite right for (24) the beggar and the destitute (25); and who affirm the (truth of) the Day of Judgment (26); and who fear the punishment of their Lord (27) - for indeed none should feel secure from their Lord’s punishment (28); and who preserve their private parts (furujaḥ)* (29) - except from their spouses (azwaj), that is (awe) those under their lawful trust (ma malakat ayman), and then (they are) not blame worthy (30), and those who seek beyond that exceed limits (31); and who preserve their trusts and commitments (32), and who stand by their testimony (33), and who watch over their prayer (34). Such (people) shall be in gardens, highly honored” (70:35). *[Sexual impulses.]

Note: The traditional gender biased rendering of the underlined transliterated words (masculine for insan and feminine for the others) with normative translation of the particle awe (70:30) as ‘or’, instead of ‘that is’ allows the verses 70:29/30 to be interpreted as a sanction for men to keep mistresses. This, however, contradicts Qur’anic family laws (which explicitly prohibit extra-marital relations), as well as

Qur'anic inheritance laws (which do not mention any mistress or unwedded spouse, though claiming to cover all family relationships (4:33/Ch. 38.4). Our rendition maintains the gender integrity of the passage, is based on the Qur'anic usage of its particle *awe* in the verse 25:62,¹ is supported by Muhammad Asad² and conforms to the broader message of the Qur'an.

With time, the Qur'an admonishes against various mundane as well as grave vices such as foul talk, miserliness, bearing a false witness, adultery (*zina*)³ killing of innocent people, and all manners of abominable acts (*fawahishah*),⁴ and reiterates its exhortation against unwedded relationships. [The verses 70:29/30 above and 23:5/6 below have identical text.]

"Believers will indeed succeed (23:1): those who are humble in their prayer (2), who avoid foul talk (3), who are active in charity (*zakah*)⁵ (4), and who preserve their private parts (*furujah*)* (5) - except from their spouses, that is, those under their lawful trust - and then (they are) not blame worthy (6); and those who seek beyond that – it is they who exceed limits (7); and those who are faithful to their trust and their commitment (8), and who watch over their prayers (9) - it is they who are the heirs (10) who will inherit Paradise; and they will remain there" (23:11). *[Sexual impulses.]

"Those who are alert in fear of their Lord (23:57), and those who believe in the message of their Lord (58), and those who do not associate (others) with their Lord (59), and those who give whatever they give with their hearts trembling (at the thought that) they must return to their Lord (60) - – it is they who hasten to all good things, and they will outpace (others) in this" (23:61).

"The servant of the Benevolent is those who walk humbly on earth and when the ignorant address them, they say 'Peace.' (25:63), and those who meditate on their Lord by night standing and prostrating (64), and those who say: 'God, avert from us the torment of hell - whose torment undoubtedly is terrible (65), and surely it is an evil place for abode (66); and those, when they spend, are not wasteful, nor miserly but take a position in between (67); and those who do not invoke any deity with God, nor kill any person as God has forbidden this - except when lawful; nor commit adultery (*la yaznuna*)³ - for whoever does that will meet punishment (68), (and such) punishment will be doubled on the Day of Judgment and he will live there in disgrace (69) - except those who repent, have faith, and do good deeds - for God will substitute the evil in them for good, as God is Most Forgiving and Merciful (70), and anyone who repents and does good deeds has truly turned to God in repentance (71); and those who bear no false witness, and if they pass by folly - pass by with dignity (72); and those who, when reminded of the messages of their Lord, do not fall at them deaf and blind (oblivious of their message) (73); and those who say: 'Our Lord, give us joy* in our spouses and our offspring and make us models for the heedful (*Muttaqin*)' (74) – it is they (who) will be rewarded with lofty abodes for their endurance, and they will be received there with salutations and peace" (25:75). * [Lit., 'delights of the eye'.]

In a late Meccan passage, the Qur'an declares some of its moral precepts as binding or Haram for all believers:

"Say, 'Come, I will tell what your Lord has made binding (Haram) on you: do not associate anything with Him, be kind to (your) parents, do not kill your children on account of poverty - We provide for you as well as for them, keep away from abomination (fawahishah) - whether open or secret, do not kill any person as God has forbidden this - except when lawful.' Thus does He command you, that you may use your reason (6:151). 'And do not approach the property of an orphan before his full maturity - except for its betterment, give full measure and (use) true scale: We do not task a soul beyond its capacity; and when you speak, uphold justice (fa'dilu) even if it concerns a relative, and fulfil the covenant of God.' Thus does He instruct you that you may be mindful (152). This is My straight path: so follow it, and do not follow (other) paths - lest you should be parted from His path. Thus He instructs you for you to heed" (6:153).

19.2. Qur'anic broader notion of Halal and Haram

The Qur'anic moral precepts of the Haram category (6:151-6:153 above) are binding for all believers at all times. Most Muslims today are very particular about what they eat; and take only Haram food. This is fine. But they hardly take the broader Qur'anic message on what all are declared Haram with a similar zeal. The fact remains, one can have the most sumptuous meal even by keeping away from the Haram category of food, but to abide by the precepts of the Qur'an on the whole range of Hurmah deeds, is a totally different matter. Moreover, a food of the Haram category (properly slaughtered and cooked with Haram recipe) is liable to become Haram if it is acquired by unlawful means (Ch. 25.2). So, an exaggerated emphasis on the method of slaughtering may not be all that meaningful, if the lawfulness of earning is ignored.

In the western world, various Islamic agencies advise Muslims on what food items are Haram or otherwise. Like-wise, some commercial houses claim the 'lawfulness' of their products (consumer goods, cosmetics etc.) by not using ingredients from a source, declared unlawful (Haram) for food (such as animal slaughtered without Islamic rites). However, the Qur'anic notion of Haram and Haram as clearly spelled out in the above verses is far wider.

19.3. Qur'anic Broader Notion of Heedfulness (Taqwa)

A Medinite verse (2:177) declares that piety or heedfulness (Taqwa, Ch. 8) is not attained merely by expression of faith, and outward gesture of prayer:

"Virtue (birr)* does not mean that you turn your faces towards the East or West; but (imbued with) virtue (birr) is one who believes in God, the Last Day, the angels, the revelation (Kitab)** and the prophets; and gives away his wealth - out of love for Him - to relatives, orphans, the needy (Masakin),⁶ the traveler (ibn al-sabil),⁷ and the beggar, and for (the freeing of) slaves; and (virtuous are those who) keep up prayer and give charity; and (virtuous are also those) who fulfill their commitments, once they have pledged (to them), and show endurance in suffering and adversity, and during times of peril – it is these people who confirm (the truth),

and it is they who are heedful (muttaqun)” (2:177). *[Lit., ‘moral excellence’] **[Lit., the Book, the divine edict.]

Notes

1. “And He it is Who has appointed night and day in succession, for anyone who desires to remember, that is (awe), desires thankfulness” (25:62).
2. Muhammad Asad, The Message of the Qur’an, Gibraltar 1980, Chap. 23, Note 3; Chap.70, Note 13.
3. In the context of the revelation, the word zina (verb yaznun) connoted wilful sexual relation of a married woman with a man.
4. Commentators agree that fahishah denotes an act or a behavior that is grossly immodest, indecent and abominable, and includes sexual lewdness, adultery and pandering to such deeds by speech, suggestion or action -Muhammad Asad, Message of the Qur’an, Gibraltar, 1980, Chap. 4, Note 14.
5. See Glossary for broader notion of zakah.
6. See Explanation 2 under the rendering of 9:60/Ch. 18.8 for the generic meaning of masakin.
7. See Note 2/Ch. 17 for the broader meaning of ibn al-sabil.

[7 references]

20. General Behavioural Norms

20.1. Restraining anger, forgiveness, courtesy, avoiding conflict, and self-reproach

The Qur'an asks people to restrain anger, forgive others (3:134), return a greeting with a nicer greeting (4:86), speak nicely avoiding conflict (17:53), and refrain from talking evil in public without being wronged (4:148).

“Hasten to forgiveness from your Lord, and to a garden - as wide as the heavens and earth, prepared for the heedful (muttaqin) (3:133): those who spend (in charity) in (times of) plenty as well as hardship, restrain anger and forgive people for God loves the compassionate” (3:134).

“When you are greeted with a greeting, return it with a more courteous greeting or (at least) its like. Indeed God takes account of everything” (4:86).

“God does not love of evil talk in public except by one who has been wronged. (Remember,) God is All-Knowing and Aware” (4:148).

“Tell My servants to say what is best - for verily Satan sows dissension among them, for Satan is an open enemy to man” (17:53).

20.2. Arrogance, Loud Talk, and Listening To Whispers Are Condemned

The Qur’an asks people to maintain a modest bearing and not to behave arrogantly or talk loudly (17:37, 31:18/19), and reminds them that the harshest of sound is the braying

of an ass (31:19). It cautions people against believing any wicked person without verifying facts (49:6).

“And do not walk arrogantly on earth - for you can neither cleave the earth apart, nor reach the mountains in height” (17:37).

“(Said Luqman to his son): ‘Do not turn your cheek away from people (in scorn), nor walk arrogantly on earth. Surely God does not love any arrogant boaster (31:18). Therefore, be modest in your bearing, and keep your voice low; (and remember) the harshest of sounds is the braying of an ass’” (31:19).

“You who believe, if a wicked person comes to you with a (slandering) news, verify it, otherwise you may ignorantly harm (other) people, and become regretful for what you have done” (49:6).

20.3. Slandering, Fault-Finding, Contempt and Excessive Suspicion Are Condemned

The Qur’an condemns slandering (24:23), backbiting, scandal-mongering, excessive suspicion (49:12, 104:1) and miserliness (47:38, 104:2) and does not approve of showing contempt or giving derogatory nicknames to other people (49:11).

“Those who (falsely) accuse carefree, believing, chaste women are cursed in this life and (in) the hereafter, and there is a severe punishment for them” (24:23).

“Behold, (O you people!) You are invited to spend in God's way, but some of you are miserly; though whoever is miserly, is being miserly to his own soul. (Remember,) God is Self-Sufficient, whereas you stand in need. If you turn away (from His path), He will replace you with other people, and they would not be like you” (47:38).

“You who believe, let not any people (qawm) among you mock other people (qawm) who may be better than they are; nor should some women (ridicule) other women who may be better than they are; and do not find fault in each other, nor insult others with (insulting) nicknames. (Giving) an insulting name after embracing the faith is most wicked, and those who do not repent (after giving such nicknames to others) – it is they who are unjust” (49:11).

“You who believe, avoid excessive suspicion, for suspicion in some cases is a sin; and do not spy (over others), nor backbite each other. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it! So heed God and (remember,) God is Most Relenting and Merciful” (49:12).

“Woe to every backbiting critic (104:1), who amasses wealth, and keeps counting it (and does not spend in charity)” (104:2).

20.4. Good Conduct At Places Of Worship

“Children of Adam, conduct yourselves graciously (khuzu zinatakum) at every place of worship. Eat and drink - but do not be lavish*, for He does not approve of those who are given to excesses” (7:31). *[Lit. ‘to be given to excesses’.]

Note: Based on the generic Qur'anic notion of the word zinat as God's endowments, the most accurate rendering of the transliterated words will be 'hold on to your God given endowments (zinat).' We have tried to capture the essence of this literal rendering in the underlined words. In a very restrictive sense fine clothes are also God's endowments, and accordingly the words have been traditionally rendered to imply the wearing of one's best dress at every place and occasion of prayer.

21. On Justice

21.1. Upholding of Justice is a binding instruction

The Qur'an commands justice (7:29, 16:90), and places it in the Hurmah (binding) category (6:152/Ch. 19).

"Say: 'My Lord has commanded justice (Qist), and that you set your whole selves (to Him) at all your prostrations* (in prayer) and call on Him with sincerity of faith. (Remember,) as He (brought you forth) in the beginning, so shall you return (to Him)'" (7:29). *[Lit., 'places of worship'.]

"God commands justice ('adl) and goodness and giving to fellowmen (qurba),¹ and He forbids the abominable, the evil, and terrorism, and instructs you that you may be mindful" (16:90)

The Qur'an asks people to return honestly, what may be under their trust to their owners, and to judge justly among people (4:58), even if they nurtured any hatred against them (5:8), and to bear witness justly and without any kind of bias or discrimination (4:135).

"God commands you to return (what is under your) trust back to their folk; and to judge with justice ('adl), when you judge between people (nas). Noble indeed is what God instructs you for surely God is Observant and Aware" (4:58).

"You who believe, be upright as witnesses to justice (qist) before God – even it be against yourselves, or (your) parents or relatives, or whether it concerns the rich, or the poor. God can best protect both. Therefore do not follow (your) whim, lest you detract from justice ('adl); and if you swerve, or decline (to do justice), (remember,) God is Informed of what you do" (4:135).

"You who believe, be upright before God as witnesses to justice (qist), and let not the hatred of any people prompt you to detract from justice ('adl). Deal justly: this is nearest to heedfulness (Taqwa); and heed God. Surely God is Informed of what you do" (5:8).

Explanations:

The verse 4:58 calls for dealing justly with all people, regardless of blood, communal, racial or any other ties as underscored by its use of the generic term nas. The verse 5:8 from the last revealed Sura, al-Maidah, warns the believers against doing any injustice to a people, they may hate.

21.2. To Guide Others Truthfully For Justice to Prevail

The Qur'an acknowledges the role of a category of people who are trained to guide the judges by way of truth so that justice prevails (7:159/181).

“And among the people of Moses there is a community who guide (others) in the way of truth and do justice (ya'dilun) thereby” (7:159).

“Among those that We have created, there is a community who guide (others) in the way of truth and do justice (ya'dilun) thereby” (7:181).

21.3. Criteria of Divine Justice

The Qur'anic pronouncements on the criteria of divine justice (6:160, 28:84)² are suggestive of the principle of proportionality of crime and punishment that may also hold for worldly affairs.

“Anyone who brings forth goodness (on the Day of Judgement,) will be rewarded ten times like it, while anyone who brings forth evil shall not be recompensed except with its like; and they will not be wronged” (6:160).

“Whoever brings about good, has an even better reward, while whoever brings about evil - the evildoers are not recompensed but for what they did” (28:84).

21.4. The Primacy Of Justice In The Qur'an

The Qur'anic pronouncements on justice as listed in the foregoing are clear, concise and unambiguous and together establish one of its revolutionary principles. Until the advent of Islam and for centuries to come, the poor and the weak were denied justice while the rich and the mighty enjoyed a privileged form of justice that institutionalized oppression and injustice in human society. The Qur'an abolished all this, and paved the way for the establishment of societies, in which the weakest could take the strongest to the court of law and get justice.

To sum up, and to strengthen our argument with a practical illustration, we quote below one of Caliph Umar's proclamations directed to his governors (rendering from Arabic/Urdu):³

“Administration of justice is an essential duty after the praise of God. Treat people equally, whether in your immediate presence, or in your court, so that the weak do not despair of justice, and the guilty may not be hopeful of your concession. One who makes a claim requires proving it. One who denies must take an oath. Compromise is permitted, provided it does not turn the Haram (permissible) into Haram (forbidden), and vice versa. If you have to give a decision tomorrow, reflect on it carefully today. If you have doubt on any matter not contained in the Qur'an or the Prophet's Sunna (example), deeply ponder over it, and take account of similar instances and others' opinions, and reflect over it logically...”

Notes

1. As in case of the verse 4:36/Ch. 17.3, the word qurba has been rendered in its broader connotation as fellowmen.

2. 42:40/Ch. 12.2; 40:40, 53:31.
3. Shibli Noumani, al-Faruq, 1898, Karachi reprint 1991, p. 191/192.

[3 reference]

22. Fraud, Bribery, Cheating Are Forbidden

22.1. Usurping others' property

The Qur'an forbids the usurping of others' properties by bribing the authorities (2:188), or by commercial exploitation - even with mutual consent (4:29).

“Do not unjustly consume (kulu) others' wealth*, nor try to bribe the authorities with it, that you may viciously but knowingly consume a portion of (other) people's wealth” (2:188). *[Lit., 'your wealth among yourselves'.]

“You who believe, do not consume (kulu) others' wealth* - not even by (illa) way of trade with mutual consent, and do not kill yourselves for indeed God has been merciful to you (4:29). But whoever does that maliciously and unjustly, We shall soon cause him to endure fire, and that is easy enough for God” (4:30). *[Lit., as in 2:188 above.]

Note: The underlined rendering above is based on the Qur'anic usage of the particle illa in the verse 27:11, as advocated by Muhammad Asad.¹

The Qur'an also denounces the tendency of wealthy businessmen to take over the business and assets of small stakeholders. This is demonstrated in the story of two disputing brothers who approached the Prophet David climbing the wall of his sanctuary. One of them complained to David that his brother had ninety-nine ewes and wanted to take charge of his sole ewe. David replied that his brother had certainly wronged him by demanding his ewe, and added that so many business associates do indeed treat each other unjustly.²

22.2. Tampering of weight and measurement

At the time of the revelation, the economy was based on the barter system, and goods, such as corn, dates, etc. were 'weighed out' or 'measured out' in exchange of goods and services received. Accordingly, the Qur'an calls for giving full measure, and using correct weights and true scales (6:152/Ch. 19.2; 17:35, 26:181/182, 55:9), and forbids cheating and tampering with scales (83:1-3).

“And give full measure when you measure out, and weigh with straight scales. This is better and fairer in the end” (17:35).

“Give full measure, and be not among cheaters (26:181). Weigh with straight scales (182), and do not diminish the goods of (other) people (by under-weighting them), and do not act wickedly on earth as corruptors (mufsidin)” (26:183).

“Establish (standard) weights justly and do not tamper the scale (mizan)*”

(55:9). *[The Qur’an also connotes this word with the overall balance of all things in creation,³ and with the criteria of truth and falsehood.⁴]

“Woe to the cheaters (83:1) – who demand full (measure) when they receive by measure from people (2) - but when they measure out for them, or weigh for them, cheat (them)” (83:3).

22.3. Fair payment for goods and services

The Qur’anic commandments to maintaining the integrity of weights, measurements and scales in commercial transactions is aimed at ensuring fair payment for goods and services. However, as with many other social and binding injunctions, Muslim leaders and rulers tend to ignore it to the great detriment of their community. As this is adversely impacting the progress and well being of Islamic societies to this very day, the matter merits further elucidation.

Throughout the medieval era, Muslim ‘ulama and intelligentsia, by and large, supported the prevalent feudal system, which was built on low wages for goods produced and services rendered by the common man. This tendency has accentuated in recent times in the Muslim world, resulting from increased supply of labor due to high unemployment levels, contributing to widening income disparity and concomitant social problems in most of Islamic nations.

Ironically, with the turn of the 20th century, the non-Muslim World, and particularly the West, have developed social norms and national laws that guarantee a far better payment for goods and services to their common people than what their counterparts get in the Muslim world. Indeed if making fair payment for goods and services received was to be among the principal criteria of piety or morality, as clearly indicated by the Qur’an, the present day Western society may, on this count, stand highly pious and moral, and the Muslim World, highly impious and immoral.

NOTES

1. Muhammad Asad, The Message of the Qur’an, Gibraltar 1980, Chap. 4, Note 38.

2. 38:21-24. While Muslim commentators have cited this story to support an alleged love affair of David with the wife of one of his officers, this work focuses on the clear moral of the story and keeps away from theological speculations.

3. 55:8.

4. 42:17, 57:25. [Same as Note 17/Preface]

[4 References]

23. Against Usury And Over-Profiteering

23.1. The Qur'an forbids usury (riba)

The Qur'an uses the term *riba* for usury, that is, lending money at exorbitant interest rates, as the traditional money-lenders practiced since ancient times. The Qur'an forbids usury (*riba*), and advocates fair business practices (2:275/276). It also encourages the believers to write off their outstanding interest against usury (*riba*) (2:278), and to remain content with the principle sum (2:279).

“Those who live off usury (*riba*) will never establish themselves, except as those* who are confounded by Satan's touch. That is because they say ‘trade is like usury (*riba*)’. But God has permitted trade, and forbidden (*harramah*) usury (*riba*). As for anyone who gives up (usury) after receiving instruction from his Lord, let bygone be bygone: his case rests with God. But those who repeat – it is they (who are) the inmates of hellfire, and they will remain there (2:275). (Remember,) God wipes out usury (*riba*) and nourishes charity, and God does not love any ungrateful sinners” (2:276). *[Lit., ‘as those are established’.]

“You who believe, heed God, write off anything that remains outstanding from usury - if you are indeed believers (2:278). If you do not do so - take notice of war from God and His Messenger, but if you repent – you may (recover) your principal. Do not wrong (others), and you shall not be wronged” (2:279).

23.2. On easing debt repayment and writing off debt

The Qur'an recognizes that on occasions a debtor may not be able to settle his debt on time, and therefore, it calls for easing terms of payment, or even writing off debts in appropriate cases:

“If someone is in a difficulty, wait until it is easy (for him to repay). But if you treat (your debt) as charity, it would be better for you, if you only knew” (2:280).

23.3. Qur'anic notion of *riba*

The Qur'an also refers to *riba* as a means of getting one's wealth ‘doubled and multiplied’ (3:130), and forbids amassing wealth at the expense of others (30:39).

“You who believe, do not live off usury (*riba*), (and have your wealth) doubled and multiplied, but heed God, that you may succeed” (3:130).

“What you invest in usury (*riba*) that it might increase through the wealth of (other) people, does not increase with God; but what you give as *zakat*, seeking God's favour* (increases with God), and it is they who shall have (their reward) multiplied” (30:39). *[Lit., ‘Face’.]

23.4. Is Modern banking based on *riba*?

With the advent of modern banking and advanced financial institutions and instruments, there is an ongoing debate whether or not the profit earned as bank interest, and through other financial instruments fall in the *riba* (usury) category. Let us seek clarifications from the Qur'an, which is the final authority on all matters.

Firstly, the Qur'an allows Muslims to avail of all lawful things in life, that is, to earn their livelihood lawfully (2:168, 2:172):**1**

“O People! Avail of (kulu) all lawful and good things of what is in the earth, and do not follow Satan’s footsteps, for he is an open enemy to you” (2:168).

“You who believe! Avail of (kulu) the good things We have provided for you, and be grateful to God, if it is (truly) Him that you serve” (2:172).

Secondly, the Qur’an expects the believers to be serious with their business and professional pursuits. Thus, it urges the believers to disperse soon after the Friday congregational prayer in ‘pursuit of God’s bounties’ (fadlillah) [i.e. to resume normal work for livelihood]. (62:10/Ch. 45.1).

Thirdly, in the Qur’anic world view, humans are appointed as God’s deputy or agent (khalifah)² on earth (2:30/Ch. 5.1), and the resources of nature have been placed at their services (31:20, 45:13/ Ch. 10).³

These illustrations clearly indicate that the Qur’an expects humans to engage themselves in lawful business, in trading across lands and seas, and in exploring and harnessing nature through industrial ventures. Thus, it will be fair to say that the Qur’anic message admits of wealth generation, as long it is not attained by exorbitant interest rates on deposits or loans (riba), or by fraudulent means, or grossly underpaying for goods and services (Ch. 22.3). With this we come to the question, whether the income earned as bank interest falls in the riba category and thus stand unlawful (Haram)? There are two ways to look at it:

1. The modern banking system requires a borrower to pay at a fixed interest rate, regardless of his financial condition or capability, and offers no mechanism for easing terms of loan repayment, or writing off a debt as charity as enjoined by the Qur’an (2:280), and therefore the earning from a bank as interest on deposits stands as riba, and so it is Haram. Moreover, the purely commercial basis of modern banking enables the rich to become richer at the expense of the poor, lends itself to manipulation by unethical businessmen, and even promotes such unlawful activities as gambling and prostitution, and therefore it conflicts with the Qur’anic world view.

2. Modern banking systems contain provisions for easing loan repayment and writing off debts against liquidity petitions. If these are applied in a just and fair manner, and internal audit mechanism is set in place to avoid fraudulent manipulations by directors, and to curb socially harmful investments, there may be no Qur’anic basis to declare modern banking unlawful (Haram). Besides, a bank very often lends depositors’ money for a lawful (Haram) business proposition: the recipients of bank loans include all types and categories of customers - from common citizens, students, farmers, patients and petty traders to businessmen and industrialists of all descriptions, and corporate giants making hospitals, housing complexes, cars, aircrafts etc. So long as such investment is lawful, and does not enable the depositor, or the board members of a bank to multiply their wealth through fraudulent means, it will be no different from that generated by fair trade as permitted by the Qur’an (2:279).

23.5. The lawfulness of modern banking

The modern banking system acts as the focal point for all trading and commercial activities, which are lawful in Islam. It serves as the main channel for extending an initial advance against an order and for transfer of payments after the execution of an order. It is also the financial service provider and enables a customer to settle his utility bills, taxes and to transfer funds to other accounts. It also advises the customers on investment options and helps them to buy. Thus, modern banking is a multifaceted financial institution that benefits the common man, the investors and promotes trade, commerce and industry at local, national and international levels. Traditional usury, on the other hand, benefited only the moneylenders who charged excessive interest rates to the borrowers. Thus, modern banking system stands miles apart from the traditional institution of usury and may not be paralleled with it.

Moreover, the modern banking system is based on paper currency, which is nothing but a promissory instrument, whose 'real value' (purchasing power) decreases with time. Therefore, a lender may lawfully take appropriate 'inflationary adjustment' from a bank to maintain the real value of his money, and thus keep his wealth intact as permitted by the Qur'an (2:279). It would therefore follow, that recovering appropriate 'inflationary adjustment' in the form of an interest against deposits in the present day economic scenario, would not necessarily constitute riba.

Finally, it may be added that of late some modern banks have adopted Islamic banking based on the Qur'anic principles of profit sharing and flexible debt recovery, and humanity may stand to benefit if this is extended to the poor section of the population, subject to adequate checks and balances.

Notes

1. 5:4, 5:88, 23:51.
2. 6:165, 27:62, 35:39. [Same as Note 6/Ch. 5]
3. 14:32, 16:12, 67:15. [Note 1/Ch. 10]

[3 References]

24. On Debt And Contract

24.1. On The Drafting Of A Commercial Contract

The Qur'an expounds a comprehensive protocol on drafting business contracts and commercial transactions in one of its longest passages (2:282/283) that covers the following elements:

- Drafting of a contract by the recipient of a loan, or his agent.
- Witnessing of a contract by two other men, or, if two men are not available, by one man and two women.
- Putting dates, and stating the contract period on the contract.
- Exhortation to the witnesses to turn up for testimony when called.
- Forbidding harassment of a scribe or a witness

- Permission for hand-to-hand transaction without documentation.
- Approval of a security against a loan.
- Responsibility of the trustee to honestly discharge his trust.

The passage is fashioned in terse juristic manner, but the foregoing summary may help in understanding the following rendition without difficulty.

“You who believe, whenever you contract a debt for a certain period of time, record it: have a scribe write down justly (the terms agreed) between yourselves. The scribe should not refuse to write - he should write as God has taught him.

Let the borrower dictate (the terms of the contract,) but let him heed God, his Lord, and not diminish anything from it. If the borrower is feeble-minded, or infirm, or unable to dictate, let his guardian dictate justly.

Get the witness of two witnesses from your men. If two men are not (available), then (take) a man and two women from among those, you approve of as witnesses - so that if one of them errs, the other may remind her. Let the witnesses not refuse (to respond) when called on (for evidence).

And be not averse to recording (any transaction), small or large, with its due dates. This is more just before God, more valid as a testimony, and a more likely (way of) to avoiding doubts, except for on-the-spot transaction that you pass around among yourselves, when there is no blame on you if you do not write it.

And have witnesses whenever you engage in trade, and let no scribe or witness be harassed: if you do so, it will be immoral of you. So heed God, for it is God that teaches you. (Remember,) God is Cognizant of everything” (2:282).

“If you are on a journey and cannot find a scribe, a deposit (may suffice) as security.* If one of you should trust the other (with something) - let the trustee return his trust heeding his Lord. And do not hide any testimony, for whoever hides it, is a sinner at heart. (Remember,) God is Cognizant of what you do” (2:283). *[Arabic words for the underlined expression can also be rendered as: ‘pledges (may be taken) by hand.’]

24.2. Why Two Women To Substitute For One Man For A Witness?

The underlined Qur’anic injunction (2:282) to take two female witnesses for one male witness is often quoted by commentators as an indication or proof of a woman’s lower intellect. Such a conclusion from a single Qur’anic verse is misleading, as the Qur’an maintains its gender neutrality in all other witnessing situations, notably:

- While handing back properties to orphans as they reach a matured age (4:6/Ch. 31.1).
- Witnessing a will (5:106-107/Ch. 37).
- Witnessing an alleged adultery (4:15/Ch. 36.2; 24:4/Ch. 36.4).
- Witnessing the execution of a divorce (65:2/Ch. 34.2).

Historically, trading has been a predominantly male profession as it involved traveling across hazardous terrains and staying away from homes. Therefore, the general instruction is to take two male witnesses and if two of them are not available then one male and two female witnesses. This poses the question, whether the Qur'anic exceptional witnessing protocol must be regarded as binding for all times. We have to answer this from Qur'anic illustrations, as attempted below.

In the context of the revelation, the Qur'an was addressed to a given people at a given space-time bracket. Therefore, the Qur'anic precepts relating to the material aspects of life, such as employing hunting animals to catch birds (5:4/Ch. 25.2), traveling to the Ka'ba on lean mounts,¹ or employing cavalry² in combat were specific to the era, and the same conceivably is the case with the witnessing requirement in the market place. But the Qur'an repeatedly asks Muslims to reflect, to reason and to understand, and calls for consultation in running the affairs of the community (3:159, 42:38/Ch. 42.1), and even in family matters (2:233/Ch. 34.5). It is thus clear that the Qur'an did not want the Muslims to stop dead in the track of civilization at the seventh century Arabia. It leaves space for progress – for changing the material and commercial paradigms with time. It was possibly for this reason that "Caliph Umar used to entrust a lady, Shaffa bint 'Abdullah as an inspector over the market in Medina,"³ while there have been countless female professors and jurists in Islamic history who bestowed academic and juristic credentials to many men under their signatures. Thus if the progress of civilization removes the traditional barriers constraining women's active participation in commerce, the Qur'anic specific witnessing requirement may be adapted for the changed circumstances.

Notes

1. 22:27.
2. 8:60.
3. Extracted from the article, On recognition of women in Islam by Khaled Abou El Fadl, featured on the following web-link:
www.themodernreligion.com/women/recognition.html

[3 references]

25. Allowables & Forbidden For Food

25.1. The Qur'an Abolishes the Prevalent Taboos

In pre-Islamic Arabia, many edible things were either reserved only for men, or prohibited as food by prevalent taboos (Notes 4-6/Ch. 1). The Qur'an revokes these restrictions (6:145, 10:59).

"Say: 'In all that has been revealed to me, I do not find anything forbidden to eat, if one wants to eat (something), unless it be carrion or blood poured out, or the flesh of the swine – for that is loathsome, or a sinful offering to anyone besides God. But

if anyone is compelled (by necessity), without wanting to, or exceeding limits, then indeed your Lord is Most Forgiving and Merciful” (6:145).

“Say: ‘Do you see, what God has sent down for you as sustenance? But you make (a part) of it forbidden and (a part) lawful?’ Say: ‘Has God given you permission, or you have forged a lie against God’ (10:59)?

25.2. The Qur’an Allows All Lawful And Good Things

The Qur’an connotes the word *akl* with ‘eating’ (of food) as well as ‘availing of’ (2:168, 2:172/Ch. 23.4), and ‘consuming’ (2:188/Ch. 22.1). Therefore, its verb form *kulu* in the opening part of the verses 2:168 and 2:172 (Ch. 23.4), and other complementary verses¹ can be rendered as, ‘Eat of,’ and these verses would then read:

“O People! Eat of (*kulu*) all lawful and good things of what is in the earth ...” (2:168).

“You who believe! Eat of (*kulu*) the good things We have provided for you...” (2:172).

Thus, the Qur’an allows as food all lawful (Haram) and good things, including all livestock (except swine) (5:1), what the hunting animals could be trained to catch, including all kinds of birds (5:4), and all marine creatures (5:96):²

“You who believe, fulfil (your) commitments. The grazing animals are made lawful to you (for food) - except those already announced, but game is unlawful when you are in the state of pilgrimage. Indeed, God commands what He wishes” (5:1).

“They ask you (O Muhammad,) what is lawful for them (as food). Say: ‘Lawful for you are (all) good things. As for those hunting animals, which you have trained by teaching them something of what God has taught you - eat what they catch for you, and mention the name of God over it. Heed God, for God is swift in reckoning’” (5:4).

“All water-game and its (other) eatables³ are lawful provisions for you as well as for the travelers, but land game is forbidden to you when you are in the state of pilgrimage. Heed God, to whom you shall be summoned” (5:96).

Furthermore, by assigning dual meaning (‘Eat of’ and ‘Avail of’) to the word *kulu*, the Qur’an combines the lawfulness of food with the lawfulness of income. Accordingly, the Prophet’s companions were extremely careful about lawfulness of the method of procurement of what they ate. Thus, there are reports about Abu Bakr and Umar throwing up perfectly Haram food items like milk, in revulsion, when they were not convinced of their right to consume it.⁴

25.3. Food of the ‘People of the Book’

Towards the concluding phase of revelation, the Qur’an declares:

“This day (all) good things are made lawful for you. The food of those to whom Scripture [Book] was given is lawful for you, and your food is lawful for them; ...” (5:5). [Full verse in Ch. 32.3]

The Qur’an however does not state what category of food of the people of other revealed religions is permissible for the Muslims. Scholars agree that food items

consumed as found in nature, such as those of plant origin, milk, fish, eggs etc. are Haram for food, irrespective of their producer or grower, as no slaughtering nor any Qur'anic rite is involved in their cultivation or processing. As for the slaughtered animal, there has been a huge debate, and opinions remain divided to this day. However, it is worth noting that the Biblical teaching prohibits swine's flesh, blood, and dead animal as food, and requires slaughtering of cattle invoking the name of God.⁵ Therefore the slaughtered animals of the People of the Book (Christian and Jews) could be lawful to the Muslims, if they observed their religious rites.

25.4. The Qur'an forbids only a few things

The Qur'an only forbids carrion, free flowing blood, swine's flesh, and the meat of cattle consecrated to anyone other than God, or slaughtered without invoking God's name (2:173, 5:3, 6:118/119).⁶ It also defines the unnatural circumstances of an animal's death that would render its meat Haram (unlawful), and prohibits lottery (5:3).

"He has forbidden you carrion, blood, and swine's flesh, and that which has been consecrated to anyone other than God. But if anyone is compelled, without willful disobedience, or exceeding limits - (there is) no sin upon him. Indeed God is Most Forgiving and Merciful" (2:173).

"Forbidden to you (for food) are carrion, blood, swine's flesh, and that which has been consecrated to anyone other than God, and that (which has been killed) by strangling, or by a violent blow, or by a headlong fall or by being gored to death; or that which has been (partly) eaten by a wild animal - unless you (are able to) slaughter it; and that which is slaughtered before an idol, or divided up by drawing lots. (All) that is immoral. But if anyone is compelled by hunger, without deliberately sinning, God is indeed Most Forgiving and Merciful" (5:3).

"Eat of that over which God's name has been invoked, if you believe in His messages (6:118). Why should you not eat (the meat) over which God's name has been invoked when He has explained to you what is forbidden to you, unless (you are) compelled? But there are many who mislead (others) by their whims, without (any) knowledge. Indeed your Lord knows best those who exceed limits" (6:119).

As food likes and dislikes are conditioned by local traditions and availabilities, the Qur'an circumvents local influences in a generic injunction allowing all good things, except those expressly prohibited (7:32):

"Say: 'Who has forbidden the beautiful (gifts) (zinat) of God, which He has brought forth for His servants, and wholesome means of sustenance?' Say: 'They are, in the life of this world, for those who believe, (and) especially for them on the Day of Judgment.' Thus do We explain the signs in detail for those who know" (7:32).

As Muhammad Asad comments,⁷ the verse indicates the Qur'an's disapproval of any self-denial or asceticism that was traditionally associated with piety.

Notes

1. 5:88, 23:51.

2. 16:14, 35:12.
3. This understandably refers to dead fish, or other marine creatures collected from the beach, or from the bank of a river, lake or pond. - Abul Kalam Azad, Tarjuman al-Qur'an, 1931; reprint New Delhi 1989, Vol.2, p. 670.
4. Muhammad al-Ghazali, Ihya ul-'Ulum, Urdu translation by Ahsan Siddiquee, Karachi 1983, Vol.2, p.128.
5. The Bible, Deuteronomy, Chap. 12-14.
6. 6:121.
7. Muhammad Asad, Message of the Qur'an, Gibraltar 1980, Chap. 7, Note 24.

[7 references]

26. Intoxicants & Gambling

26.1. Qur'anic exhortations against intoxicants and gambling

The Qur'an introduces its restrictions on intoxicants and gambling in phases, beginning with a general exhortation (2:219):

“They ask you (O Muhammad,) concerning intoxicants and gambling. Say: ‘There is grave sin as well as some benefits for people in both of them; but their sin is greater than their benefit;’ and they ask you (O Muhammad,) concerning what to spend (in God’s way). Say: ‘the surplus.’ Thus does God clarify the messages to you, that you may reflect” (2:219).

At a later stage, the believers are asked not to approach prayer in a state of intoxication or when mental faculty is impaired, such as due to influence of drugs, giddiness or any reason (4:43).¹

“You who believe, do not approach prayer while you are intoxicated (sukara) until you know what you say...” (4:43).

In the final phase (5:90/91), the Qur'an speaks about the social vices of drinking and gambling and asks the believers to keep away from them:

“You who believe, intoxicants and gambling, idols and raffles are defilements from the work of Satan, so abstain from them that you may succeed (5:90). Satan desires to create enmity and hatred among you with intoxicants and gambling, and to keep you from the remembrance of God, and from prayer. So, will you not desist” (5:91)?

No matter the semantics, it goes without saying that the above verses advocate abstinence from all forms of intoxicants and gambling, while a vast number of Prophetic traditions place the Qur'anic admonition regarding intoxicant and gambling in the binding (hurmah) category.

26.2. Supreme significance of deeds and heedfulness (Taqwa)

The verse 5:93 belonging to the last revealed Sura of the Qur'an lays special emphasis on good deeds and heedfulness (Taqwa), by pronouncing each of these precepts thrice (underlined below):

“Those who believe and do good deeds shall not be blamed for **what they may eat (or drink)** (fima ta'imu,) so long as they heed (attaqu), and believe, and do good deeds; so long as they heed (attaqu), and believe; so long as they heed (attaqu), and do good (Remember,) God loves the compassionate ” (5:93).

The phrase fima ta'imu (rendered in bold) carries a seeming liberty on what 'one may eat and drink,' or, literally what one 'may have eaten and drank,' so long as he does good deeds and remains heedful, that is, practices Taqwa. Most interpreters have, however, added a qualifying bracket: '(in the past)' after the reference to 'eating', implying that God will not blame Muslims for what they ate or drank before conversion to Islam, provided they remained committed to good deeds and heedfulness (Taqwa) after embracing faith. Such an interpretation has some difficulty.

The Qur'an affirms that all past (sins) are forgiven when the disbelievers embrace Islam.² Thus, there can be no question of the Qur'an making the forgiveness of past sins contingent to the doing of good deeds after embracing faith, as the additional qualifying bracket implies. Therefore, as advocated by Muhammad Asad,³ and reflected in our rendering, the 'eating' action referred to in the verse applies to any time a person may eat or drink any thing.

This verse would appear to remind those believers who may be painstakingly complying with Qur'anic dietary precepts (Ch. 25), that they will be judged primarily on the basis of their deeds and heedfulness (Taqwa), rather than by what they ate or drank. This argument is consistent with the Qur'an's broader message on Haram and Haram (6:151-153/Ch. 19.1), and can hardly be perceived as a bid at intellectualization, as some may contend.

The foregoing proposition may, however, be turned around by arguing that anyone who willfully partakes of the forbidden (Haram) category of food defaults on heedfulness (Taqwa), and therefore, he must comply with the Qur'anic dietary instructions to avoid incurring blame in God's sight. God knows best.

The verb ta'ima primarily applies to eating and drinking. Muhammad Asad, however, notes that in a broader sense, it may also be interpreted to imply the partaking of all good things in life,⁴ Thus, the verse seemingly removes any taboo on undue austerity in dietary or living habits, so long as a believer remains committed to Taqwa and good deeds. The Qur'an further clarifies its message in yet another verse from the same period:

“You who believe, do not forbid the good things God has made lawful for you, but do not exceed limits. Indeed God does not love those who exceed limits” (5:87).

Notes

1. Muhammad Asad, Message of the Qur'an, Gibraltar 1980, Chap. 4, Note 54.
2. 8:38.

3. Muhammad Asad, Message of the Qur'an, Gibraltar 1980, Chap.5, Note 108.

[3. references]

27. Thoughtless Oaths

In the Prophet's era, oaths played a significant role in personal and family lives. Thus a man could temporarily abandon his wife by taking an oath (ayman),¹ which he could break at will.² As a prelude to introducing its laws on divorce (beginning with 2:226/Ch. 34.1), the Qur'an exhorts the believers to refrain from upsetting peace and harmony in the family or society by taking thoughtless oaths (2:224/225).

"Do not make God an excuse for your oaths (ayman) that would prevent your being virtuous (tabarru), or heedful (tattaqu), or reconciliatory among people. (Remember,) God is All-Knowing and Aware" (2:224). God will not take you to account for any frivolity in your oaths, but He will take you to account for the intention* in your hearts. (Indeed) He is Most Forgiving and Gracious" (2:225).

*[Lit., 'earnings'.]

However, the breaking of an oath taken in earnest is a sin (16:91) that needs to be atoned (5:89).

"God will not take you to account for thoughtlessness in your oaths - but He will take you to account for the oaths which you swear, in earnest, the expiation for which is the feeding of ten needy persons with the average of what you would feed your own families, or clothing them, or freeing a slave; but if anyone cannot afford (this), then it is fasting for three days. This is the expiation of your oaths that you have sworn, but (it is better that) you keep your oaths. Thus does God clarify His messages to you, that you may be grateful (to Him)" (5:89).

"Fulfil the promise to God, once you have pledged, and do not break any oaths after having confirmed them, as you have made God your surety. Indeed God knows what you do" (16:91).

Finally, it needs explaining that in the Qur'anic context oath (ayman) is a personal pledge aimed at denying oneself of any good thing that the Law of Islam does not prohibit,³ or giving up a lawful habit or pursuit.

Notes

1. The Qur'anic word ayman, rendered as 'oath' must not be confused with the notions of 'testimony', and 'commitment' for which the Qur'an uses the roots ShHD and AHD respectively.
2. This custom was however abolished with the introduction of divorce laws, beginning with the verse 2:226, which succeeds 2:225 above on thoughtless oaths.

3. Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, Gibraltar 1980, Chap.5, Notes 100, 101.

[3 references]

28. On Personal Clothing And Modesty

28.1. Significance of clothing for humanity

In one of the Meccan verses, the Qur'an speaks about the relative significance of clothing:

“Children of Adam! We have sent you clothing to cover your nakedness, and for (your) beauty (risha),* but the cloak of heedfulness (Taqwa) is the best. This is among the signs of God, that they may be mindful”(7:26). *[Lit., ‘plumage’ – metaphorically derived from the bird’s plumage.]

The Qur'an expands on this in the Medinite period in a long and cryptic passage (24:30/31) asking both believing men and women to avert their glances (from what they should not see) in addition to covering their private parts (furujaḥ). The passage also commands womenfolk to ‘draw their shawls (khimar) over their bosoms’ permitting a casual display of ‘what is (normally) apparent’ and forbids them from exposing their ‘charms’ (zinat) except in the presence of the immediate members of their household, and restrains them from walking in a provocative manner. The fuller interpretation of these injunctions, which will be contingent to the exact meaning of the word zinat, is evolved in the commentary following the rendering of the passage.

“Tell believing men to restrain their glances and guard their private parts (furujaḥ)*. This is (conducive) to their purity. Indeed God is Informed of whatever they contrive (in their minds) (24:30). And tell believing women to restrain their glances and guard their private parts (furujaḥ)*, and not to expose their charms (zinat) except what is (normally) apparent of it, and to draw their shawls (khimar) over their bosoms, and not to expose their charms (zinat) except (in the presence of) their husbands, or their fathers, or their husbands’ fathers, or their sons, or their husbands’ sons, or their brothers, or their brothers’ sons, or their sisters’ sons, or their women, or those under their lawful trust, or the male attendants not having any (sexual) desire, or children not yet conscious of women’s sexuality; nor let them strike their feet so as to make known what they hide of their charms (zinat). And turn to God together, you believers, that you may succeed” (24:31). *[See usage in the verse 23:5/Ch. 19.1.]

28.2. Orthodox View On Dressing Norms For Women

The orthodox scholars interpret the word zinat in the verse as ornaments, women wear to enhance their appeal. They argue that since women wear ornaments around their neck and on their ears and arms and hands, and so forth, all these parts of the body must be covered, and accordingly they advocate head-to-toe veiling.¹ They draw on a tradition that the Prophet had told his young sister-in-law Asma that an adolescent girl’s

body should not be visible except her face and palm.² But (i) the compiler (Abu Daud) himself classified it as a weak tradition, (ii) the tradition was not reported by earlier Imams, al-Bukhari and Muslim and (iii) it imposed a clothing requirement that was excessive for the scarcities of the time, as indicated by a number of traditions,³ and by the prevalent custom of men and women wearing single pieces of unstitched cloaks around their bodies.⁴ Thus the authenticity of the tradition remains too questionable to support the classical interpretation of the passage. Hence the traditional meaning of the term zinat as external ornament, which provides the basis for the classical interpretation, is also untenable.

28.3. Textual Analysis of The Qur'anic Injunction (24:31)

The interpretation of the critical words and phrases of the verse is tabled below.

1. **zinat** : The Qur'an often uses the word zinat and its other forms to denote the gifts of God, alluring to humans, such as the worldly life,⁵ feeling of love for the opposite sex,⁶ and all sorts of beautiful things.⁷ Based on this analogy, the word zinat in the above verse must be something beautiful and alluring that God has gifted to a woman, and this can only be her 'physical' charms, – not the ornaments that she may or may not wear. This corollary is reinforced by the permission of casual exposure in the presence of (i) male family members of the household and (ii) male attendants not having any (sexual) desire, or children not yet conscious of women's sexuality.' If zinat were to mean ornaments, these instructions will be meaningless as:

- It will be virtually immaterial for a male member of a household, whether the female inmates (sister, wife, mother, aunty etc) reveal or hide their ornaments. The instruction will only make sense if zinat connoted with the physical charm of the body that is liable to be exposed in day-to-day life.
- If zinat were to mean ornaments, the instruction should have been to hide them from the male attendants as well as children, as they both might be attracted by its glamour. The instruction will only make sense if zinat connoted with the physical charm for which none of them would have any appeal.

2. **'what is apparent of it'**: Muhammad Asad quotes al-Qiffal to interpret the phrase as 'that which a human being may show in accordance with prevailing custom,' obviously within the Qur'anic spirit of modesty.⁸

3. **'to draw their shawls (khimar) over their bosoms'**: Many scholars, including Muhammad Asad affirm that in pre-Islamic Arabia, many women did not cover their breasts as a dressing norm – a practice dictated both by scarcity of clothes and pagan relaxed attitude towards sexuality. So, the instruction is simply to pull the shawl around the upper part of the body.

4. **'nor let them strike their feet'**: In the scarcity society of the time when a woman wrapped herself with merely a single piece of clothing and wore but little ornaments, this instruction forbade her from walking about in a seductive and revealing manner. In its universal context, it is a general guideline for women against adopting a provocative gait - despite proper covering of body.

28.4. Qur'anic universal guidelines on modesty

The clear pronouncements of the verses 7:26 and 24:30 and the textual analysis of 24:31 as tabled above demonstrate that for any public appearance, the Qur'an asks, men and women to restrain their glances and cover their private parts (*furujah*). The Qur'an also takes account of a woman's innate power to provoke the male sexual impulse by wearing revealing outfit. She is therefore asked to dress modestly, commensurate to the prevailing custom, and to bear herself in a non-provocative manner. Wearing of any external head to toe veil, covering of head, and gender-based segregation are not specified.

Women are also allowed some 'concessions' to facilitate their joint accommodation with close relatives, such as their fathers, father-in-laws, brothers, nephews, children and senile male attendants.

28.5. The Qur'an makes concession for elderly women

“(As for) the elderly women who sit around and do not look forward to marriage, there is no blame on them in taking off their garments (provided they do so) without showing off their charms (*zinat*), but modesty is better for them. (Remember,) God is All-Knowing and Aware” (24:60).

In historical context, common people in most parts of the world barely had any extra clothing apart from what they wore, and used community washing and bathing facility in a modest way. The verse relents towards the elderly women who may be instinctively less conscious of their sexuality, that they may go about their daily chores without being blamed for showing off their physical charms (*zinat*).

28.6. Dressing guideline for the Prophet's household and other Muslim women

In a clearly stated verse, the Prophet is asked to tell the womenfolk in his household and other believing women to pull their cloaks around themselves for others to recognize them without causing them any annoyance (33:59).

“O Prophet, tell your wives and your daughters and the womenfolk of believers that they should draw their cloaks over themselves: this may be more appropriate as they may be recognized (in public), but not annoyed (*yu'dhayna*)*. (Remember,) God is Most Forgiving and Merciful” (33:59). *[See the rendering of 33:53/Ch. 3.15 for use of common root- word.]

As Muhammad Asad comments, the specific time bound reference to the Prophet's wives and daughters, and the deliberate vagueness of the instruction, by not specifying what part of the body to be covered, make it clear that the verse carries a general moral guideline as is reinforced by the concluding God's attributes of Mercy and forgiveness.⁹ The orthodox cite this verse to reinforce their argument on head-to-toe veiling for Muslim women. But this restrictive dressing code is conceivably, a reflection of the pre-Islamic heritage of Muslim scholars.

28.7. Influence of pre-Islamic heritage on women's dress code

Until the advent of Islam, women were oppressed and subjected to various forms of restrictions in practically all the major civilizations.¹⁰ Therefore all the Christians (including the Romans and Greeks), Zoroastrians, pagans and Hindus who embraced

Islam brought notions against women from their previous religions. This inevitably influenced their interpretation of Qur'anic exhortations on modesty. With time, this gave rise to imposition of varying restrictions upon women, including their full veiling and segregation when outside the house – a custom borrowed understandably from “the Greek Christians of Byzantium, who had long veiled and segregated their women in this manner.”¹¹

Notes

1. Muhammad Shafi, *Mu'arif al-Qur'an*, New Delhi 1993, Vol. VI, p. 396.
2. Sanan Abu Daud, Urdu translation by Wahiduz Zaman, Vol.3, Ch. 26/Acc. 704, p. 264.
3. Sahih al-Bukhari, English translation by Mohsin Khan, New Delhi 1984, Vol.1, Acc. 305, 309, 348-358, 360, 361, 366.
4. Ibid., Vol.1, Acc. 358.
5. “Worldly life allures (zuiyina) those who deny (God's Guidance)...” (2:212/Ch. 41.1).
6. “Alluring (zuiyina) to people is the love for pleasures from women ...” (3:14/Ch. 41.1).
7. “Who has forbidden the beautiful (gifts) (zinat) of God, which He has brought forth for His servants ...” (7:32/Ch. 25.4).
8. Muhammad Asad, *Message of the Qur'an*, Gibraltar 1980, Chap. 24, Note 37.
9. Ibid., Chapter 33, note 75.
10. An illustration of how the pre-Islamic world treated women: The Zoroastrians (Persians) kept their women in confinement, guarded by eunuchs. The Greek followed their example and kept their women in gynaeceum, often under lock and key. The Hindus burnt their widows alive on funeral pyres of their husband's bodies - a practice continued until recent centuries. The Chinese bound their women's feet in iron shoes as a cultural norm, obviously, to restrict their movement. The Christian Church placed women under total domination of men. (The Bible, Genesis 3.16). Roman male citizens could kill their women by law, if they found them committing adultery.
11. Karen Armstrong, *Islam, A short history*, New York 2002, p. 16.

[11 references]

29. Bidding The Good And Forbidding The Evil

29.1. To enjoin the good and forbid the evil

The Qur'an enjoins what it calls *ma'ruf* – which it connotes with doing good to others and behaving in the most decent and reasonable manner in the community. It forbids (*naha*)¹ the *munkar*: all acts, gesture, and behavior that run counter to reason and contradict all norms of good behavior (3:104, 3:110).² For simplicity, we will be rendering these terms as the good (*ma'ruf*) and the evil (*munkar*).

“Let there be a community among you who will invite (others) to be good, enjoin the good (ma’ruf), and forbid the evil (munkar), and it is they who shall succeed” (3:104).

“You are the best community brought forth for humanity; you enjoin the good, and forbid the evil, and believe in God. If the People of the Book would only believe - it would be best for them: some of them have true faith (mu’minun) while most of them are perverse” (3:110).

In the context of the revelation, the verse 3:110 describes Muslims as ‘the best community’. However, taken in isolation, the pronouncement can be highly misleading. To deserve this accolade, Muslims must comply with the all-embracing directives of the Qur’an, and emulate the noble principles and exemplary moral conduct and behavior of the Prophet (33:21/Ch. 15). Apparently, this verse also calls upon the People of the Book (the Jews and Christians) to embrace Islam, but it also declares that some of the People of the Book have indeed true faith in God (mu’minun). Therefore citing this verse partially to indicate the exclusivity of Muslims (the followers of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh) will be misleading.

29.2. Admonitions against all forms of vices

As mentioned in the Preface (Note 24), the Qur'an uses different root-words while referring to different categories of vices. The following review attempts to render these words in a consistent manner, giving the transliteration of each Arabic word in the first instance of its appearance to maintain the integrity of translation.³

The Qur'an forbids (harramah) sins (thaiyat), abominable acts (fawahishah)⁴ (16:90, 24:21, 42:37)⁵ – whether open or secret (6:120, 7:33), and terrorism (baghya) (7:33, 7:56).⁶

“Abstain from sin – whether open or secret: those who earn sin will get due recompense for what they have earned” (6:120).

“Say, ‘My Lord has forbidden abominable deeds - whether open or secret, sin, and unlawful terrorism, and that you should associate (others) with God for which He has not sent down any authority, or say things concerning God that you do not know’” (7:33).

“Do not cause corruption (fasad) on earth after it has been reformed, but pray to Him with fear and longing. Indeed God’s Mercy lies close to the compassionate”(7:56).

“God commands justice and goodness and giving to fellowmen (qurba),⁷ and He forbids the abominable, the evil, and terrorism, and instructs you that you may be mindful” (16:90).

“You who believe, do not follow Satan’s footsteps; for he who follows Satan’s footsteps (will find that) he (Satan) enjoins the abominable and the evil. (Remember,) without God's Grace and Mercy towards you – not one of you will ever be pure; but God purifies anyone He wills. (Remember,) God is All-Knowing and Aware” (24:21).

“Whatever you are given is a provision for this life, but what is with God is finer and lasting, (and it is) for those who believe and put their trust in their Lord (42:36), and who avoid grave sins and abominations and forgive (even) when they are angered” (42:37).

29.3. The Qur’an is lenient with the repentant and stern to the arrogant

The Qur'an recognizes man's innate propensity to commit evil or wrong his own soul (5:100), even while praying for good (17:11). It promises forgiveness to those who are ashamed of a vice having committed it (4:110).⁸ However, it is stern against those, who commit sin, and then blame the innocent (4:111/112). It asks believers not to confuse their faith with wrongdoing (6:82), but underlines a concession for minor mistakes (53:32).

“If anyone commits a sin or wrongs his own soul and then seeks God's forgiveness, he will find God Most Forgiving and Merciful (4:110). So anyone who earns a sin, earns it upon himself (and must know that) God is All-Knowing and Wise (111). But anyone who earns a mistake (khati’a) or a sin, and then throws the blame upon the innocent, burdens himself with a slander as well as an open sin” (4:112).

“Say, ‘Bad (things) (khabisah) and good (things) (tayyibah) are not equal, though the plentiful of bad (things) pleases you. So, heed God – O you prudent, that you may succeed’” (5:100).

“Those who believe and do not confuse their faith with wrongdoing - it is they who (are in) security, and they are (rightly) guided” (6:82).

“Man (sometimes) prays for (things that are) bad (sharr) while praying for (his) good - as man is prone to be hasty” (17:11).

“Those who avoid grave sins and abomination except for minor lapses* (will) indeed (find) God Boundless in forgiveness. He knows you (well) as He caused you to grow from the earth and when you were hidden in your mothers’ wombs; so do not redeem yourselves. (Remember,) God knows best who heeds” (53:32). *[Lit., ‘a touch thereof’.]

Notes

1. In Qur’anic vocabulary, the word naha connotes a non-compulsive forbiddance, that is ‘restraining’ against doing something. Examples:
 - 79:40 - refers to those who ‘restrain’ (naha) their own souls.
 - 11:62 – The Prophet Salih’s elders asked him if he was trying to ‘restrain’ them (atanhana) from their idols.
 - 29:45 - Prayer (salat) ‘restrains’ (tanha) one from abomination (fahshah).
2. 9:112, 22:41, 31:17.
3. Since the notions of the different Arabic words relating to ‘goodness’ and ‘badness’ (Note 24/Preface) remain subjective, it is impossible to claim accuracy in the choice of the English counterparts in the above focused review.

4. See Note 4/Ch. 19 for fuller notion of this word (singular form, fahishah) as used in the Qur'an.
5. 6:151 (Text in Ch. 19.1), 29:45.
6. 42:42/Ch. 12.2.
7. See 4:36/Ch. 17.3 for the broader connotation of the word Qurba as fellowmen.
8. 3:135.

[8 references]

30. The Abolition of Slavery

30.1. Phased abolition of slavery

The Qur'an aimed at removing slavery in a phased manner. The phasing out was an historical necessity as the social and historical realities of the time were not conducive to an abrupt eradication of slavery with all its ramifications. Moreover, the Qur'an also had to address other prevalent vices in tandem. It therefore introduced its injunctions against slavery concomitantly with its social and moral reforms. Thus, it gives clear directives to freeing the slaves (riqab, pl. raqabah) in the following passages:

- 90:13-16 (Ch. 17.1). The Qur'an combines its exhortation on "the freeing of a slave" (90:13), with "feeding during famine (14) an orphaned relative (15), or the needy (lying) in the dust" (90:16).
- 4:92 (Ch. 39) commands the freeing of a believing slave and paying compensation for any accidental killing of a believer.
- 5:89 (Ch. 27) lists the freeing of a slave as an option to expiate a false oath taken in the earnest.
- 2:177 (Ch. 19.3) includes the freeing of slaves among the virtues of the truly pious.
- 9:60 (Ch. 18.8) includes slaves regardless of faith in the category of people entitled to receive charity.
- 58:3 requires the freeing of a slave as expiation for breaking an oath called zihar, which absolved a man of all conjugal responsibilities to his wife, but did not give her the freedom of divorce:

"Those who divorce their wives by zihar* and then wish to go back on their words, must free a slave before they touch each other..."(58:3). *[The word literally means 'back.' Many men abandoned their wives simply by declaring, "You are to me like my mother's back" (58:2)]

Since slavery and prostitution went hand in hand, the Qur'an aimed at eradicating slavery by rehabilitating the male and female slaves through the institution of marriage. Thus the Qur'an exhorts men to marry from among the bondmaids under their lawful trust (4:25), marry off the unmarried ones among their male and female slaves (24:32) and free their slaves against reasonable contract, allowing them to pay later for their freedom (24:33).

“And any of you who cannot afford to marry (yankiha) chaste believing woman (should marry) from believing bondmaids under your lawful trust,¹ and God knows best your faith. Some of you have (ties) with others of them. So marry them with the permission of their people and give them their dowers reasonably as (meriting) chaste women, and do not prostitute them nor take them as mistresses. If they commit adultery after they are married, their punishment is half that of (free) chaste women. This (permission to marry bondmaids) goes for those of you who fear (committing sin by) their (sexual) impulses. However, patience is best for you. (Remember,) God is Most Forgiving and Merciful” (4:25).

“Marry off the unmarried ones among you and those among your slaves (‘abd) and bondmaids that are ready for marriage.² If they are needy, God will enrich them of His bounty. (Remember,) God is Boundless (in mercy) and All-Knowing (24:32). Yet those who have no (financial) means to marry should wait until God enriches them of His bounty. And as for those under your lawful trust who seek a contract (for freedom), draw it up for them if you know any good in them, and give them out of the riches God has given you. And do not coerce your bondmaids into prostitution seeking the gains of this world, when they want to be chaste - seeking the pleasure of worldly life. But should anyone coerce them (sexually), God will be Merciful (to them) after they have been so coerced” (24:33).

30.2. Qur’anic Positive Phrase For Slaves And Bondmaids

While the Qur’an uses the words *fatat*,³ *riqab*,⁴ *‘abd*,⁵ to denote a slave, bondmaid in the historical sense, it also employs a dignified phrase, *ma malakat ayman* to denote slaves, bondmaids, and for that matter, anyone who is under one’s lawful trust. Most scholars render this phrase literally as: ‘what the right hand possesses’, and connote it restrictively with slaves, bondmaids, captives, and prisoners of war in the masculine as well as feminine gender. Such an interpretation is misleading. The closest literal translation of this expression would be: ‘those possessed by (or under trust to) the right hand.’ However, the Qur’an uses the word ‘right hand’ figuratively to denote a positive lawful status, such as the companions of the ‘right hand’,⁶ and God’s ‘right hand’.⁷ Therefore, the phrase could be best rendered as “those under one’s lawful trust.” Thus through its ingenious vocabulary, the Qur’an gives a new ennobling status to the slaves and bondmaids who were historically relegated to the lowest rung of the social hierarchy – hated, despised, brutalized and segmented from the freeborn by impervious boundaries.

The Qur’anic phrase *malakat ayman* (sing. *mil al-yamin*) is no camouflage or mere euphemism. In the Prophet’s days, captives from armed conflicts were distributed among the Medinite Muslims for their safe custody. Those captives, whether male or female, were virtually ‘slaves’ but were regarded as *malakat ayman*; and accordingly their custodians treated them with sympathy and consideration. William Muir, one of the most hostile of the Prophet’s biographers offers this quotation from a prisoner: “the men of Medina made us ride, while they themselves walked, they gave us wheaten bread to eat when there was a little of it, contenting themselves with dates.” ⁸

In a different plane, unlike the legal codes that preceded it, and succeeded it for over a millennium, the Qur'an does not enact any separate civil law or code for the slaves or the *ma malakat ayman* class. The Qur'an does, however, refer to slavery in the context of the past or even prevalent traditions, but its civil, commercial, inheritance and family laws are for all believers, without any reference to their being freeborn or slaves.

In sum, Qur'anic repeated rejoinders on freeing slaves, its clear dictates to looking after them, to setting them free and to marrying them off, its specific ennobling vocabulary for slaves, bondmaids and captives, and its avoidance of any distinction between slaves and freeborn in all its social and civil laws, amply demonstrate that the Qur'an aimed at rooting out the institution of slavery. Accordingly Caliph Umar abolished slavery among the native inhabitants of Arabia. He also gave a clear instruction to his generals, on the strength of the Qur'an, not to turn the civilian population of conquered nations into slaves.⁹ However, he met with stiff resistance from many of his generals, and his policy was discontinued with the establishment of the first Islamic dynasty (AH 40), less than two decades after his death (AH 24). Thus slavery re-established itself in the Islamic world, barely thirty years after the Prophet's death, and was vigorously followed by slave traders and those with vested interests, for many centuries to come.

The Qur'anic ideal of a slave free society was realized more than twelve hundred years after the death of the Prophet – but not in the Islamic world. Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the United States (1861-1865) legislated the abolition of slavery by the [Emancipation Proclamation](#) (Jan.1 1863). Ironically, the classical Islamic Shari'a that had its birth more than a hundred years after the Prophet's demise, entertained slavery; and slaves, bondmaids, and concubines formed an integral part of the social hierarchy of Islamic civilization in many Muslim lands.

Notes

1. The opening and the clarifying underlined stipulations suggest that when a man of limited means apprehends that a Muslim woman may not entertain his marriage proposal, he should approach a bondmaid, offering her the same sort of dowry that he would have offered a free Muslim woman. The verse has been often misinterpreted to imply the following propositions, supportive of the institution of slavery. To quote Muhammad Shafi:
 - “As far as possible one should marry free women; one should not marry a bondmaid.”
 - “It will be *makruh* (undesirable) for anyone having the means to marry a freewomen, to marry a Muslim or believing bondmaid.” - Quoted from Abu Hanifa.
 - “It is *Haram* (forbidden) to marry a bondmaid, and thus completely forbidden to marry a bondmaid from the *kitabia* (the People of the Book)”.Muhammad Shafi, *Mu'arif al-Qur'an*, New Delhi 1993, Vol.II, p. 371.
2. The Qur'an normally connotes the word *al-sualih* (pl. *al-sualihin*) with a pious person, who is, so to say, spiritually sound. However, the term can also apply in

the material sense, such as physical and moral fitness for marriage, as rendered in underline. - Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, Gibraltar 1980, Chap.24, Note 43.

3. 12:30, 4:25.
4. 2:177, 4:92, 5:89, 9:60, 58:3, 90:13.
5. 2:178, 2:221, 24:32.
6. 56:8, 56:27.
7. 39:67.
8. Rafiq Zakaria, *Muhammad and the Qur'an*, London 1992, p. 408.
9. Shibli Noumani, *al-Faruq*, Delhi 1898, Karachi reprint 1991, p. 258.

[9 references]

31. Protection Of Orphans / Orphaned Women

31.1. Qur'anic laws protecting orphans and women

The Qur'an evolves a set of laws to protect the interest of orphans and women, who were oppressed and exploited in pre-Islamic Arabia, as elsewhere in the contemporaneous world.

It asks men to honestly manage the property of the orphans, and by implication, of those under their lawful trust (2:220, 17:34) until they reached a matured, marriageable age (4:6, 17:34). It calls for the grooming of such orphans, and then handing them back their properties with due witnessing (4:5-6). It also warns men against absorbing any property under their trust, or exchanging any valuables under their trust with their own worthless assets (4:2, 4:10). It, however, authorizes the needy custodian of an orphan's property to claim reasonable charges (4:6).

“...(Thus does God clarify His messages, that you may reflect) on this life and the hereafter. They ask you (O Muhammad,) about orphans. Say: ‘Their welfare is the best, but if you mix up their affairs with yours, (remember,) they are your brethren; and God knows the corrupt from the benefactor. If God wished, He could have ruined you, for God is Almighty, Wise’” (2:220). [Bracketed qualification is from the lead verse 2:219/Ch. 26.1.]

“And restore their property to the orphans, without exchanging bad for good, and do not absorb their property into your wealth, for this will be a grave sin” (4:2).

“And do not hand over to the feeble minded, (their property in) your wealth, which God has assigned to you for (their) support, but provide them out of it, and clothe them, and speak to them kindly” (4:5).

“And test the orphans (in your charge) until they reach the marriageable age. If you then find them matured enough, hand over their property to them, but do not consume it wastefully or hastily before they grow up. If one [the guardian] is rich, let him abstain (from claiming charges). But as for one who is poor, let him take

what is fair. And when you hand over their property to them, have it witnessed for them, though God is Sufficient in taking account” (4:6).

“Those who unjustly consume the property of orphans, devour fire into their bellies; and soon they will endure a blaze” (4:10).

“Do not approach the property of an orphan, except for (its) improvement, until he reaches maturity, and fulfill (your) commitments, for (every) commitment will be questioned.” (17:34).

In the course of the revelation, many men were killed in battles resulting in a disproportionate rise in the number of women, many of whom were orphaned. For the permanent settlement of these women, the Qur'an allows Muslim men to marry up to four orphaned women provided they could treat them with equity ('adl)* and justice (qist)*, but otherwise only one of them, or a female under their lawful trust (4:3). *[See Ch. 21.1 for common usage of words.]

“If you fear that you cannot do justice (qist) by the orphans, marry women who please you - two or three or four; but if you still fear that you cannot treat (them) equitably ('adilu), then only one, or (marry) someone under your lawful trust. Then it is most likely that you will not act unjustly” (4:3).

In a later verse (4:127), the Qur'an admonishes the early Muslims for their selfish desire to marrying the orphaned women under their charge, and discourages them from marrying more than one woman, as they could never treat them equitably (4:129).

“They consult you about (the laws) concerning women. Say: ‘God enlightens you about (the laws) concerning them in what is (already) conveyed to you in this divine Writ (kitab) about female orphans (under your charge,) to whom you do not give as prescribed for them, though you desire to marry them; and about the helpless children; and that you must support the orphans justly (bi al-qiste).’ (Remember,) whatever good you do, surely God is Cognizant of it” (4:127).

“You will never be able to treat (more than one) wife equitably ('adilu), however eager you may be; and so do not be completely partial, so as to leave her in suspense. But if you reconcile and are heedful (tattaqu), God is Most Forgiving and Merciful” (4:129).

31.2. The Qur'an recommends monogamy as a social norm

The Qur'anic conditional clause of treating the wives (if more than one) equitably (4:3) coupled with the underlined stipulation of the verse (4:129) suggests that the primary recommendation of the Qur'an is for monogamy. The Qur'an furnishes further illustrations to fully clarify itself:

- Wherever it refers to the wives of other prophets, such as those of Abraham,¹ Noah,² Lot,³ Imran,⁴ Job,⁵ and Zakaria ⁶ it is suggestive of each Prophet having one living wife.

- The Qur'anic word *zauja* for spouse denotes a pair: one each of opposite sex. Thus Adam's spouse is referred to in the singular,⁷ and the two of them are referred to as a pair.⁸
- The Qur'an's reference to the wives of its other characters, such as Pharaoh,⁹ the Egyptian nobleman who had bought Joseph,¹⁰ and Abu Lahab¹¹ are suggestive of each having one living wife.
- The Qur'anic inheritance laws (Ch. 38) refer to the shares of sons and daughters (4:11), two or more daughters (4:11), brothers and sisters (4:176), two sisters (4:176), more than two brothers and sisters (4:12), implying the plurality of each of these family members. But in the case of a widow, the inheritance is reciprocal with the husband (4:12), which admits of a man leaving behind one widow as a social norm.
- The Qur'anic permission to a woman who just lost her husband, to avail of a year's maintenance and lodging at her deceased husband's home (2:240/Ch. 35.2) is suggestive of a man leaving behind one widow.

These Qur'anic illustrations clearly show that the Qur'an espouses a monogamous society as a social norm. This view was propounded as early as the third century of Islam and is shared by many eminent Islamic scholars, notably Yusuf Ali,¹² and Ameer Ali.¹³ Muhammad Asad and Husayn Haykal refer to the conditional clause of the verse 4:3 and observe that such plural marriages are allowed only in 'exceptional circumstances.'^{14,15}

As the issue has been debated since early centuries of Islam, it merits further discussion as tabled in the footnote.¹⁶

Notes

1. 11:71, 51:29.
2. 66:10.
3. 11:81, 15:60, 29:33, 66:10.
4. 3:35.
5. 38:44.
6. 3:40, 21:90.
7. 2:35, 7:19, 20:117.
8. 2:36, 7:20-22, 20:121.
9. 28:9, 66:11.
10. 12:21, 12:23-26.
11. 111:4.
12. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an*, Lahore 1934, reprinted, Maryland 1983, note 509.
13. Syed Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, Delhi 1923, reprinted 1990, p. 229.
14. Muhammad Asad, *Message of the Qur'an*, Gibraltar 1980, Chap. 4, Note 4.

15. Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, English translation by Ismail Ragi, 8th edition, Karachi 1989, p. 293.
16. The critics who insist on labeling Islam with polygamy may cite the example of the Prophet who had taken many wives. But the fact remains, the Prophet lived in monogamy with his first wife Khadija for about 25 years until her death, and his later marriages were the result of exceptional circumstances (Enc. 2). The critic may still question, if recommendation was 'towards monogamy', why wasn't it clearly spelled out? The answer is simple: Strict monogamy would have inevitably resulted in increased suffering and exploitation of women at the hands of the constitutionally lustful man:

In the context of the revelation, introduction of monogamy in a single stroke and without any other option, would have required the new polygamous converts to part with all but one of their wives, leaving a good number of women without a protective husband. This would have created serious problems relating to the status, preoccupation, source of income and future of such an unprotected women, and the custody and maintenance of the children born to them after their separation from their former husbands.

In historical perspective, only menfolk took part in trading missions or other civil, political or military assignments leaving their wives behind, as journey to distant places was hazardous and took long. These men, living away from their wives for months and sometimes years, needed women to meet their physical, emotional and biological needs. Strict monogamy in such a setting would have inevitably led such travelers to use women without the bond of marriage resulting in gross exploitation of women and concomitant social vices.

As a universal fact of life, a man's wife may be permanently impaired from discharging her marital role because of ill health, accident etc. Strict monogamy would prevent any second marriage of such a man, and inevitably drive him either to divorce his incapacitated wife and remarry, or to keep a mistress with no marital responsibilities. In either case, the injustice to womenfolk, and to the society as a whole, would be far greater than if the man was to take a second wife, and maintain his first disabled wife as well.

The inveterate skeptic may still contend that as a man is allowed to take a second wife under certain circumstances, a woman should also be given the reciprocal option. The answer is simple: God has made men and women in different biological models: a man has the physiological constitution to impregnate and meet the sexual callings of more than one wife, but a woman's long pregnancy period constrains her from bearing a child for more than one husband, and meeting the recurring sexual callings of even one husband. Moreover, there will be serious complications in determining the inheritance of children born to a woman who has several husbands.

Hence, the notion of a woman having a number of husbands is contrary to her biological constitution and socially untenable.

[16 references]

32. Marriage Eligibility For Muslims

32.1. Wedlock with polytheist is forbidden

The Qur'an declares (2:221):

“Do not marry (tankihu)* women who associate (others with God), until they believe (in God). A believing maidservant (amah) is better than a woman, who associates (others with God,) even if she allures you. Do not marry (tunkihu)* men who associate (others with God) until they believe (in God). A believing male-servant ('abd)¹ is better than a man who associates (others with God,) even if he allures you. They invite you to hellfire, whereas God invites you to the garden and to forgiveness by His Grace, and clarifies His messages to people, that they may be mindful” (2:221). *[Based on the technical meaning of nikah as coupling, the verb also connotes an ongoing marriage bond]

In the context of the revelation, this verse was directed mainly towards the couples, either spouse of which had remained a pagan (polytheist). Thus the instruction, as phrased, is more of a prohibition against keeping a pagan spouse in wedlock, than an explicit permission to marry a believing person. This was to come later (5:5/32.3 below).

32.2. Muslim men and women to choose their spouses

The Qur'an uses identical expression (2:221/32.1 above) in phrasing its permission to men and women regarding choosing a spouse and admiring a suitor. A Muslim woman's prerogative to choose her own mate is also demonstrated by the absence of any reference to her father or guardian from practically all the Qur'anic verses on marriage and divorce. Traditionally, scholars have put additional words in bracket while rendering the verse, to imply that the father or guardian of a girl has the final say in choosing her spouse. This has been done, understandably to:

- protect the historically vulnerable girl from exploitation by any unscrupulous man who could force marriage upon her, if a guardian does not protect her.
- safeguard the interest of a simple and gullible girl, lest she may be cheated by an aggressive, but unworthy suitor.

32.3. Muslim men to marry any believing women

Towards the concluding phase of revelation (5:5), the Qur'an gives explicit permission to Muslim men to marry from among the 'People of the Book' (Jews and Christians), or those who believe in One God (mu'minat).

“This day (all) good things are made lawful for you. The food of those to whom Scripture [Book] was given is lawful for you, and your food is lawful for them; and so are chaste believing women (mu'minat), and chaste women from among those (who have been) given the Scripture [Book] before you - after you give them their

dowers (and take them in wedlock) as chaste women, not in lewdness, nor as secret love-companions. Anyone who rejects faith (in God), his deed is in vain, and he will be among the lost ones in the hereafter” (5:5).

The verse does not require women from among the believers in One God (mu’minat), and the people ‘to whom Scripture was given’ (Jews and Christians in the context of the revelation) to embrace Islam while marrying Muslim men. Thus, there are plenty of examples in Islamic history of believing non-Muslim women marrying Muslim men and living together with their privileges enhanced, and religions unchanged, unless they opted to become Muslims.

The verse does not bar Muslim women from marrying believers in One God (mu’minin) or from among the ‘People of the Book’. But historically this has not happened obviously because a Muslim woman would have lost all her Qur’anic privileges as well as individual legal status by marrying a non-Muslim believer (mu’min) – who could also compel her to adopt his faith. However with the permeation of Islamic values across the global multi-religious communities and the remoteness of the Qur’anic ideals from many Islamic societies, the table has turned and there have been cases of interfaith marriages between Muslim women and believing non-Muslim men.

32.4. The Qur’an abolishes Incest

The Qur’an forbids marriage with a defined set of close relatives (4:22/23), as well as married women (4:24):

“And do not marry (tankihu) women whom your fathers had married, except what is already past. It is indeed abominable and abhorrent, and a sinful way (4:22). (Also) forbidden to you (in marriage) are your mothers, your daughters, your sisters, your paternal aunts, your maternal aunts, your brother's daughters, your sister's daughters, your foster-mothers, your foster sisters, your wives' mothers, your stepdaughters under your guardianship, (born) of your wives with whom you consumed marriage; (but there is) no blame if you did not consume marriage with them; and the wives of your own begotten sons; and two sisters (in wedlock) at the same time - unless it was a thing of the past. (Remember,) God is Most Forgiving and Merciful (4:23). Also (forbidden in marriage are) married woman - except those under your lawful trust. This is God’s ordinance for you. With the exception of these, all others are lawful provided you seek them (in wedlock), using your wealth, as chaste women, and not prostituting them. And give them their dowers as a duty to those with whom you seek enjoyment (by marrying them). There is no blame in what you mutually settle (regarding your affairs) after the duty (has been performed). Indeed God is All-Knowing and Wise” (4:24).

32.5. The Qur’an forbids extramarital cohabitation

Read in isolation, and ignoring the elliptic language of the Qur’an, the verse 4:24 (32.4 above) may be misconstrued to imply Qur’anic sanction for extramarital cohabitation of a man with a woman under his lawful trust, even if she was a married bondmaid. The verse must be read in the context of the passage (4:22-4:25), which features root words of nikah (tankihu, yankih), in the opening and closing verses (4:22 and 4:25/Ch. 30.1),

making it absolutely clear that the marriage clause applies to the intermediate verse 4:24 as well. We have incorporated this in the above rendering by adding the underlined bracketed words, thus ruling out the notion of sexual relation with bondmaid or any other woman outside the wedlock. The Qur'an, in its immaculate consistency, drives home the point in the verses 4:3 (Ch. 31.1) and 4:25 (Ch. 30.1), and leaves a clear clue in 24:32 (Ch.30.1) on the requirement of marriage for single adults:

- The verse 4:3 asks men to marry women under their lawful trust, if they are not in a position to marry free orphan women.
- The verse 4:25 asks men to take permission from the families of those under their lawful trust, before taking them in wedlock.
- The verse 24:32 calls for marrying off 'the singles' among those under one's lawful trust.

Thus, read together, the verses 4:3, 4:24/25 and 24:32 clearly and conclusively prohibit sexual relation of a man with any woman in his possession - be it a call girl or a hired maid in the present day context, or a bondmaid, slave girl, unmarried spouse etc. in historical perspective - except through honorable wedlock. In a word, as stressed by Muhammad Asad quoting al-Razi and al-Tabari² the Qur'an prohibits sexual relation with any woman other than one's lawful wife.

32.6. The Qur'an does not support marriage of minors

The Qur'anic directive to men and women to choose their own mate (2:221/32.1 above) also implies that they should marry after reaching a matured age, when they should be in a position to take a decision on the choice of spouse. The Qur'anic injunctions on the obligations and privileges of men and women in conjugal bond (Ch. 33-34) also indicate that both men and women have to attain a level of maturity to comprehend and implement their respective roles. Finally, the opening injunction of the verse 4:6, "test the orphans until they reach marriageable age," (Ch. 31.1), is explicit about the notion of a 'marriageable age' that is not supportive of marrying off minors. Thus, the Qur'anic illustrations are clear in support of a marriageable age for both the sexes.

Notes

1. In Qur'anic usage, the word 'abd (pl. 'ibad) normally means a servant, though the Qur'an also connotes it with slaves (female and male), such as in the verses 2:178 (Ch. 39.1) and 24:32 (Ch.30.1), and Yusuf.Ali, Marmaduke Pkthai and Shakir have rendered the word 'abd in the verse 2:221 (Ch. 32.1) as slaves.
2. Muhammad Asad, Message of the Qur'an, Gibraltar, 1980, Chap. 4, Note 26.

[2 reference]

33. Man, Woman, Sex and Marriage

33.1. Love and mercy between the sexes is a 'sign' of God

“And among His signs is that He has created for you, of yourselves, spouses (azwaj), that you may console yourselves with them, and (He) has set love and mercy between you. There are signs in this for a people who reflect” (30:21).

Historically, in most societies, love before marriage was condemned, while spouses in wedlock often concealed their love. This was because the feeling of love between man and woman was eyed with mute contempt or perhaps jealousy, while marriage was regarded as a purely biological necessity aimed primarily at procreation. The verse acknowledges the spiritual and emotional attachment between the opposite sexes, and asks humans to reflect on this. Furthermore, the etymology of the word azwaj, (spouses) is suggestive of a pair of the opposite sexes, which indicates monogamy as a social norm, as earlier reviewed (Ch. 31.2).

33.2. Sexual relation between the spouses

The Qur’an allows unqualified sexual freedom in wedlock (2:223).

“Your wives are a field of yours. So approach your field as you please, but take steps for yourselves, and heed God, and know that you will meet Him (on the Day of Judgment); and give good news to believers” (2:223).

This verse is a classical example of the uniqueness of Qur’anic vocabulary. Addressed to menfolk, it combines the sanction of freedom in physical conjugal relations with spiritual precept (heeding God) and concludes with a reminder of an ultimate meeting with God. However, as for the underlined statement, Abul Kalam Azad has interpreted it (rendered below from Urdu) as suggestive of containing family size:¹

“...Take steps for yourselves (make necessary arrangements for the coming of your offspring)...”

The Qur’anic exhortations on giving ease, rather than hardship (2:185/Ch. 48), and against tasking any person beyond his or her capacity (2:233, 65:7/Ch. 34.5) provide further Qur’anic illustrations for curtailing family size on health and, or income grounds. Muhammad al-Ghazali, who lived almost a millennium ago, also held similar views.²

The Qur’an features two other verses on the subject:

- 2:187 (Ch. 48) allows conjugal intimacy after breaking the fast during the month of Ramadan.
- 2:222 (below) forbids conjugal intimacy when women are in their monthly courses.

33.3. Women during their menstruation

The Qur’an removes all taboos against menstruation. It refers to it as a mere inconvenience, a discomfort, and asks men not to approach women for conjugal relations during their menstruation.

“They ask you (O Muhammad) about menstruation. Say: ‘It is a discomfort (adha)*. So, do not approach them until they attain purity (yathurna). And when they have attained purity (tatahharna), you may approach them (freely) as God has ordained for you.’ Indeed God loves the penitent and loves those who purify themselves

(mutatahhirin)” (2:222). *[See the renderings of 33:53/Ch. 3.15 and 33:59/Ch. 28.6 for use of common root-words]

The verse uses THR root-words to denote a state of purity or fitness. This is different from physical cleanliness, as the Qur’an does not impose any cleanliness requirement on women in sexual matters (2:223, above). Furthermore, the pairing together of the concluding words tawwabin (those who repent) and mutatahhirin (those who are pure) lends the root THR, the broader connotation of purity of heart and faith. The verse thus concludes by giving a spiritual note to an otherwise mundane matter (women’s courses), as in the succeeding verse (2:223 above).

33.4. Men to give women dower at the time of marriage

The Qur’an states:

“Give women their dower as a gift (saduqat), but if they voluntarily favour you with anything from it, take it and enjoy it in good spirit” (4:4).

The dower marks a man’s commitment to take the financial responsibility of his wife, and accordingly it should be of a substantive value, as underscored by the underlined waiver clause. There are traditions on marriage being contracted, in case of extreme scarcity, over the symbolic remittance of a Qur’anic memorized Sura,³ an iron ring,⁴ or gold equal to the weight of a date-stone.⁵ The Qur’an, however, cites the generous example of a fortune, (4:20/Ch. 34.2), that obviously reflects its concern for women.

33.5. Women are entitled to independent income

The Qur’an treats men and women in wedlock as separate individuals, with respective capabilities, and independent incomes.

“Do not desire what God has favoured in different measures to each of you (ba’dakum ‘ala ba’din):⁶ men are to have a portion of what they have earned, and women are to have a portion of what they have earned. Ask therefore God of His bounty, and (remember,) God is Cognizant of everything” (4:32).

The verse introduces a notion of corporate ownership of personal income by reminding men and women that they have a share in their own income and not the whole of it for themselves. The verse complements Qur’anic clear dictates on kindness to parents (Ch. 17.4) and on broader social responsibilities (Ch. 17.2), and thus requires either of the spouses in a conjugal relationship to share income, particularly with parents, and generally with personal relatives and the needy. The verse also legitimizes state taxation as a compulsory way of sharing of income with the community.

33.6. Role of men and women in wedlock

The Qur’an spells out the reciprocal role of men and women in wedlock (4:34):

“Men are the supporters (qawwamah) of (their) wives because God has favoured each of them in different measures (ba’dahum ‘ala ba’din),⁶ and because of what they spend (for them) of their wealth. The righteous women are devout (qanitatun) and guard the unseen that God would have them guard. As for those (women), of whom you fear extramarital perversity (nushuz), counsel them, leave them (alone)

in their beds and assert on them (wadribuhunna); but if they listen to you, do not seek a way against them. (Remember,) God is Sublime, Great” (4:34).

It is one of the most critical and important verses of the Qur’an. Most commentators have interpreted it in a manner that i) admits of a man’s superior and commanding role, and a woman’s inferior and subordinate role in marriage and ii) empowers a man to beat an allegedly wayward or disobedient wife. They interpret the critical words and phrases of the verse in the following traditional lines:

qawwamah as ‘In charge’ (Marmaduke Pikhall), ‘Protectors and maintainers’ (Yusuf Ali). ba’dahum ‘ala ba’din as a preferential comparison. qania’tun as obedience (to husband). nushuz as disloyalty and ill-conduct. wadribu as beating (the wives).

Thus Marmaduke Pikhall’s rendition of this verse, which is typical of the traditional, reads as follows:

“Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded. As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo! Allah is ever High, Exalted, Great” (4:34).

Our rendition does not support a husband’s superiority or a wife’s obedience to, or being beating up by her husband regardless of cause, and is based on the interpretation of its critical words and phrases from Qur’anic illustrations. Since this is a somewhat exhaustive exercise, we have placed it in the footnote for those who may wish to verify it, or fully satisfy themselves.⁷

Let us now try to further probe this keynote verse from Qur’anic illustrations.

First, as the opening statement suggests, a man is expected to support his wife – financially and otherwise. In the context of the revelation, this gender-specific pronouncement was an historical necessity. Men left homes on trading missions without providing for their wives, who cohabited with strangers to sustain themselves (Note 7/Ch. 1.1). This needed correction and hence the gender-specific responsibility. However, the Qur’an connects the role of the man as a ‘supporter’ with his spending for his wife. Thus, in the event God favoured a woman with a higher level of earning than her man, she could also play the role of the ‘supporter (qawwamah),’ as a joint awliya’ (protector) of the family (9:71).

“The believing men (mu’minin) and the believing women (mu’minat) are protectors (awliya’) of each other: they enjoin the good and restrain the evil; they keep up prayer and give charity, and obey God and His Messenger. They are those on whom God will have mercy. (Remember,) God is Almighty, Wise” (9:71).

The verse (4:34) is directed to the community at large and is not an injunction to be executed by the husband, and as such does not accord him any superior position over his woman.

Second, the linking together of the stipulations “devout (women) guard the unseen that God would have them guard,” with the exception clause, “As for those (women), of whom you fear extramarital perversity...” suggests that a devout woman is one who abstains from extramarital perversity, and therefore, the unseen (ghaib) that she is asked to ‘guard’ is nothing but her chastity.

Third, regarding the highly controversial issue of wife beating, the concluding God’s attributes (Sublime, Great) rule out any notion of beating – even symbolically. Our rendition (‘to assert’) symbolizes a gesture of beating and is based on the Qur’anic use of this verb form in the verse 38:44, in which the Prophet Job is commanded to take a ‘tuft of grass’ in his hand and fadrib (his wife) rather than break his oath. While the Qur’an leaves it there enigmatically, Biblical accounts are accommodative of the classical Muslim commentators’ view that this simply meant flinging the tuft of grass towards his wife, as a symbolic gesture of beating.⁸ Some of the early scholars of Islam including al-Tabari, al-Razi, al-Shafi’i, also interpreted this verb form (wadribu) in the verse 4:34 in similar manner, while the Prophet detested the idea of beating one’s wife and is reported to have said: “Never beat God’s handmaidens.” The English language does not have any suitable word for the symbolic gesture of beating to match this situation, and so the word ‘assert’ in our rendering may be more appropriate and less misleading than the traditional word, ‘beating’ to maintaining thematic continuity with the next verse and compatibility with the broader reciprocal and equitable role of men and women as the awliya’ (protector) of one another as enjoined by the Qur’an (9:71 above).

This brings us to the concluding injunction of the verse: “but if they listen to you, do not seek a way against them.” This raises the question, what measure a man should take if his assertiveness fails, and a breach is established between a man and his wife and the community gets to know of it. This is answered in clear and simple terms in the very next verse (4:35).

“If you (the community) fear breach between the two, appoint an arbiter from his family and an arbiter from her family. If they wish reconciliation, God will unite them. Indeed God is All-Knowing and Informed” (4:35).

Thus, read together the verses 4:34 and 4:35 (the passage 4:34/35) spell out not only the roles of men and women in wedlock but also the measures to be taken if a woman continues to show marital infidelity, and recommends arbitration as the final option for settling conjugal disputes. In a later verse, the Qur’an prescribes the same ultimate course of action for the reverse situation, and declares:

“If a wife fears extramarital perversity (nushuz) or desertion (i’rad) from her husband, there is no blame on either of them if they mutually settle (the matter) amicably. Such settlement is best, though (our) souls are (drawn to) greed.⁹ But if you do good, and are heedful (tattaqu), (remember,) God is Informed of what you do” (4:128).

If the breach persists and the peace and stability of the family is destroyed, the Qur’an allows for the termination of a marriage (4:130). Since this is an extremely painful

decision that can also have serious financial implications for the financially dependent partner of the marriage, the Qur'an declares:

“And yet if they do separate, God will provide each out of His Abundance, for God is Boundless (in resources) and Wise” (4:130).

Under compelling circumstances however, the Qur'an also empowers women with unilateral right of separation (2:229/Ch. 34.2)

33.7. Qur'an's worldview on women's role in society

A deep-rooted misogynistic heritage (Note 10/Ch. 28), fostered by the dicta of some patently weak accounts, led the Muslim 'ulama to impose various restrictions on women. Any cataloguing of such restrictions will not serve any purpose, but it is sufficient to say that until very recent times, Muslim women were discouraged from pursuing higher education, working side by side with men in corporate offices, traveling by themselves, or even taking up a profession of their choice – just to cite some glaring examples. However, so far as the Qur'an is concerned, it does not impose any such restrictions on women. In fact, from the Qur'anic perspective, if men can travel by themselves or pursue studies, or work for a livelihood, so can women. However, it goes without saying that the choice of both men and women for taking part in any activity is conditioned by their external environment and by the facilities at their disposal. Thus today, a woman can travel around the world without the need of a protective guardian while just a century ago, she would need a male guard or companion to go to a neighboring village to ensure her safety. In sum, the Qur'an does not invest men with the guardianship of women and expects them to live together as friends and protectors of one another (awliya', 9:71/33.6 above).

33.8. The Qur'an overrules any notion of male superiority

The Qur'an also offers the following clear and undeniable illustrations to overrule any notion of male superiority or female inferiority:

- It acknowledges the position of a head of state by a woman, ruling discretely by consultation through her chieftains, and later embracing the true faith.¹⁰
- It does not blame a woman for any of man's infirmities, vices or misfortunes. Thus for example, it blames both Adam and his spouse (and not the latter alone, as mentioned in the Bible) for their temptation by Satan and their primordial fall from Paradise.¹¹

In sum, the notion of male superiority has no Qur'anic basis, and the various demeaning accounts on women's inferiority appearing in various theological literatures are no more than myth.¹²

33.9. Paradox of linking Islam with misogynistic customs

Some Muslim communities have retained their pre-Islamic misogynistic customs, notably honor killing and female genital mutilation (FGM), legitimizing them by some weak traditions and controversial law school rulings. This is simply absurd. Neither any verse of the Qur'an, nor its collective message gives any basis whatsoever to support these inhuman practices. In fact, at an early stage of the revelation, the Qur'an condemned

female infanticide (Note 1/Ch. 1.1). The Qur'an also prohibited the prevalent custom of killing the women who committed adultery, and introduced laws that paved the way for the dissolution of a marriage if a woman, or for that matter, a man betrayed any extramarital perversity. Therefore, there is no Qur'anic basis at all for FGM and honor killing, and they are no more than pre-Islamic customs that some communities have retained even after their conversion to Islam.

Notes

1. Abul Kalam Azad, Tarjuman al-Qur'an, 1931; reprint New Delhi 1989, Vol.2, p. 182.
2. Muhammad al-Ghazali, Ihya ul-'Ulum, Urdu translation by Ahsan Siddiquee, Karachi 1983, Vol.2, Chap. 2, p. 74.
3. Sahih al-Bukhari, English translation by Mohsin Khan, New Delhi, 1984, Vol.7, Acc. 24, 54, 58, 66, 72, 79.
4. Ibid., Vol.7, Acc. 80.
5. Ibid., Vol.7, Acc. 78, 85.
6. The Qur'an uses the expression ba'dahum 'ala ba'din for a relative comparison as conveyed in our rendition. However, many scholars have connoted it with a preferential comparison between men and women, with men having been given more favour than the women. This is misleading as the Qur'an uses the connective clause fauqa and not 'ala, where a preferential comparison is implied as illustrated below:
 - o 6:165, 43:32: God raised some people in rank over others.
 - o 24:40 layers of darkness in a see – darkness and yet more darkness until one can hardly see his own hand.
7. Meanings of the critical words in 4:34 based on Qur'anic illustrations:
 - i. qawwamah (sing. qiwam, root QWM): The Qur'an uses QWM root-words with the broad connotation of protecting, establishing, and upholding something that needs to be protected, supported or upheld:
 - ♣ Establishing or performing prayer in a regular manner (aqim, yuqim) (over a hundred verses across the Qur'an).
 - ♣ To be upright (qawwamah) in justice (4:135, 5:8).
 - ♣ To uphold (aqim) (an evidence) (65:2).
 - ♣ To establish (aqim) (correct) weights (55:9).
 - ♣ More sound (aqwamu) (17:9) (guidance).
 - ♣ More valid (aqwamu) (as a testimony) (2:282).
 - ♣ An upright or straight forward (qayyimah) law, religion, or book (18:2, 98:5).
 - ♣ To be constant (qa'imah) (in following up) (3:75).
 - ♣ To be upright (qa'imah) (as a community) (3:113).
 - ♣ To support (qiyamah, taqumu) (the orphans) (4:5, 4:127).
 - ♣ Qur'anic common use of the word qawm for community, which is nothing but a group of people held together to protect and support each other.

Our choice of word ('Supporters') is consistent with this.

ii. ba'dahum 'ala ba'din: See 6 above.

iii. qani'atun: In practically all (9) instances of its use, the Qur'an connotes this word and its other derivatives with obedience or devotion to God, or to God and the Prophet (2:238, 3:17, 3:43, 16:120, 30:26, 33:31,33:35, 39:9, 66:5).

iv. nushuz: Etymologically, the word features a combination of zina (adultery), and shahwat (sexual passion), and in the verses 4:34 and 4:128 (33.6 above) it connotes sexual or passionate relation with someone other than the lawful spouse. Hence our choice of the expression, 'sexual perversity'.

v. wadribu: In a generic sense, the Qur'an uses the verb form daraba with two broad shades of meanings:

- o Relating to expression, such as to coin a parable, to mention, propound, reiterate etc.

- o Relating to traveling, such as to go forth in a civil or military campaign.

The Qur'an also uses it with the following specific meanings:

- o To be covered with (humiliation, or clothing) (2:61, 24:31).

- o To block or fully cover (the ear) (18:11).

- o To slay (47:4) or knock down (Abraham knocking down the idols) (37:93).

- o To symbolically 'strike': Moses 'striking' the rock or sea with his staff (2:60, 20:77, 26:63); angels 'striking' the souls of the disbelievers (8:50).

- o To make a gesture (of striking) (38:44).

8. The Bible (the Book of Job, ii.9) relates that for a long time, Job lived in deep agony, as he was afflicted with sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. On one occasion, his wife reproached him for his perseverance in faith and said: 'Curse God and die.' Early Muslim commentators have suggested that Job took an oath to beating his wife a hundred stripes if God should restore him his health. As he regained health, he realized that his wife's outburst only reflected her deep frustrations at his sufferings, and he bitterly regretted his oath. The verse 38:44 refers to the revelation Job received to fulfill his oath without hurting or beating his wife.

9. A man in the given situation would like to get his wife to divorce him and claim compensation while a woman would be tempted to get her husband to divorce her so that she could leave him with all the gifts he might have given her in addition to claiming the marriage dower.

10. 27:32/33, 27:44.

11. 2:36, 7:20-22.

12. Examples of such mythical accounts:

Until morning, the angels curse a woman who refuses to come to the husband at night.

- Sahih al-Bukhari, English translation by Mohsin Khan, New Delhi, 1984, Vol.7, Acc. 121, 122.

- Until morning, the angels curse a woman who refuses to come to her husband at night; and (the Lord) who is in heaven remains angry until the man is pleased with his woman.
- The woman whose husband is satisfied at night and spends the night contentedly will enter Paradise.

- Sahih al-Muslim, Urdu translation by Wahiduz Zaman, Delhi 19..., Vol.4, Kitabun-Nikah, Acc. 43,44, p. 55.

[12 references]

34. Divorce Procedures and Conditions

34.1. Qur'an recognizes the emotional trauma of a divorce

The Qur'an recognizes the serious emotional and financial implications of a divorce for either or both the spouses, as well as the offspring of a broken marriage. It, therefore, discourages divorce by a set of well-guarded stipulations, but allows it if the alternative was life long unhappiness for the family. The Qur'an however does not consider divorced women as a social burden. It rather protects their financial interest, and those of the children born to them from their broken marriages, permits them to remarry and treats them practically like any other unmarried women.

It is worth remembering that in pre-Islamic Arabia, as elsewhere in the world, it was the prerogative of the menfolk to divorce their wives and not the other way around. On a broader plane, the men governed human society and made the laws and the women had little say in the scheme of things – particularly, if it related to their own suppression by men. It was for these obvious reasons that the Qur'anic directives aimed at various social reforms were addressed mostly to menfolk, as the leaders of the community, and this therefore must not be construed as a reflection of gender discrimination. Lets now revert to our theme.

In the immediate context of the revelation, the Qur'an abolishes the pre-Islamic custom that permitted a man to abandon his wife indefinitely by an oath, but retain her in wedlock, thus preventing her remarriage or freedom. It therefore declares (2:226):

“Those who vow (to abstain) from their wives must wait for four months.
Meanwhile if they go back, (remember,) God is Most Forgiving and Merciful”
(2:226).

The concluding God's attribute of Forgiveness and Mercy is suggestive of Qur'anic encouragement for reconciliation between the spouses and restoration of an effective marriage tie. However, if a man remains firm in his decision on divorce, and abandons his wife for four consecutive months, he must terminate the marriage at the end of this period and release his wife (2:227).

“However, if they decide on a divorce, (let them remember that) God is All-Knowing and Aware” (2:227).

34.2. Principles concerning a divorce initiated by a man

Having defined a time limit of four months for the termination of a marriage by an oath (2:226 above), the Qur'an prescribes a phased execution of a divorce:

“Divorce (is pronounced) over two occasions. Thereafter live together (with your mates) honorably, or part with (tasrihu) them honorably. It is not lawful for you (men) to take anything from what you have given them, except when both (the partners) fear that they would be unable to keep within the limits set by God. And if you do indeed fear that they would be unable to keep within the limits set by God, there is no blame on either of them if she gives up (something to her husband) for her freedom. These are the limits set by God; do not exceed them - for any who exceed the limits set by God, it is they who are unjust” (2:229).

The Qur'an asks women under notice of divorce by their husbands to stay by themselves for three months, understandably to establishing pregnancy if any; and reminds the men of their obligation to take them back if they are to be found pregnant (2:228).

“Divorced women shall wait by themselves for three monthly periods, for it is not lawful for them, if they believe in God and the Last Day, to conceal what God has created in their wombs. (During this period,) their husbands will be obliged (ahaaqu)1 to take them back if they want reconciliation, while they (the women) have similar honorable (obligations) as them (men); but men have (a higher) degree (of obligation) towards them. (Remember,) God is Almighty, Wise” (2:228).

The foregoing consecutive verses (2:228, 2:229) indicate a timeframe of three monthly periods (iddat) for a divorce to take effect. Thus the Qur'an brought about a reduction in the pre-divorce separation period from indefinite in pre-Islamic Arabia, to four months for a divorce by an oath (2:227 above), and then to three months in its final ordinance. The Qur'an further clarifies this in the verses 2:231 and 65:1, which also instruct men to terminate the marriage, if they must, in a decent way.

“And if you divorce women, and they reach (the end of) their term, then either live together honorably, or part with (sarrihu) them honorably, but do not keep them to injure them, (or) to exceed limits. Anyone who does that merely wrongs his own soul. And do not take these messages of God for a joke, and remember God's favour to you, and what He has revealed to you of the Book and Wisdom for your instruction. Therefore heed God and know that God is Cognizant of everything” (2:231).

“And when they reach (the end of) their term, then either live together honorably, or part with (fariqu) them honorably, calling to witness two just members from among yourselves and uphold the evidence (as) before God. This is to instruct anyone who believes in God and the Last Day. (Remember,) God will find a way out for anyone who heeds Him” (65:2).

These verses clearly demonstrate that in the event a man considers divorcing his wife, he must go through a three-month timeframe, formally articulating his intention at least twice over the period. However, at the end of this period, he must either retain his wife and live together amicably or terminate his marriage in an amicable manner. He is

therefore prevented from taking back anything that he might have gifted to his wife (2:229 above). Given that men divorcing their wives may detest their divorced wives walking away with the gifts they gave them – especially if those were valuable, the Qur'an declares:

“If you want to take one wife in place of another wife, and you had given one of them a fortune - do not take anything away from it. Would you take it by slander (committing) an open sin (4:20)? How can you take it back when you have given yourselves to each other, and they have taken a firm pledge from you” (4:21)?

However, to avoid any injustice to a man who may have gifted much of his possessions to his wife, the Qur'an asks the woman under divorce to release a part of what she might have received from her husband if she felt that she was going beyond the limits set by God (2:229 above).

34.3. A woman can initiate a divorce unilaterally (khul)

The underlined injunction (she gives something for her freedom) in 2:229 (above) gives a woman the privilege to take a divorce unilaterally by paying due compensation to her husband, which may include herdower (4:4/Ch. 33.4) as well as part of what she might have received from him as gifts. Such a dissolution of marriage at a wife's insistence is called khul, and is fully supported by several traditions as reviewed by Muhammad Asad.²

34.4. Remarriage between spouses after irrevocable divorce

The Qur'an does not permit a man to marry his erstwhile wife whom he divorced after the expiry of the three months waiting period, unless she married another man, and the latter divorced her (2:230).

“If he (the husband) divorces her (at the end of the waiting period), she becomes unlawful to him afterwards until she marries another man. If he (her new husband) then divorces her, there is no blame on the (former) couple to reunite - provided they feel that they can keep within the limits set by God. These are the limits set by God, and He clarifies them to a people who have knowledge” (2:230).

There could be three reasons for this:

- ‘To set almost impossible conditions,’ and thus discourage men from divorcing their wives, without giving very serious thought to the matter - Yusuf Ali.³
- To ensure the right of a divorced woman to marry a different spouse, otherwise her erstwhile spouse could force her to remarry him, even after the expiry of the waiting period.
- To prevent any scandalous manipulation by an unscrupulous couple who could set up a mock divorce for the divorced wife to court wealthy admirers, gain financial benefits, and return to her former husband.

To avoid any ambiguity on the matter, the Qur'an further declares (2:232):

“And when you have divorced women (after) they have reached their term, you must not obstruct them from marrying **(their would be)** spouses (azwaj) if they

have mutually agreed in a fair manner. This is instructed to anyone among you, who believes in God and the Last Day. (Remember,) this is more appropriate for you and purer; and God knows, yet you do not know" (2:232).

Many noted translators⁴ have put a qualifying bracket '(the previous)' before 'spouses' (underlined above) implying that a divorced woman could remarry her former husband after expiry of her three lunar months 'waiting period'. Such an interpretation is untenable as it is not consistent with:

- the Qur'anic commandment to men divorcing their wives to part with them, at the end of the 'waiting period' (2:229, 2:231 and 65:2/34.2 above).
- the Qur'anic clause that a divorced woman could marry her former husband, only after she 'marries another spouse', and 'he divorces her' (2:230, above).

The qualification in the present rendering of 2:232 (shown in bold) is fully consistent with the stipulations of the noted verses, and follows those of Abul Kalam Azad, and Muhammad Asad. Moreover, the Qur'an has its own linguistic subtlety to rule out any misinterpretation regarding the finality of the 'separation'⁵ at the end of the waiting period.

34.5. Maintenance of divorced pregnant wife, and the offspring

In a clearly stated verse (2:233) the Qur'an spells out: i) the social and financial responsibilities of a man divorcing a pregnant wife, ii) the moral responsibility of his divorced wife, iii) the need for mutual consultation between them if they wished to put the child under care of a foster-mother, and iv) the responsibility of the heir of the father if a child was born posthumously (2:233).

"Mothers shall nurse their children for two whole years if they wish to complete the nursing. The father (has to) provide for them, and clothe them reasonably. No soul is to be burdened beyond its capacity. A mother should not be made to suffer for her child, nor a father for his child, while the heir (is liable) likewise. If they both wish to wean the child by mutual consent and consultation - there is no blame on them; so if you wish to give your children out to wet-nurses, there is no blame on you, provided you pay what is reasonably expected from you.⁶ Heed God and know that God is Observant of what you do" (2:233).

The Qur'an further elaborates its precepts to the menfolk on supporting a divorced pregnant wife (65:6), and clarifies that they should spend according to their means (65:7).

"Accommodate them (the women in iddat) in the manner you lodge, according to your circumstances, and do not harass them to reduce them (to straits). If they are pregnant, meet their expenses until they bring forth their burden; and if they suckle (the baby) for you, give them their due, and consult together honorably. But if you find it difficult (for her health reason, or she intends to remarry), let another woman nurse (it) on behalf of him (the father) (65:6). (In all these matters) the rich should spend (according to) his abundance, but the one whose means is limited should spend of what God has given him. (Remember,) God does not burden

anyone beyond what He has given him. Surely God will grant relief after distress" (65:7).

34.6. Settlement of dower if neither marriage is consummated nor dower fixed

The Qur'an directs men to give a reasonable provision to their divorced wives, even if the marriage was not consummated (2:236, 33:49).

"There (will be) no blame on you to divorce women before you have consummated (marriage) with them, or fixed their dower (faridah), but provide for them: the rich according to his means, and the poor according to his means – a reasonable provision, a duty (haqq), binding on the compassionate"(2:236).

"You who believe, when you marry believing women and divorce them before you have consummated (marriage) with them, you do not have to count (the waiting) period for them. So make provision for them, and part with (sarrihu) them in a handsome parting"(33:49).

The verse 2:236 uses the term faridah for marriage dower, as against saduquat in the verse 4:4 (Ch. 33.4). The former connotes with a binding obligation, while the latter, with a gift, or charity. Thus, the Qur'an leaves no ambiguity about the legal position of marriage dower: it is a binding obligation of a man towards his wife, and is performed as a gesture of goodwill or charity (saduquat).

34.7. Settlement of dower if marriage is not consummated, but dower is fixed

The Qur'an states:

"If you divorce them before you have consummated (marriage) with them, but you have fixed their dower (Faridah), then (give them) half of what you have fixed, unless they (the women) forgo it, or the one in**whose** (alladhi) hands is the marriage tie forgoes it. To forgo is nearer to heedfulness (Taqwa), and do not forget to be generous between yourselves. (Remember,) God is Observant of what you do" (2:237).

The common gender pronoun alladhi, rendered above as **whose**, is traditionally identified with a husband, implying that only the husband can terminate a marriage that is yet to be consummated. But this purports to revoke a woman's Qur'anic privilege to dissolve a marriage unilaterally under compelling circumstances (2:229/34.2 above). Therefore the pronoun alladhi must be interpreted in its common gender form, implying that either of the couple - husband or wife can lawfully dissolve an unconsummated marriage. Based on this, the pronouncements of the verse may be broken down into the following simple tenets:

- If a man initiates a divorce, he has to pay half the dower to the woman, unless she forgoes it.
- If a woman breaks the marriage from her side, she has to forgo her claim on half the dower that she would have received if the man divorced her.
- A man, who gives a divorce, has the option to forgo the exempted 'half' part, and give full contracted dower as a gesture of generosity (fadl).

- Both the partners of a divorce should be generous to each other, and refrain from exploiting one another.

34.8. Maintenance for a Divorced Woman

The Qur'an declares:

“(There shall be) a reasonable maintenance for divorced women - a duty (Haqq) binding on the heedful (Muttaqin) (2:241). Thus does God clarify His messages to you, that you may use your reason” (2:242).

The Qur'anic injunction is in broad terms: it does not say whether a man is required to make a one off provision, or give a maintenance allowance to his divorced wife until she remarries. The Qur'an however asks the menfolk to use reason. Thus, if a man is required to make a provision, commensurate to his income, to a woman with whom he has only contracted marriage but not yet consummated it (2:236/34.6 above), he must be fair and considerate to the woman he is divorcing after living together as a husband and wife. He must therefore arrange spousal maintenance, commensurate to his income, and to the financial need, age, health and circumstances of his spouse. This obviously is a matter for the court to decide, depending upon the merit of the case, the prevalent social conditions and securities, and the relative financial positions of the partners in a divorce case.

34.9. Clarification on the waiting period (iddah)

The Qur'an reminds that the waiting period should be correctly observed (65:1), and clarifies that the latter remains unchanged at three months even for women past their monthly courses, or otherwise having no courses (65:4), and lasts until the delivery for pregnant women (65:4).

“O Prophet! (Tell your followers that) when you (finally) divorce women, divorce them at (the end of) their waiting period and (correctly) calculate this period, and heed God, your Lord. Do not drive them out of their homes and neither shall they be made to leave, unless they are found guilty of adultery (fahishatim mubaiyinah).⁷ These are the limits set by God. Whoever exceeds the limits set by God, wrongs his own soul. You do not know God may subsequently bring about a new situation” (65:1).

“As for those of your wives who are past menstruation - the prescribed waiting period, if you have any doubts, should be three months, and the same (will apply for) those who have no courses. As for the pregnant (wives), their (prescribed) term will be until they deliver what they are carrying. Thus, God makes matters easy for anyone who heeds Him (65:4). This is God's commandment, which He has revealed to you. Anyone who heeds God, He will efface his evils from him, and will reward him greatly” (65:5).

34.10. The Qur'an forestalls any manipulative interpretation of its commandments

The Qur'anic dictates on divorce as discussed above date from two different periods of its revelation. The passage 2:226-242 dates from early Medinite period, while the passage 65:1-7 from mid Medinite period. The passages, separated chronologically by at

least three to four years, complement each other with immaculate consistency and clarity in spelling out a husband's obligations during a divorce. This Qur'anic repetition is understandably to help avoid (i) any misinterpretation by later generation scholars and (ii) any ambiguity on the subject.

In sum, the Qur'an deals with the process of divorce in a balanced and structured manner, so that this most agonizing experience in a person's life is faced in a balanced and harmonious manner, and there is no bitterness and ill feelings between the erstwhile spouses.

Notes

1. Most commentators have connoted the Qur'anic word *haqq* in 2:228 (Ch. 34.2) with 'right', implying that a man has the right to retain his wife under divorce notice, if she is later found pregnant. The authors have, however, connoted the word *haqq* with 'obligation', (or duty), rather than 'right,' based on the following Qur'anic illustrations:
 - a. Verse 2:233 (34.5 above) commands a man to bear the expenses of his divorced wife and the child she bears him after the divorce through to the entire nursing period of two years. Therefore, it should also be his responsibility or obligation to provide the emotional support to the mother and the child during the period, which he can best do by keeping the marriage.
 - b. As agreed by most scholars, the Qur'an uses the word *haqq* with the connotation of duty in the verses 2:180 (Ch. 37) and 2:236/34.6; 2:241/34.8 above).
 - c. The underlined concluding God's attributes of the verse clearly imply that God in His Might and Wisdom makes it an obligation or duty on the part of an estranged husband in such a situation to reconcile with his wife and take her back.
2. Muhammad Asad, *Message of the Qur'an*, Gibraltar, 1980, Chap. 2, Note 218.
3. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an*, Lahore 1934, reprinted, Maryland 1983, note 260.
4. Thomas Irving (Talim Ali), Yusuf Ali, N.J.Dawood, and Marmaduke Pkthall.
5. To denote separation at the end of the waiting period, the Qur'an uses the verb forms *sarrihu* (2:231/34.2 above), *tasrihu* (2:229/34.2, 33:49/34.6), and *fariqu* (65:2/34.2 above), which it employs elsewhere with the connotation of total freedom of the separated members, each following its own course. Thus:
 - a. *tasrahu* is used to denote the free grazing of cattle (16:6).
 - b. *faraqna* is used for the total parting of river Nile (2:50), and *fatafarraqa*, for parting from God's straight path (6:153).

Thus, there can be no question of a woman, divorced by a husband at the end of her waiting period marrying her erstwhile spouse.

6. The underlined words represent the traditional interpretation of the Arabic expression: iza sallamtum ma aataitum bi al-ma'ruf. However the use of the underlined word derived from SLM root (Ch. 7), adds a dimension of well being and safety to the expression that Muhammad Asad renders as follows: "provided you ensure in a fair manner, the safety of the child you are handing over."
7. The Qur'an uses the term fahishah in a generic sense for all kinds of abominable deeds (Note 4/Ch. 19), but when it qualifies this term with the word mubaiyinah, it specifically refers to adultery committed by women as part of the pre-Islamic social norm (Note 7/Ch. 1).

[7 references]

35. Status of Widows

35.1. Widows have same social status as unmarried women

The Qur'an asks women to wait concerning themselves for four lunar months and ten days after the death of their husbands (2:234), and thereafter treats them like any unmarried women, permitting them to entertain marriage proposals from suitors and to restart a married life or live independently (2:234, 2:235). Its vocabulary does not even admit of the widowed status of a woman.

"Those of you who die and leave behind wives - they (the widows) shall wait by themselves (without remarrying) for four months and ten days. When they have reached their (prescribed) term, there is no blame on you for what they do with themselves honorably. (Remember,) God is Informed of what you do" (2:234).

"And there is no blame on you in giving the proposal (of marriage) to such women, or keep it to yourself, for God Knows that you will mention (it) to them; but do not make any secret promises to them, except in honest and sincere terms, nor resolve on the tie of marriage, until the prescribed term matures. And know that God Knows well what is in your mind. So beware of Him; and know that God is Most Forgiving and Gracious" (2:235).

35.2. Financial security of a widow

As the death of a husband could mean loss of income as well as home, the Qur'an entitles a widow, maintenance for a year without having to leave her deceased husband's home, but gives her the option to leave earlier of her free will (2:240).

"Those of you who die and leave behind wives, should bequeath to their wives the provision for a year, without having (them) to leave (their deceased husband's home). However, if they leave (voluntarily), there is no blame on you for what they do with themselves honorably. (Remember,) God is Almighty, Wise" (2:240).

In pre-Islamic Arabia, the next of kin of a deceased man could inherit his widow as well as all of his belongings. The Qur'an therefore directs the next of kin of a deceased person leaving behind a widow, to refrain from creating any difficulty for her, nor to disinherit

her of the objects and gifts she received from her late husband - unless she was openly immoral (4:19). The Qur'an also entitles a widow of a fixed inheritance, or to be a nominee of her late husband's will as discussed later (Ch. 38).

"You who believe, it is not lawful for you to inherit (anything from your) women (nisa) forcefully, nor should you put them under any pressure in order to take away some of what you have given them, unless they are found guilty of adultery (fahishatim mubaiyinah).¹ So, live with them honorably. (Remember,) if you hate them, it may be that you hate a thing in which God has placed profound goodness" (4:19).

The absence of any pronominal suffix prior to the Arabic word nisa in this verse renders it fully applicable both for (a) the widow of a kinsman as some scholars have interpreted² and (b) the wife of a person. Thus the kinsmen of a deceased man are asked not to treat the widow of their deceased kin or her wealth as their inheritance, while a husband is barred from putting any pressure on his wife, whether he is living with her or divorcing her, to make an inheritance in his favour (such as by asking or retaining a part of dower, asking a share from her personal property or income, etc. as is commonplace in day to day life.)

On the surface, the Qur'an does not empower a woman to take care of the property of her deceased husband and leaves the matter with the community, but we must bear in mind that a woman may be widowed soon after her marriage and or without having any issue from the marriage. If this young or childless widow is empowered to manage the properties of her deceased husband she might become the sole beneficiary of his properties, while the kinsmen of her deceased husband who possibly depended on his income, could be deprived of their due share as prescribed in the Qur'anic inheritance laws for such a situation (Ch. 38). On the other hand, if there are children and the mother chooses to groom them without remarrying, she will obviously have the right to stay in her deceased husband's home: (i) on the basis of the Qur'anic injunction of the verse 2:233 (Ch. 34.5), and (ii) in exercise of the Qur'anic inheritance laws (Ch. 38), which gives a woman and a child collectively a higher share than that of the deceased man's other next of kin.)

It is also notable that by addressing the verse to menfolk the Qur'an is not empowering the men to decide on behalf of the women but ensuring that its directives are put into effect by those who give decision on community matters: men in the context of the revelation and until very recent times, and in many societies, to this day.

The Qur'anic timeframe of one year is obviously applicable for women who have no issue from the marriage, and would like to get remarried or live as an independent person. A time framing was an historical necessity to avoid the next of kin of a deceased man to retain his widow in their household indefinitely, against her will (4:19 above), and can be relevant in appropriate cases even today.

Note

Note 7/Ch. 34 for the interpretation of the expression fahishatim mubaiyinah. Abul Kalam Azad, Muhammad Shafi, Marmaduke Pikhall.

[2 References]

36. Against Unlawful Intimacy

36.1. Sexual norms of pre-Islamic Arabia

As noted earlier, it was normative for women in pre-Islamic Arabia to cohabit with strangers when their husbands were away on trading missions (Note 7/Ch. 1.1). Even otherwise, sexual norms were relaxed, and a casual encounter between the strangers of opposite sexes could readily culminate into intimate relationship, often openly promoted by women, leading to their motherhood. This created controversy in establishing paternal lines, which was decided by comparing the looks and features of a child with its likely fathers, assembled for the purpose.¹ The practice, established as a social norm, absolved men-folk of all social and financial responsibilities towards the women they espoused or cohabited with and their offspring, forced women into commercial adultery, and left children born of such unions at the mercy of the society. This was in stark contradiction to the Qur'anic family laws that were designed to i) divest men of their sexual, financial and social licenses, ii) abolish adultery, iii) empower women and iv) give financial protection to women and children, as reviewed in the preceding chapters. The Qur'an therefore had to stop this practice, for which it uses a specific term, zina (25:68/Ch. 19.1; 17:32, 60:12).

As a first step, the Qur'an asks the Prophet to take an oath of fealty from believing women who came to him, that they will refrain from adultery, (60:12).

“Do not go near adultery (zina), for this is indeed an abominable deed (fahishah) and an evil way” (17:32).

“O Prophet! When believing women come to you to swear allegiance to you, (let them declare that:) they will not associate anything with God, nor will they steal, nor commit adultery (la yaznina), nor kill their children, nor invent any slander deliberately*, nor disobey you in anything fair. Then you accept their allegiance, and seek forgiveness for them from God. Indeed God is Most Forgiving and Merciful” (60:12). *[Lit., ‘between their hands and their feet’.]

Traditionally, the word zina connotes extramarital sexual relation of a woman, whether married or unmarried. However, the explicit reference of a husband as the prime witness in the absence of other witnesses in a zina charge (24:6/36.6 below) seemingly identifies this word with adultery in the present day sense. The Qur'an however uses the generic term fahishah for all forms of abominable deeds including fornication and adultery (Note 4/Ch. 19). We have therefore shown the Arabic transliteration in our rendition to best ensure the integrity of the interpretation.

36.2. Qur'anic punishment for adultery

The Qur'an describes those who commit adultery as perverts in faith (mushrik, mushrikah) (24:3). As an interim measure, it retains the prevalent capital punishment for

women who invited men into adultery but changes the form from stoning to death to confinement at homes until death overtakes, and imposes the stringent requirement of testimony by four direct witnesses (4:15). In the succeeding verse (4:16), the Qur'an extends the scope of punishment to both the partners of an adulterous act, but does not spell out the mode of punishment. In its conclusive legislative phase on adultery (zina), the Qur'an prescribes flogging the man, and the woman found guilty of adultery, each with a hundred lashes, and calls for the witnessing of the punishment by a group of believers (24:2), obviously to ensure that the guilty do not go unpunished (24:2). The Qur'an allows for repenting and reforming after the prescribed punishment has been inflicted (4:16/17, 24:5).

“Should any of your women commit adultery (fahishah), collect evidence against them from four of you. If they (so) testify, confine them to their houses until death claims them or God makes a way for them (4:15). If two of you do it, punish them both. If they (subsequently) repent and reform, then leave them alone for God is Most Relenting and Merciful (16). Repentance with God is for those who do evil in ignorance, and then soon repent. God will relent towards them, for God is All-Knowing and Wise” (4:17).

Scholars differ whether the opening words (wal ladhane) rendered in the underline (4:16) apply both to man and woman, or homosexual relations. Given that the verse 24:2 (below) on punishment for adultery (zina) prescribes equal punishment each to the guilty man and the guilty woman, it is clear that the opening two of you in the verse (4:16) applies both to man and woman.

“Flog the adulteress (zaniyah) and the adulterer (zani) each with a hundred lashes, and don't let compassion with them keep you from (complying with) the law of God, if you believe in God and the Last Day; and let a group of believers witness their punishment (24:2). An adulterer (zani) couples with (yankih) none but an adulteress (zaniyah), who is (awe) perverted in faith (mushrikah); and as to an adulteress (zaniyah) – none couples with (yankih) her but an adulterer (zani), who is (awe) perverted in faith (mushrik). That is forbidden to believers” (24:3).

Traditionally the Arabic words yankih, awe and mushrik, mushrikah are rendered according to their normal usage: yankih for 'to marry'; awe for 'or' and mushrik, mushrikah for one who associates others with God.

Accordingly, the traditional interpretation suggests that a believing person – a man or a woman, who has committed adultery, can only marry one of his/her type of the opposite sex, or one who associates others with God. But this is not consistent with the stipulations of the verses 4:16 (above) and 2:221/Ch. 32.1, taken together.

The verse 4:16 restores the spiritual purity of a believing adulterer or adulteress, who has repented and reformed after receiving the prescribed punishment. The verse 2:221 (Ch. 32.1) forbids such a person to marry one who associates others with God (mushrik, mushrikah) thus contradicting the traditional interpretation of 24:3. Moreover, the Qur'an associates the word zina (adultery) with married women (60:12/36.1 above), and

therefore, it cannot conceivably make any suggestion about the marriage of such women as the traditional interpretation of 24:3 suggests.

Our rendering is free from any such contradictions, and is based on Qur'anic illustrations,² and also advocated by Muhammad Asad:³

36.3. Object of the Qur'anic punishment for adultery

The immediate object of the Qur'anic ordinance on adultery (24:2), was to root out the prevalent heterosexual practices (36.1 above). In the historical context, the ordinance prohibits any extramarital sex between a man and a woman, regardless of the marital status of either. To avoid any miscarriage of justice, the Qur'an imposes the stringent requirement of four witnesses (4:15/36.2 above) to establish the offence.

Viewed against the present day lax sexual morality and normative consensual licenses, the Qur'anic punishment for adultery appears harsh and outlandish. However, the trauma and agony a wayward spouse may cause in a stable and close-knit happy family may be immensely greater than the extent of the punishment prescribed for adultery - the nature of which is however obviously dictated by the prevalent practices (See 36.7 below).

36.4. Qur'anic punishment for slandering against women

The Qur'an imposes a punishment of eighty lashes on those who accuse a woman of adultery, but fail to provide four witnesses (24:4).

“And those who accuse chaste women, but fail to bring four witnesses, flog them with eighty lashes, and never accept their testimony, ever, for it is they who are perverse (24:4), except those who repent after that (*ba'da dhalika*) and reform (themselves); for God is Most Forgiving and Merciful” (24:5).

The underlined stipulation *ba'da dhalika* indicates that the guilty may be forgiven 'after' (*ba'da*) the prescribed punishment of 'flogging' has been inflicted upon them.

Accordingly, we have placed the qualifying word, 'subsequently', in bracket while rendering the complimentary verse, 4:16 in the foregoing (36.2).

36.5. The case of the offspring of an unwedded mother

The Qur'an remains silent about any offspring of an unwedded mother. It levels no stigma upon such a child. The fact is, no matter the legitimacy of a relationship, all children are God's creation, and based on the Qur'an's broader message, subject to the same set of laws.

36.6. Establishing sexual offence against one's wife, if there is no witness

The Qur'an prescribes an oath protocol to establish a charge of adultery against a woman in the absence of any witnesses, other than her husband. In such an event, the husband must take an oath four times invoking God that he was truthful, and a fifth time, invoking God's curse upon himself if he was lying (24:6/7). However, the wife could avert the punishment by reciprocal oaths (24:8/9).

“Those who accuse their own wives but have no witnesses except themselves, the evidence of one of them should be to testify four times keeping God as a witness that he is truthful (24:6), (swearing) a fifth (time) that God's curse be on him if he is

a liar (7). However, it will avert the punishment from her if she testifies four times keeping God as a witness that he (her husband) is a liar (8), (swearing) a fifth time that God's curse be on her if he (her husband) is truthful" (24:9). [Literally the underlined expressions should read: 'among the truthful ones', 'among the liars'.]

36.7. Broader Qur'anic message relating to adultery

Qur'anic injunctions against adultery (4:15, 24:2/36.2 above) must be comprehended in conjunction with the other elements of its laws on man and woman relationship (Ch.33) to evolve the Qur'an's universal message on the subject, as attempted below.

In the event, a man suspects his wife of adulterous behavior, he is commanded to counsel her, temporarily shun her bed, and finally assert on her, failing which he can involve the community and proceed for a divorce (4:34/35, Ch. 33.6). If he, however, chooses to charge his wife of adultery, he must bring four eyewitnesses (4:15/36.2 above). This may however be impossible, as no woman would commit adultery openly and risk the Qur'anic punishment. Setting up false witnesses, on the other hand, would be constrained by the severity of punishment for false witnessing (24:4/5, 36.4 above). So the best a man could perhaps do is to divorce her, or to create a situation for her to divorce him.

In the event, a woman suspects her husband of adultery, she is urged to conciliate with him, failing which she can divorce him unilaterally (4:128, 4:130/Ch. 33.6).

As for the Qur'anic specific punishment, e.g. flogging, it drew on the prevalent code and aimed at bringing about a quantum social change (36.1 above). Therefore, to take the punishment in isolation or out of its historical context as harsh or draconian will be misleading. The Qur'an was not sent down to punish humanity but to deliver humanity – particularly the women and the oppressed classes, from the sufferings society inflicted upon them - "to lift from them their burdens and shackles that were upon them (before)" (7:157, Note 185/Ch. 3), and the achievement of its noble objectives inevitably entailed some hard measures, affecting albeit, a fractional minority of people.

36.8. Sexual offences

The Qur'anic verses reviewed in this chapter relate specifically to adultery (zina) in which consenting men and women engaged themselves as part of the prevalent social norms (36.1 above). The lax sexual mores of the times kept sex related crimes to low levels and accordingly the Qur'an does not specifically refer to sex offences which are committed by men or women by force, or by way of active seduction, or when their prey is in a state of delusion or unconsciousness, such as under drug or during sleep. Muslim jurists have legislated capital punishment for rape while punishment for other forms of sex-offences is dictated by the severity and circumstances of the offence. However, it must be admitted that the capital punishment for rape is not derived from the Qur'an, and is based on the pre-Islamic custom of stoning to death for adultery, as recorded in the traditions.

36.9. The Qur'an condemns homosexuality.

The Qur'an condemns homosexual behavior (7:80/81), and refers to it as a transgression beyond bounds (7:81). In a number of its passages,⁴ it refers to the homosexual norms of the Prophet Lot's people, who were destroyed for their sins.

“Lot said to his people, ‘Would you commit such an abomination (fahishah) that none in the world has ever done before you (7:80)? You approach men in your lust, instead of women. Indeed, you are a transgressing people.’” (7:81)

There is a growing debate in the West to treat homosexuality as a moral norm. They argue that that homosexuality is a natural disposition that comes with the fuller awakening of sexual impulses during the adolescence; and therefore it should be treated as a completely normal behavior. The biological fact is, the awareness of sex sets in much early in life. If homosexuality is regarded as perfectly acceptable behavior, it will, like any addiction, infest children even at primary school level, who will then boldly carry their addiction through to adulthood creating serious cultural and demographic issues and a breakdown of social order.

Notes

1. Muhammad Husayn Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, English translation by Ismail Ragi, 8th edition, Karachi 1989, p. 319.
2. The Qur'anic illustrations supporting our rendition of the verse 24:3 are as follows:
 - a. The use of the verb form yankih in the verse 24:3 is immediately preceded by a reference to the punishment for adultery or coupling without marriage (zina, in 24:2 above). This lends the word yankih in 24:3, a generic meaning of 'coupling' without marriage, as advocated by Muhammad Asad.
 - b. The particle awe is interpreted in an amplifying or explanatory sense as in 70:30 (Ch. 19.1).
 - c. The terms Mushrik, Mushrikah, which normally signify a person who 'associates others with God', is interpreted in a broader sense as one who is 'perverted in faith', as those who 'associate others with God' are indeed perverted in their faiths.
3. Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, Gibraltar 1980, Ch.24, note 5.
4. 15:72-75, 26:165-73, 27:54-58, 29:31-35.

[4 References]

37. Drawing Up Of Wills

The Qur'an asks the believers leaving behind any property, to make a will in the presence of two of their just persons (2:180). If they are travelling and fear death, they are asked to take witnesses from outsiders (2:180, 5:106). If the witnesses are of questionable integrity, the Qur'an asks for their swearing in after prayer that they would not be taking bribe even from a near relative to hide or alter the will (5:106). If the witnesses are later found to be implicated in any crime, the Qur'an calls for their replacement with two

other persons from among the close relatives, or those having lawful rights, after proper swearing in (5:107/108). The Qur'an further states that those who alter a will shall earn the sin for such alteration, but it allows the executor of a will to alter it to reconcile disputing parties, if he suspects error or injustice by the testator.* (2:181/182). *[Lit., 'the deceased who made the will'.]

“It is prescribed for you that when death approaches any of you, and he leaves behind (some) property, he should make a will in a just and fair manner for his parents and near of kin. (This is) binding for the heedful (muttaqin) (2:180). If anyone changes it after having heard it, the sin shall be on those who change (it). (Remember,) God is All-Knowing and Aware (181). However, anyone who fears bias or injustice by the testator and patches things up among the concerned parties,* there shall be no sin on him. (Remember,) God is Most Forgiving and Merciful” (2:182). *[Lit., 'them'.]

“You who believe, when death approaches any of you, let there be witnesses* among you when making a will: two just (persons) from among you, or two others from the outsiders, if you are travelling on earth and a fatal calamity befalls you. Detain the two after prayer, if you are in doubt (about their integrity), and let them swear by God (saying): ‘We shall not take any payment for (tampering) it, even from a relative, nor will we hide the testimony of God, for then indeed we shall be among the sinners’ (5:106). But if it so happens that both of them are found (guilty) of crime, let two others from among the most rightful stand in their place. Let both of them swear by God (saying): ‘Our testimony is truer than their testimony, and we have never exceeded limits, for then indeed we shall be among the unjust’ (107). It is then likelier that they give true** evidence, for they might fear that other oaths may be taken after their oaths. Heed God and listen. (Remember,) God does not guide the immoral folk” (5:108). *[Lit., 'testimony'.], ** [Lit., 'at its face value'.]

Most scholars including Muhammad Asad have interpreted the term ‘among you’ (underlined in 5:106) as Muslims. Thus, the ‘outsiders’ would be non-Muslims, but believers in God, as they are required to swear by Him to uphold their testimony. Abul Kalam Azad is, however, explicit in interpreting the ‘outsiders’ as non-Muslims.¹

Notes

Abul Kalam Azad, Tarjuman al-Qur'an, 1931; reprint New Delhi 1989, Vol.2, p. 679.
[1 Reference]

38. Law of Inheritance

The Qur'an sets out clear rules and guidelines for the division of inheritance under varying family scenarios. These rules are spelled out in a juristic tone, interweaved across a long passage and two verses (4:7-12, 4:33, 4:176) that may tax the lay reader and confuse the skeptic. Therefore, for simplicity, we have put together the various elements of its rules topically, with verse references, before listing the rendition of the verses. Some scholars may argue that this topic relates to the juristic discipline and should be left for the jurists to deal with. However, the Qur'an does not contain any hint

whatsoever to segment its precepts across different domains, and therefore, we present it as part of this comprehensive exposition of the Qur'an's clearly stated dictates.

38.1. Broader logic and rationale of Qur'anic inheritance laws

The Qur'anic inheritance laws are based on the following rationale:

- The inheritance of a woman in her various capacities, such as, a daughter, a wife, and a mother, is clearly spelled out leaving no ambiguity in any case in order to fully protect her inheritance rights, and to safeguard against any patriarchal manipulations (Alas! It goes on to this day.)
- A man's higher share vis-à-vis a woman, as a son, a husband or a brother takes account of his financial responsibility for his household (4:34/Ch. 33.6).
- Equal share of mother and father from a deceased offspring underlines equal old age need for each of them.
- The share for a man (a son, a brother and a father) is left unspecified in certain cases but can be obtained by deducting the specified portions from the total inheritance based on 38.3 below.

38.2. General principles of inheritance

The Qur'anic inheritance laws are governed by the following principles:

- Surviving parents, spouse, and children are accorded the status of direct heir (4:7, 4:11, 4:12).
- If there is no direct heir (parents, spouse or children), surviving brothers and sisters will share the inheritance (4:176).
- If there is neither direct heir, nor full brother or sister, surviving half brothers and half sisters if any will have a share in the inheritance (4:12).
- Orphans and needy relatives (offspring of deceased first relatives) present at the division are to be provided for out of the inheritance in a just manner (4:8-10).
- All rightful agreements such as dues, taxes, and legacies are to be settled before the division of inheritance (4:11, 4:12, 4:33).

38.3. Division of Inheritance among Survivors

When parents, spouse, sons and, or daughters are surviving:

- The father and mother, each gets a sixth of the inheritance (4:11).
- The wife gets one eighth of what her husband leaves, while the husband gets a fourth of what his wife leaves (4:12).
- Each son will get twice as much as each daughter, but if there is only one daughter and no son, she gets half of the inheritance (4:11).
- If there are two or more daughters and no son, their combined share is two-thirds of the inheritance (4:11).
- If there are sons, one or more, and no daughter: by logic of 38.2 top bullet, they equally divide the inheritance left after giving the parents' shares.

Division of Inheritance when parents and spouse are surviving but no children:

- The wife gets a fourth of what her husband leaves, while the husband gets half of what his wife leaves (4:12).
- If the deceased left brothers and sisters, each of the parents gets a sixth of the inheritance, and the brothers and sisters get the balance - the male having twice the share of the female (4:11).
- If there is no brother or sister, the mother gets a third of the inheritance (4:11).

Division of Inheritance when neither parents, nor children, nor any spouse is surviving:

- If a deceased man left only one sister, she inherits half of what he left, but if there are two sisters or more, they together inherit two-thirds of what he left (4:176).
- If a deceased woman left one brother, he inherits the whole of what she left (4:176).
- If a deceased man or woman leaves both brother and sister - the male has twice the share of the female (4:176).
- If a deceased man or woman leaves a brother or a sister from the mother's side (different father), each will get a sixth of the inheritance – and if there are more than two of them, the combined share will be one-third of what is left (4:12).

38.4. Rendition of the referred to verses:

“Men get a share in what their parents and next of kin leave, and women get a share in what their parents and next of kin leave, be it a little or a lot - a legal share (4:7). If other relatives, orphans, and the needy (not having direct claim but worthy of consideration) are present at the (time of) division (of the inheritance,) provide for them out of it, and speak to them reasonably (8). Let those (who ignore orphaned children) fear, as they will (indeed) fear, if they were to leave behind helpless children. Therefore, they should heed God and speak out honestly (in favour of such orphans) (9). (Remember,) those who unjustly consume the property of orphans devour fire into their bellies; and, and soon they will endure a blaze (10). God directs you concerning (the inheritance) of your children: the male has (the share) of two females. If they are daughters [Lit., ‘women’], more than two (and no son) - their share is two-thirds of what (their parents) leave behind. If there is only one, her (share) is half. The parents will each get a sixth of what the (deceased) leaves behind, provided (the deceased) left children; if (there are) no children and the parents are the (only) heir, the mother has a third; but if the deceased left siblings, the mother has a sixth, after (payment of) legacies and debts. You do not know whether your parents or (your) children are closer to you in (deserving the) benefit. Hence, this ordinance from God! Indeed God is All-Knowing and Wise (11). You (will get) half of what your wives leave, provided they leave no child; but if they leave a child, then you get a fourth of what they leave, after (payment of) legacies and debts. Theirs is a fourth of what you leave, provided you leave no child. But if you leave a child, they get an eighth of what you leave, after (payment of) legacies

and debts. If a man, or a woman, leaving inheritance, has no direct heir (kalalah) (father, mother, offspring, or full brother or sister), but has a brother or a sister* - each of them (gets) a sixth; but if more than two, their (combined) share is a third, after (payment of) legacies and debts, without causing loss (to anyone). This is an instruction from God. (Remember,) God is All-Knowing and Gracious” (4:12). *[Most commentators hold that, a brother or a sister referred to above, are those from only one’s mother’s side - that is, half brother or sister.]

“For everyone, We have appointed heirs to (what is) left by parents and near of kin. But (first) you must give their shares to those (with whom) you have made a pledge. Indeed God is witness to everything” (4:33).

“They consult you (O Muhammad). Say, God pronounces (thus) about indirect inheritance (kalalah): ‘If a man dies leaving a sister but no child, hers is half of what he leaves, but he would inherit (wholly) from her, if a woman died leaving no child. If there are two sisters - they shall have two-thirds of what he leaves. If there are brothers and sisters - the male has (the share of) two females.’ God clarifies (this) to you, lest you err (Remember,) God is Cognizant of everything” (4:176).

38.5. Why A Daughter’s Inheritance Is Half That Of Her Brother

This seeming gender bias can be clarified by taking a holistic view of the Qur’anic laws protecting the financial interest of women. Thus the Qur’an allows women:

- To have independent income (4:32/Ch. 33.5), without any binding to share with their husbands.
- To receive a dower at the time of marriage (4:4/Ch. 33.4).
- To have their living expenses covered by their husbands (4:34/Ch. 33.6).
- To receive gifts, even a fortune, from their husbands, in addition to the dower (2:229, 4:20/Ch. 34.2).
- To receive inheritance from their deceased children who left offspring, equally as their husbands (4:11).

Therefore, if the Qur’an were to accord equal inheritance to a brother and a sister, womenfolk would possess greater wealth than men, and the Qur’anic injunctions on the financial responsibility of man will be contradicted.

38.6. The Principle of Representation

The verses 4:8 clearly encapsulates a principle of representation, that is, if a person A survives his offspring B, who left an offspring C, and at the time of A’s death, the orphan C is present (4:8), then C should not be left out of the inheritance (4:9), and those who deprive them “devour fire into their bellies” (4:10). To put this in technical terms, the Qur’an allows the representation of an orphaned person C, born of the deceased B, in the inheritance left by B’s father/mother A, who had survived B. This is another matter that the classical Islamic law does not recognize this principle, but we leave that to the jurists to resolve.

39. Abolition Of Blood Vendetta

The diverse tribes in pre-Islamic Arabia were autonomous communities; each headed by a chief and governed by its traditions. In the absence of any central state or court of appeal, inter-tribal rivalry and grievances were settled by tribal mores that permitted a like-for-like retribution. Thus, it was normative for any tribe to avenge even an accidental killing of any of its members by another tribe, with the killing of a member of the latter. At the same time, scarcity of resources and harsh realities of desert life were conducive to sparking violence even on trivial issues like someone's camel grazing a neighbour's field or drinking water at someone else's pool, and this could readily lead to manslaughter and set off a chain of retaliatory killings. As a result, most of the Arab tribes were locked in blood vendetta, which often lasted for generations. The Qur'an had to correct this, once and for all.

The Qur'an starts off with a general forbiddance of killing of any human being, irrespective of tribe or faith, except when there was no alternative course of action and the killing was fully justified and thus lawful (6:151, 25:68/Ch. 19.1; 17:33).

“Do not kill any person as God has forbidden this, except when lawful. As for anyone unjustly killed, We have given (some) authority to his guardian, but let him not overdo in killing (in retaliation), for surely he will be supported (by the society or state)*” (17:33). *[Support may also come from God; so, the underlined rendering may also read: ‘helped (by God)’].

As the revelation progressed, the Qur'an had to forestall perpetuation of blood vendetta among the converts. Since eradication of slavery was also among the Qur'an's key agendas, it enjoined the freeing of a believing slave, and paying compensations as redemption for any accidental killing of a believer and prohibited the killing of any believer (4:92/93).

“A believer (mu'min) must not kill a believer except by mistake. Anyone who kills a believer by mistake must free a believing slave, and pay compensation to his family, unless they (forego it) as charity. (However,) if he (the deceased) belonged to a people hostile to you, and yet was a believer, (the redemption is) to free a believing slave; but if he belonged to a people with whom you have (peace) treaty, the blood money must (also) be paid to the family (in addition to) freeing a believing slave. Anyone who does not find this (within his means) must keep the fast for two consecutive months - by way of repentance to God. (Remember,) God is All-Knowing and Wise (4:92). Anyone who kills a believer intentionally, his recompense is hell - to remain in it: God will be wrathful with him and curse him and prepare for him an awful torment” (4:93).

39.1. Law of Compensation for the loss of life

In its final legislative phase, the Qur'an prescribes a law of compensation for the killed, that covers practically all possible cases of loss of life, from murder to the accidental, and offers a way out of blood vendetta.

“You who believe, compensation for (anyone) killed has been prescribed for you: the free for the free; the slave ('abd) for the slave; the female for the female.

But if any from the family* (of the deceased) pardon him (who caused the death), then he should follow this up with something appropriate (as compensation), and execute (the same) in a good gesture. This is a Concession and Mercy from your Lord. Anyone who exceeds the limits after this shall have painful torment (2:178). There is (security of) life in this (law of) compensation – O you prudent, that you may heed” (2:179). *[Lit., ‘brethren’, i.e. brother or sister.]

This passage embraces four distinct stipulations:

- It begins with an illustrative statement (underlined), which refers to the prevalent custom of equitable retaliation for the loss of life.
- This is followed by an optional forgiveness-cum-retribution clause (shown in bold), which, on one hand asks the victim’s family to be forgiving, and, on the other, commands the offender to offer the victim’s family a generous compensation, in a good gesture.
- The good gesture is described a Concession and Mercy from God, and not a favour by the offender.
- The offenders are warned of severe punishment if they failed to comply with it.

Finally, the rationale of this divine writ is borne out: a means to provide security of life. The essence of the passage, therefore, lies in its optional forgiveness-cum-retribution clause: the victim’s family may or may not forgive depending upon the circumstance of the killing.

The Qur’anic law is based on the principle of universal justice. It protects the rights of the victim's family, and covers the different circumstances leading to the loss of life. Thus, if it is a case of accidental killing, the victim’s family must exercise forgiveness in lieu of an appropriate compensation. But, for a premeditated murder, the victim’s family may insist on capital punishment for the murderer, while the juries may decide on an appropriate punishment depending upon the gravity of the offence.

The Qur’anic Law resulted in an end to the blood feud that was widely practiced in pre-Islamic Arabia. Its principles have been absorbed in the modern code of justice, yet, in its pure form as analyzed above, it is universally applicable to all cases of loss of life caused by the human agency – from homicide to accidental killing, and offers the best deal to the victims’ people – particularly if they are poor.

40. Exemplary Punishments for Major Crimes

Crime changes form with time and progress of civilization, and so do the methods for probing its genesis, for identifying and tracking the criminal, for establishing the criminal charges, and the nature of punishment. Accordingly, the Qur’an does not discuss the subject in any details. It, however, pronounces some exemplary and illustrative punishments for the major prevalent crimes, and sets out universal principles to guide the jurists in deciding on the mode and extent of punishment.

The social setting of the revelation was far from secure. There was no civil administration, no police force, no court of law, no trial for crime, no jail, and no

institution for punishing the criminal. So the criminals had almost unlimited power. They could bully, beat up and rob any unprotected soul, commit major crimes, spread terror in the community and roam about in broad daylight, or disappear in the desert wilderness - depending upon their clan clout. The Qur'an had to stop this outrage. There were past examples of rulers inflicting severe punishment on those who defied them and of communities suffering awesome punishments because of their errant ways. The Qur'an reminds its audience of these punishments (5:33), and commands amputating of hand for stealing (5:39) as an exemplary punishment. It, however, leaves a forgiveness clause (5:39), thereby allowing flexibility in the mode of punishment.

“(It is but) a just recompense (jaza’) for those who wage war against God and His Prophet, and storm about the earth causing corruption (fasad) that they are slain, or crucified, or have their hands and feet amputated from opposite sides, or expelled from the land. This has been their disgrace in this world, and a severe punishment (awaits) them in the hereafter (5:33), except (for) those who repent before you overpower them. (If so,) know that God is Most Forgiving and Merciful” (5:34).

Most commentators take the stipulations of this passage as the Qur’anic injunction on punishment for major crimes, and accordingly render it in a legislative tone. Examples:

“The punishment of those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger... is execution, or crucifixion,...” (Abdullah Yusuf Ali).

“The only reward of those who make war upon Allah and His messenger... will be that they will be killed or crucified, ...” (Marmaduke Pikhall).

However, as Muhammad Asad explains, the punishments are mentioned in the passive verbal forms: ‘are slain’, ‘are crucified’, ‘are amputated’ and ‘are expelled’, and as such the traditional rendering is grammatically incorrect.¹ Moreover, the Qur’an puts the underlined threatening expressions in the mouth of Pharaoh,² whom it describes as the epitome of evil. So, it will detract from God’s Mercy and Greatness, to legislate the same punishment to offenders for all time to come. Furthermore, the inclusion of the Prophet in the verse lends it an existential dimension that does not necessarily support its future legislative role.

“(As for) the thief, male and female, amputate the hands of both of them as a recompense for what they have earned - as an exemplary punishment from God. (Remember,) God is Almighty, Wise (5:38). But (as for) anyone who repents after his wrongdoing, and reforms - God will turn towards him. Indeed God is Most Forgiving and Merciful” (5:39).

40.1. Flexibility in the application of Qur’anic punishments

It will be fallacious to interpret the foregoing two punitive passages (5:33/34, 5:38/39) in isolation. The Qur’an’s declarations on the criteria of divine judgment³ are clearly suggestive of the principle of proportionality of crime and punishment, while both the passages incorporate forgiveness clauses (5:34, 5:39) and conclude with God’s attribute of Mercy and Forgiveness. It will therefore be essential for the jurists to consider the

severity of a crime, its impact on the victim, prevalent social system, and mitigating circumstances if any, before arriving at their final verdict. It must have been this Qur'anic spirit that led Caliph Umar to introduce jailing for lower offences, and reserving the Qur'anic exemplary punishment (5:38) for grave offences (5:33).⁴

Notes

1. Muhammad Asad, The Message of the Qur'an, Gibraltar 1980, Chap. 5, Notes 43-46.
2. Three Qur'anic verses quote Pharaoh threatening his sorcerers with the expression: "I shall amputate your hands and your feet from opposite sides, and then I shall crucify you" (7:124, 20:71, 26:49).
3. 6:160, 28:84/ Ch. 21.3; 42:40/Ch. 12.2; 40:40, 53:31. [Same as Note 2/Ch. 21]
4. Shibli Noumani, al-Faruq, Delhi 1898, Karachi reprint 1991, p. 198.

[4 references]

41. Allurements of Worldly Life

41.1. Man's innate passion for wealth, women, glory and power

The Qur'an recognizes that man is ever ungrateful to His Lord (100:6/7) and is allured by the worldly life (2:212). He is intense in his desire for riches (100:8),¹ in his passion for women, for hoarded up treasures, and glory, and power (3:14), and for multiplication of wealth and children (18:46, 57:20), and is oblivious to his final accountability to God (100:9-11).

"Worldly life allures those who deny (God), and they ridicule those who believe; but the heedful (attaqo) will be preferred over them on the Day of Resurrection. (Remember,) God provides for anyone He wishes beyond any measure" (2:212).

"Alluring to people is the love for pleasures from women, for children, for hoarded up treasures of gold and silver, and well-bred horses and cattle and lands. Those are the conveniences of worldly life, but the best of goals lies with God" (3:14).

"Wealth and children are the allurements of worldly life, but good deeds endure, and are better before your Lord as a reward, and the best to hope for" (18:46).

"Indeed man is ungrateful to His Lord (100:6), and he bears witness to that (7), and he has intense desire for riches (khayr)* (8). Does he not know that when what is in the graves is overturned (9) and what is in the hearts is scrutinised (10), their Lord will be (fully) Informed of them that Day" (100:11)? *[The word connotes all good things – Note 24/Preface]

The Qur'an, however, does not connect material prosperity with faith, and asserts that God helps all people, whether they seek earthly gains, or reward in the hereafter (17:19/20).

“Whoever desires the fleeting (present life), We hasten for them whatever We please of it, to whomever We desire. Then We consign him to hell: he shall endure it, despised and condemned (17:18); and whoever desires the hereafter, and strives for it as he ought to strive, and he is a believer – it is they whose striving shall be appreciated (19). All do We help - these as well as those – from the gift of your Lord, and surely the gift of your Lord is not restricted” (17:20).

At an early stage of the revelation, when the Prophet and his followers lived in hardship, the Qur'an counsels them to remain steady and not to aspire for the luxuries of life:

“Keep your patience (O Muhammad,) with those who call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking His favour*, and let not your eyes wander beyond them seeking the allurements of worldly life; and do not obey him whose heart We have made neglectful of Our remembrance, and who follows his own whim, as his case is beyond all bounds” (18:28). *[Lit., ‘Countenance’.]

The Qur'an further declares that worldly life is nothing but play and amusement (6:32, 57:20),² and a deception (7:51, 57:20),³ and in the same breath, affirms that those who are heedful (2:212 above, 6:32),⁴ and do good deeds (18:46 above) shall be preferred and rewarded by God.

“And what is worldly life but play and amusement, while the home of the hereafter is better for those who are heedful (yattaqun): will you not then use your reason”(6:32)?

*(Relief will not be given from the blaze to) those who have taken their religion (din) for amusement and play - worldly life deceived them. So on that day We will forget them, as they forgot the meeting of this Day of theirs, and as they refuted Our messages” (7:51). *[Bracketed leading words draw on the preceding verse, 7:50.]

“Worldly life is play and amusement, but if you truly believe (in God) and are heedful (Tattaqu), He will grant you your rewards, and will not ask you (for) your wealth” (47:36).

“Know you (all) that the worldly life is play and amusement, allurements and boasting among yourselves, and multiplication of wealth and children. It is like rain (whereby) the incredulous is amazed at (the growth of) vegetation, which soon withers away, so that you will see it turning yellow, then it crumbles into dust. (Likewise) there is a severe punishment (for some) in the hereafter; (but) there is forgiveness from God and (His) approval (for others); and what is worldly life is but merchandize of deception” (57:20).

The Qur'anic treatment of the allurements of worldly life must be seen in the context of its overall exhortation to pursuing God's bounty (62:10/Ch. 45.1), and availing of all good

things in life (2:168, 2:172/Ch. 23.4) – whether as food, or otherwise. Thus, God warns Muslims in particular, and humanity in general, to restrain themselves from greed for properties, passion for glory and power, and temptations of sensual pleasure, while availing of all good things in life as permitted by the Qur'an.

41.2. Greed for allurements of life is the singular promoter of poverty

Greed for the allurements of worldly life has been one of the chief promoters of poverty and distress in human society throughout history:

In the medieval society, until the turn of the 20th century, a minority rich class regulated land, commerce and industry, to avail for itself an enormously higher proportion of the produce of land and industry than the bulk of the population - who lived in abject poverty. The driving force: an endless craving for the allurements of worldly life in the form of wealth, glory and power.

- The just concluded 20th century saw, among others, exponential increase in the supply of food and all that is needed to make life easy and comfortable. But it has ushered human society into an era in which the disparity in consumption of the produce of industry and nature between the rich and the poor has reached, if not surpassed, the scale of the medieval era. The driving force, as in the medieval era, is nothing but an unrestrained greed for wealth and items of luxury, or the allurements of worldly life.
- In today's context, people across the world are cutting their social expenses, and spending more and more to acquire wealth and luxury goods. As wealth - cash, gold, stocks, flats etc, and the supply of luxury goods are controlled by the very rich – they remain the ultimate beneficiary of this consumer behavior, while the growing population of the poor across the world bears the brunt through reduced real wages, and shrinking benefits. Hence the application of Qur'anic principles can pave the way for bridging the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor.

Ironically, in today's context, some third world Muslim countries present the worst cases of income disparity between the rich and the poor. A restrictive notion of Zakat (Ch. 46.3), and a self-centered faith in God's mercy and forgiveness often blocks the conscience of the rich and the privileged class in these countries against unrestrained greed. They hastily acquire properties and all kinds of assets, and spend lavishly on themselves and their families, compromising with their financial obligations towards their relatives, employees, the needy and the community at large as required by the Qur'an (Verses listed in Ch. 17/18), and thus widen the gap between the rich and the poor and usher their countries on the frontlines of poverty.

41.3. Recreations, Entertainment and Art forms

In the Qur'anic discourse, God has created man in the finest model (95:4/Ch. 10), and has accorded him special bounties over the rest of creation (17:70/Ch. 10). These include, among others, the diverse avenues of recreations and entertainment, and natural art forms, which in turn are nothing but allurements (zinat, 57:20/41.1 above) of life and means of 'play and amusement' (6:32, 7:51, 47:36/41.1). While the Qur'an

cautions humanity not to be deceived by them (57:20), or to make them their religion (7:51), its generic injunction on the lawfulness of all the beautiful things (zinat) of life (7:32/Ch. 25.4), gives no ground to discard or renounce them. Thus, there are traditions supporting the Prophet's approval of the prevalent sports and recreational activities, that included, among others, singing, music and artistic dance performance.⁵

Since the Qur'an leaves an open way (minhaj) before humanity to evolving its civilization (5:48/Ch. 9.4), all natural art forms, including song, music, poetry, athletics, swimming, sports etc. as in vogue today would stand permissible as long as the performers and the spectators abide by the Qur'anic paradigms on modesty, ethics and morality; and remain committed to their social, financial, and personal responsibilities and religious obligations that are intrinsic to the Qur'anic message. The same will hold for all forms of recreations including indoor and outdoor games, simple outing or picnic, angling etc. However games that stretch the players beyond their bearing capacity,⁶ (knock-down sword fight/ wrestling for example), and entertainment that conflict with the Qur'anic tenets (prostitution, alcoholism, gambling, and similar abominations) would be unlawful in Islam.

Notes

1. 89:20, 102:1/2
2. 29:64.
3. 28:60, 45:35.
4. 3:15.
5. Afzalur Rahman, *Role of Women in Society*, London 1986, p. 374-381.
6. 6:152/Ch. 19.1; 2:233, 65:7/Ch. 34.5.

[6 references]

42. Conducting Community Affairs

42.1. Consultation in conducting affairs

The Qur'an enjoins mutual consultation in conducting community affairs (3:159, 42:38):

“(God's reward is for those who believe,...) who respond to their Lord, keep up prayer, (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation (shura), and spend (in charity) of what We have given them” (42:38). [The bracketed qualifying statement draws on the preceding verses listed under Ch. 29.2]

Note: By prohibiting grave sins and abominable deeds in the preceding verse (42:37/Ch. 29.2) the Qur'an clarifies that the instrument of consensus cannot be used to justify what is ipso facto wrong, or to legalize the unlawful (Haram), as clearly stated in Caliph Umar's decree to his governors (Note 4/Ch. 21.4).

“It is because of mercy from God (O Muhammad,) that you were mild to them. Had you been harsh and hard-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you. So pardon them, seek forgiveness for them, and consult (shاور) with them on the matter. Yet, once you have reached a decision, put your trust in God. Indeed! God loves those who put their trust (in Him)” (3:159).

This verse (3:159) relates to the aftermath of the Uhud expedition, in which the Muslim defenders suddenly lost a significant military advantage as some of the archers left their positions to capture war booty, disregarding the Prophet’s order. The Prophet is asked to deal with them gently (Note 96/Ch. 3.5), and to conduct the affairs of the community (warfare in this particular instance) through mutual consultation. The Trench war furnishes another example of consultation displayed by the Prophet, leading to the digging of a trench on the suggestion of a Persian convert to defend the oasis (Ch. 3.7).

42.2. Collateral forgiveness

Towards the concluding phase of the revelation, when Muslims were in a position to avenge their oppression, the Qur’an expounds its ordinance on collateral forgiveness of erstwhile enemies:

“You who believe, do not profane the rites of God, nor the sacred month, nor the offerings, nor the garlands (that mark such animals), nor those resorting to the Sacred House - seeking the blessing and approval of their Lord. But when you are cleared (of the Sacred precincts and pilgrim garb), you may hunt. And let not the hatred of a people who (once) obstructed you from (entering the) Sacred House, lead you to be hostile.* Therefore, help each other to virtue (birr)** and piety (Taqwa), and do not collaborate with each other in sin and enmity. Heed God, and (remember,) God is severe in punishment” (5:2). *[Lit., ‘exceed limits’.] **[Lit., ‘moral excellence’.]

“You who believe, be upright before God as witnesses to justice, and let not the hatred of any people prompt you to deal unjustly. ...” (5:8) [Full text in Ch. 21]

Consensus places the 5th Sura (al-Maidah) at around the time when Mecca was integrated (630). The above verses from this Sura command the Muslims to eschew hostility against the Meccans, who had recently (628) obstructed their hajj caravan from entering the Sacred House. However, most commentators including Yusuf Ali and Muhammad Asad contend that injunctions of these verses are of universal nature, as supported by Qur’anic injunction on ‘returning evil with good’ (41:34/Ch. 12.7). These injunctions have deep social and political implications, not just in times of victory but also in times of struggle.

42.3. Role of Muslims as witnesses to humanity

The Qur’an defines the role of Muslims as witnesses to humanity (2:143, 22:78).

“Thus We have made you a justly balanced community, that you may be witnesses to humanity, and the Messenger, a witness to you. And We only established the direction of prayer that you were used to, that We might know those who followed the Messenger from those who turned on their heels. Indeed, it was a great (shock)

except to those guided by God. (Remember,) God would not let your faith suffer decline, for indeed God is Most Compassionate and Merciful to humanity” (2:143).

“Strive in God's (way) - a striving due to Him. He has chosen you (to convey His message), and placed no difficulty on you in religion - the creed of Abraham, your ancestor. He has named you Muslims before and herein, so that the Messenger acts as your witness, and you as witnesses to humanity. Therefore, keep up prayer, give charity, and hold fast to God: He is your Protector. What a splendid Protector and what a splendid Supporter!” (22:78).

By describing the Prophet as a witness to the Muslims, the Qur'an conceivably suggests that he was a living testimony to exemplary conduct and behavior to his followers that elsewhere the Qur'an asks them to emulate (33:21/Ch. 15). Thus, through these verses the Qur'an reminds the Muslims that like the Prophet as a testimony among them, they have to act as a testimony to humanity by grooming themselves as models of good conduct and behavior for the followers of other faith-communities to follow their example. This complements the Qur'anic world view on the universal brotherhood of humanity as reviewed earlier (Ch. 9), and assigns a special moderating role to the Muslims – a role that fanned the phenomenal spread of Islam in its early centuries, and, with time, a gradual sweep of Islamic values and paradigms across the world.

42.4. Notion of Islamic state

The Qur'anic precepts relating to its social, commercial and legal reforms, family laws, and other aspects of life as covered in the preceding pages required the evolution of a truly Islamic community for their implementation. Such a community (ummah) evolved in Medina under the leadership of the Prophet. However, it may be quite misleading to call the Muslim community under the Prophet's spiritual and temporal leadership, an Islamic state. The Qur'an has been unequivocal about the Prophet's role as God's Messenger. Therefore, to describe him as a head of state or commander in chief will be tantamount to putting additional words into the Qur'an. Moreover, the Qur'an remains silent about the political, civil, financial, or military administration that goes with a state. As in case of all other fields of knowledge and sciences, it understandably left these to evolve with the progress of civilization. However, its emphasis on justice, equality, tolerance, social welfare, and its priority on peace and security for all people provided the ground rules for the establishment of some of the most harmonious and egalitarian multi-cultural and multi-religious societies in world history (notably in Spain and India). With time these values have permeated the global society and have crystallized into the notion of welfare state. At the same time, there is no definable model of an Islamic state: countries with highly diverse political agendas, ideologies and administrative portfolios have claimed this generic title, and are doing so to this day, as we can see around the Muslim world.

42.5. The birth and flowering of the Islamic Caliphate

There is no denying the fact that during the caliphate of the Prophet's immediate successors (632-661), the Muslims formed a religio-political nation, when all activities of the state were carried out under the aegis of faith, and were directed at establishing it as

an historical reality. These successors (Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali), remembered as the Rightly guided Caliphs, were the most trusted companions of the Prophet, who had each marital tie with him,¹ had lived with him as members of a family, had been groomed by him for more or less two decades as early converts to Islam,² and were reputed for their wisdom, austerity, devotion and selfless zeal.

Inspired by the ideals of the Prophet, imbued with the tenets of the Qur'an, and driven by their missionary zeal, the Rightly guided Caliphs succeeded in establishing Islam as a powerful spiritual, social, intellectual and political force that took the world by surprise, made its mark and visible presence from the shore of Atlantic in the East to the shore of Pacific in the West and thus established Islam as an historical reality. However, with the passing away of this generation, the rein of the caliphate fell in the hands of people who had converted to Islam after the assimilation of Mecca, some 20th year into the prophetic mission: people who were neither tutored by the Prophet nor had encountered the explosive impact of the revelation first hand, and were driven only by personal ambitions and were thus unfit to perpetuate the heritage of the early Caliphs. These were the Umayyads (661-750). They retained the title of khalifah (Caliph) or successor, and in theory assumed the position of the elected head of the community in both temporal and religious matters, but in reality, they were dynastic rulers and temporal heads only. Thus the religio-political Islamic state came to an end and history changed its course. In the words of Fadhalla Haeri:³

“In the name of Islam, an empire was created, taking its capital the ancient Byzantine city of Damascus and adopting the administrative, political and military machinery of the defunct Byzantine government. From this point on most Muslim rulers grew more concerned with self preservation, power, accumulating wealth and controlling their people.”

Therefore, in true sense, there is no political model of an Islamic state. The Islamic caliphate under the Prophet's companions cannot be regarded as a model as it was governed in purely religious lines. It is impossible to recreate this model, as much as it is impossible to have the Prophet's companions and witnesses of the revelation come alive to lead a religio-political state. Even otherwise, in today's multi-religious world a religio-political state is antithetic to historical need rather than a historical necessity. Thus the present religious title of many of the countries with predominantly Muslim population, and the religio-political division between the Muslim and the non-Muslim world is purely a construct of history, nostalgic, anachronistic, and not rooted in the Qur'anic message.

Notes

1. Abu Bakr and Umar gave their daughters in marriage to the Prophet, while Uthman and Ali married two of his daughters.
2. Ali, Abu Bakr and Uthman were among the first converts to the faith, while Umar embraced Islam some five years later (Opening para. Ch. 3.1).
3. Shaykh Fadhalla Haeri, *The Elements of Islam*, Shaftsbury 1993, p. 80.

43. Principles of 'Human Rights'

43.1. The Qur'an is not an outcome of a charter of demands

Unlike all charters of 'human rights' dating from the famous Magna Carta,¹ the Qur'an is not an outcome of any charter of demands that the subjects placed before the throne, or a group or fraternity placed before an office of authority. The Qur'an spells out a balanced mix of privileges and obligations for men and women that are designed to make their life peaceful and comfortable.

The Qur'anic privileges and obligations have largely been covered in the preceding chapters. This chapter attempts to consolidate the subject under a single heading. Some aspects of the subject, implicit in the later chapters, are also included and cross-referenced accordingly.

43.2. Privileges and obligations of men and women as individuals

The Qur'an describes believing men and believing women as the protectors (awliya') of each other who enjoin the good and forbid the evil (9:71/Ch. 33.6), and accords the following privileges and obligations to each of them without any gender discriminations.

- To be allured by and choose believing mates for marriage (2:221/Ch. 32.1).
- To spend in charity to earning God's blessings (Ch. 18.1).
- To act as a witness in equal capacity without gender discrimination, except for commercial contracts, owing understandably to the prevalent trading realities (Ch. 24.2)
- To have independent incomes (4:32/Ch. 33.5).
- To pursue universal knowledge and develop their potentials as God's deputy (khalifah) on earth (2:30, Note 6/Ch. 5.1), created in the finest model and favoured above much of God's creation (95:4, 17:70/Ch. 10).
- To undertake scientific studies, research and explorations to harnessing the various resources of nature God has made serviceable to them (31:20, 45:13/Ch. 10).

43.3. Privileges and obligations of men and women as spouses

- Men are required to give reasonable dowers to their wives (4:4/Ch. 33.4), even if they break the marriage before consummation (2:236/Ch. 34.6; 2:237/Ch. 34.7).
- Women may voluntarily forgo a part of marriage dower (4:4/Ch. 33.4).
- Men should support their wives and maintain them with their income (4:34/Ch. 33.6)
- Women of means may also support their husbands as God has favoured men and women in different measures (4:32/Ch. 33.5).

- Men suspecting their wives of extramarital perversity may counsel them, leave them alone in their beds, and finally assert on them, failing which involve the community for arbitration (4:34-35/Ch. 33.6).
- Women suspecting their husbands of extramarital perversity may try to resolve the matter with them mutually (4:128/Ch. 33.6), failing which, divorce them (4:130/Ch. 33.6), and in extreme cases, unilaterally divorce them (2:229/Ch. 34.2).
- A man, who wants to terminate a marriage, must give a notice of divorce to his wife on two occasions within a span of three lunar months before reaching a final decision on divorce (2:229, 2:231, 65:2/Ch. 34.2).
- Men to reconcile with their wives under divorce notice if they are found to be pregnant, and take them back (2:228/Ch. 34.2), and if the reconciliation fails, to provide, according to means, for the living expenses of their pregnant wives, and those of the children born from the pregnancy, for the entire nursing period of two years (2:233, 65:6-7/Ch. 34.5).
- A man is to bear the costs, subject to means, if a child born to his divorced pregnant wife is to be nursed by a foster mother (2:233/Ch. 34.5).
- Men to feed and accommodate their women under divorce notice during their waiting period, in the manner they live, and not to harass them or make their life difficult (65:6/Ch. 34.5).
- Men to release their women under divorce notice after the expiry of the waiting period, and not to retain them in order to injure them, and otherwise not to exceed limits (2:231/Ch. 34.2), nor to hinder them from marrying a spouse of their choice (2:232/Ch. 34.4).
- Men to refrain from extorting any property from their wives, such as during a divorce, or from the widows of kinsmen (4:19/Ch. 35.2; 2:229, 4:20/Ch. 34.2).
- Men to give a reasonable maintenance to their divorced wives until they are remarried (2:241/Ch. 34.8).
- A man is to have one wife but may take more than one wife only under exceptional circumstances (4:3/Ch. 31.1).
- A woman, upon the death of her husband, is entitled to maintenance for one year, without having to leave home (2:240/Ch. 35.2), and to have the option to settle down by herself and even entertain marriage proposals from prospective suitors after a waiting period of four months and ten days (2:234/235, Ch. 35.1).
- Men and women to make a will before they die.
- Men and women are entitled to inherit from each other, their parents, offspring and next of kin (Ch. 38.3).

43.4. To avail of a minimal income and social benefits

The Qur'an's repeated exhortations on Zakat (Ch. 46) and social responsibility (Ch. 17) demonstrate that the Qur'an is pushing humanity towards creating a welfare state in

which the resourceful would be made to share their resources with those of scanty means, irrespective of faith. As the Qur'anic revelation was underway, the Muslim community formed a nation, but the paraphernalia of a state was yet to develop (Ch. 42.4). With the formation of the Islamic state after the Prophet's death, the social responsibilities of 'the resourceful' automatically devolved on the state, and it became the state policy to fulfill basic human needs, namely food, shelter, essentials of life, and employment opportunity or state subsidy.

While the Qur'anic social reforms remained indelibly recorded in its pages, centuries after centuries, the Christian West discovered them through a process of social reform in the post Enlightenment era.² As Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) states:³

"It was then that Europe began to throw off their bondage and reform their condition, reordering the affairs of their life in a manner akin to the message of Islam, though oblivious of who their real guide and leader was. So were enunciated the fundamental principles of modern civilization...."

43.5. To live peacefully, without any disturbance or threat

The Qur'an forbids entering others' houses unless permission is granted (24:27), and asks believers to invoke peace upon their occupants (24:27), and to go away if so asked (24:28). It, however, allows entry into a house that is not meant for living, but offers a provision (24:29).

"You who believe, do not enter houses, except your own homes, until you have taken permission, and invoke peace upon their occupants. This is better for you, that you may be mindful (24:27); and if you find no one home, do not go in until you are given permission; and if you are told to go away, go away. This is appropriate for you. (Remember,) God is Cognizant of what you do (28). There is no blame on you in entering uninhabited houses that offer you a provision. (Remember,) God knows what you reveal and what you conceal" (24:29).

Scholars agree that an uninhabited house that offers a provision could be an office, a public place, or an historical ruin or deserted house.

43.6. Privacy at home

The Qur'an recognizes the need for privacy during times of rest - in the afternoon and at night, and asks believers to let their growing children take permission before entering their private quarters at those times (24:58/59).

"You who believe, let those under your lawful trust, and those among you* who have not yet reached puberty, take your permission (before entering your rooms) on three occasions: before morning prayer, during midday when you lay aside your clothes (for rest), and after the prayer at night. These are the three times of privacy for you, and there is no blame on you or on them going around (attending to) one another beyond these (times). This is how God explains His messages to you. (Remember,) God is All-Knowing and Wise" (24:58). When your children reach puberty, let them seek permission as those before them did. Thus does God clarify

His messages to you, for God is All-Knowing and Wise” (24:59). *[All growing up children, irrespective of relationship.]

43.7. Care and Support of the physically challenged

The Qur’an entitles a person, whether he is blind, or lame, or sick, to take a meal, and by implication, shelter in the homes of a clearly defined set of people, which include all near of kin. It thus abolishes the prevalent superstition of treating the physically handicapped, and the sick, as God’s accursed creature, to be socially ostracized.

“There is no blame on the blind, there is no blame on the lame, there is no blame on the sick, nor on yourselves in eating (kulu) at your own homes, or those of* your fathers, or mothers, or brothers, or sisters, or father’s brothers, or father’s sisters, or mother’s brothers, or mother’s sisters, or those whose keys are in your possession, or that of a sincere friend of yours. There is no blame in your eating all together, or separately. But when you enter houses, greet others with a goodly blessing from God. Thus does God clarify the messages to you, that you may use your reason” (24:61). *[The Arabic text corresponding to the underlined lines repeats the plural noun buyut, rendered as ‘homes’ nine times, which has been omitted from the rendering for simplicity of expression.]

If only food or drink was meant, the Qur’an may have used the root TAM (ta’am, ta’imu) that it connotes specifically with the intake of food or drink. It, however, uses the word kulu, which is rendered above in the traditional lines as ‘eating’. But the word kulu also connotes with availing of the provisions of life (2:168, 2:172/Ch. 23.4). Thus, the use of this generic word allows for extending the scope of the verse (24:61) to cover shelter as well. Furthermore, the Qur’anic option to eat separately allows for offering food to a visiting relative or friend without necessarily accompanying the latter while eating.

43.8. The duty of grown up children to support their parents

The Qur’an directs humanity to show kindness to parents, and to support and patiently bear with their elderly parents staying with them (17:23-24/Ch. 17.4), as part of its harramah or binding instructions (6:151/Ch. 19.1),

43.9. General universal privileges

The Qur’anic message embraces a whole gamut of universal privileges, such as:

- Equal treatment before Law (4:58, 4:135/Ch. 21.1).
- Privilege to have a witness (4:135, 5:8/Ch. 21.1).
- Legal hearing and therefore no arbitrary punishment (7:159, 7:181/Ch. 21.2).
- Privilege to own property (2:188, 4:29/Ch. 22.1).
- Fair payment for goods and services (Ch. 22.3).
- ‘Share’ of the poor in wealth of the rich, and by implication, that of the state (70:24-25/Ch. 19.1).
- Security of life and protection from crimes (Ch. 39/40).

- Safe asylum to the civilians of the enemy nation at times of war (9:6/Ch. 12.8).
- Social security of distressed and orphaned children (4:127/Ch. 31.1; 4:9/Ch. 38.6).
- Freedom of religion (49:13/Ch. 8.1; 2:256, 10:99, 50:45/ Ch. 9.2; 5:48/Ch. 9.4).
- Punishment proportional to the severity of crime, barring exemplary punishment for major crimes (Ch. 40.1).
- Abolition of slavery and prostitution (Ch. 30.1).

The list can be extended to include other categories of privileges, such as acquiring education, use of reason etc. that are implicit in the Qur'anic message. But this will add bulk as the examples already cited cover a whole gamut of 'human privileges' that the Qur'an acknowledged more than 1400 years ago and the Western world evolved by placing charters upon charters before the crown and the state.

Paradoxically however, any objective study on compliance of Qur'anic injunctions on the various facets of the privileges accorded to humanity might find the so-called Muslim countries most un-Islamic in practically all counts and the Western and advanced countries a long way into the Islamic order – albeit with serious conflict in some areas, and a basic difference in the notion of "right" and "privilege" as explained in the opening paragraph of this section.

Finally, to quote Murad Hofmann: "There is no essential contradiction between Islam and the Western human rights. On the contrary Islam is a (complementary) human rights system.⁴"

Notes

Magna Carta: A royal charter, King John of England was compelled to seal (1215), that laid down the fundamental principles of justice that no man may be punished without any trial, that punishment must be proportional to the offence, and that justice may not be denied or delayed or sold to a man – principles that are clearly spelled out in the Qur'an. It however gave certain exceptional rights to the feudal lords over their vassals based on the established norms. Enlightenment era: Popularly known as the Age of Enlightenment, this era is identified with the 18th century, when the newly established scientific and analytical approach was applied to social fields. John L. Esposito, *Islam in Transition*, New York 1982, p. 27. Murad Hofmann, *Islam the Alternative*, UK 1993, p. 132.

[4 references]

44. The Five Pillars of Faith And Shahadah

44.1. Pillars of Faith

During the Prophet's time, anyone entering Islam was required to make a set of pledges that not only included faith in God and the Prophet but also elements tailored to the

immediate callings of the community. These pledges were regarded as the pillars of faith. They represented the essence of faith as well as the key duties of the converts as members of the upcoming Muslim community, rather than the summation of the Qur'anic message. As the priorities of the Muslim community was changing with time, the pillars also changed accordingly.

Thus, at an early stage in the Medinite period (622-632) the Prophet took the following oaths from a small group of visitors who came to him to enter Islam.¹

- Not to associate anything with God.
- Not to steal.
- Not to commit adultery.
- Not to kill children.
- Not to accuse an innocent person.
- Not to disobey when asked to do what is ma'ruf (good).

As the pagan Arabs became familiar with these prohibitions and hardly needed any reminding during conversion, the prohibitions were substituted by biddings to prayer, Zakat, fasting and war booty,² After the integration of Mecca (eighth years into the Medinite period), war booty was dropped and Hajj, Wudu and all commandments (Ahkam) of God, along with prayer, Zakat, fasting were regarded as the sole criteria of ones deeds ('amal).³ However, possibly at the time of Caliph Umar the five pillars as we have them today were canonized, while the underlined pledge was not spelled out.

44.2. The Shahadah - The Declaration of faith

The first pillar of faith is the belief in the unity of God and in Muhammad as God's prophet, and can be rendered as follows:

'I testify that there is no deity but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God.'

Any non-Muslim who wants to enter Islam has to make this declaration (in Arabic) in a solemn manner with full sincerity and conviction. Since honesty, sincerity and conviction of a person are known only to God, there is no basis to spiritually differentiate a fresh convert from one born in a Muslim family or descending from a long line of Muslim ancestors.

Most Muslims take the shahadah, as a mere oral declaration, and regard the other four pillars Salat (prayer), Zakat (traditionally, obligatory charity), fasting, and hajj, as sufficient to cover all their religious rites and obligations. This is oversimplification because at the time of the Prophet, the commandments (ahkamat) of the Qur'an were regarded as the sole criteria of ones deeds ('amal).³ Moreover, the Qur'an does not provide any basis to justify reducing its holistic message to only four elements or pillars besides the shahadah.

Notes

1. Sahih al-Bukhari, English translation by Mohsin Khan, New Delhi 1984, Vol.1, Acc. 17.

2. Ibid., Acc. 50.
3. Ibid., Chap. 42, 'The Book of Belief.'

[3 references]

45. The Canonical Daily Prayers

During the Meccan period of trial, tribulation and constant waiting for God's help, the Qur'an repeatedly asks the Prophet to leave the matter in God's hand and to devote himself to prayer. Thus, he is asked to do prayer (Salah) at both ends of the day and at the approaches of night,¹ from the sun's decline till the darkness of night² and at late hours of the night (Tahajjud prayer),³ and to stand (qum) (in prayer and devotion to God) late into the night.⁴ He is also commanded to celebrate the praise (sabbih) of God long into the night in prostration,⁵ before sunrise and before sunset,⁶ by night and by day,⁷ for part of the night and both ends of the day,⁸ at night at the end prostration,⁹ as the stars retreated,¹⁰ when he arose (in the morning),¹¹ and as he bowed down (in prayer);¹² and to remember (wadhkur) God morning and evening.¹³

The Qur'an enjoins Muslims at large to praise (subhan) God morning and evening (30:17, 33:42, 48:9), to glorify (hamd) Him at midday and nightfall (30:18), and to be watchful of prayers (salawat) - particularly the middle prayer (2:238). Since God's praise (root SBH) and glorification (HMD) are invoked in the prayer (salah), the underlined timings based on the entire period of revelation add up to five times daily prayer. However, the timings appearing in the Medinite verses alone (2:238, 33:42, 48:9) add up to three. The canonical five times daily prayer is based on traditions relating to the Prophet's ascent to Heaven (Note 25/Ch. 3), when he reportedly had an encounter with the Presence of God, who initially prescribed daily fifty times prayer for his followers,¹⁴ which upon repeated plea by the Prophet, was successively reduced to five times daily.

"Keep the prayers, (especially) the middle prayer, and perform (it) with devotion (to God)" (2:238).

"So praise God in your evenings, and your mornings, (30:17):' to Him is due all praise in the heavens and the earth; and (glorify Him) at nightfall and when it is your midday" (30:18).

"You who believe, remember God with much remembrance (33:41), and praise Him morning and evening" (33:42).

"We have sent you (O Muhammad,) as a witness, a bearer of good news, and a warner (48:8), that you (O People,) may believe in God and His Messenger and you may honor and revere Him, and praise Him morning and evening" (48:9).

The Qur'an does not lay down any clear procedure for prayer (salah). It however refers to the various postures of prayer such as standing, kneeling down, and bowing down (in prostration),¹⁵ facing the direction of the Sacred House (the Ka'ba) in Mecca.¹⁶ It also refers to the marks of prostration on the foreheads of the Prophet's companions (48:29/Ch. 16.4).

According to traditions, there are two broad categories of prayer: fard prayers of two to four rak'at (cycles) are dedicated to God, while sunnat prayers, also dedicated to God, are performed following the Prophet's example, and are of similar length. However, tradition tells us that the Prophet often shortened his prayers during journey: from four to two rak'at for midday (zuhr), middle ('asr), and nightly ('isha) prayers, and left the fajr (dawn) and maghrib (dusk) prayers unchanged. The Qur'an allows for remembering God under constraining circumstances,¹⁷ and shortening, deferring or staggering prayer when under attack.¹⁸

Muslims are required to perform a washing ritual (wudu) before the prayer, and, in the absence of any water, a dry ablution (tayammum).¹⁹ And last, but not least, the Qur'an asks people to be humble in prayer,²⁰ and not to be proud of it.²¹

45.1. Congregational prayer

The Qur'an declares:

"You who believe, when the call is given for prayer on the day of Congregation (Friday), hasten to remember (dhikr) God leaving business aside. This is best for you, if you only knew (62:9); and when the prayer is over, spread out in the land in pursuit of God's abundance (fadlillah), remembering (wadhkuru) God a lot that you may succeed" (62:10).

Commentators agree that the term fadl (rendered as God's abundance) refers to all material things that a man seeks to meet the physical needs of his life. Since a person's success to meeting his material needs is contingent to his skill, knowledge, diligence and enterprise, the verse has an implicit instruction to pursuing knowledge and to actively participating in the production, economic and industrial fields of the era – as indicated by the underlined stipulation of the verse. However, as advocated by Ibn Khatir, the concluding stipulation of the verse 'to remember God a lot' while seeking God's abundance' is a clear reminder to the believers against any unlawful or unfair endeavor.²²

45.2. Introduction of prayer call, the Adhan

The Adhan was introduced in the early years after the Prophet's migration to Medina. The wordings of the Adhan, rendered below, are exactly the same today as they were first announced by Bilal,²³ an Abyssinian freed slave, more than fourteen centuries ago.

God is great! God is Great! God is Great! God is Great!

I testify that there is no god but one God! I testify that there is no god but one God!

I testify that Muhammad is the Prophet of God! I testify that Muhammad is the Prophet of God!

Come towards salah! Come towards salah!

Come towards well being! Come towards well being!

God is great! God is great!

There is no God but One God.

An additional line (as-salat is better than sleep), repeated twice, is added with the dawn Adhan.

45.3. Significance of Salah

The Qur'an regards salah purely as a spiritual vehicle for praising and glorifying God, that can imbue the believer with patience and fortitude in the face of adversity,²⁴ and restrain people from abominable deeds (29:45/Note 1/Ch. 29). Its various postures indicate the humbleness of the believer before God. However, Muslims generally regard salah as an all-embracing piety that is sufficient to earn divine blessings and forgiveness for all sins. In light of the holistic message of the Qur'an, this may be oversimplification, and misinterpretation of the essence of prayer.

1. The Qur'an is a book of wisdom (Note 7/Preface) and a font of guidance for humanity (Note 15/Preface). Its social, moral and ethical paradigms, its emphasis on equity, justice, and use of reason, and its empowerment of individual human beings, among others, are highly stimulating and provided the impetus for the phenomenal rise of Islam and its subsequent successes in its early history. Therefore, to regard prayer (salah), as all-embracing piety will be tantamount to depriving Islam of its social, moral, ethical, intellectual and invigorating dimensions.
2. The Qur'an categorically forbids unlawful killing, stealing, all abominable deeds (crimes) and terrorism, and enjoins exemplary punishments for grave crimes as reviewed in the preceding chapters. Projecting salah singularly as a means to earning God's forgiveness seemingly dilutes the gravity of the Qur'anic emphasis on eschewing the forbidden.
3. Nowhere does the Qur'an connect the performance of prayer (salah) alone with divine rewards. Thus, its verse on the virtues of the Prophet's companions (48:29/Ch. 16.4) and its exhortation to the Prophet's wounded followers who chased the victorious Quraysh army immediately after the Uhud expedition (3:172, Note 84/Ch. 3.4), connect God's promise of reward with their doing of good deeds, though as the Prophet's companions, their devotion to prayer, love of God and the Prophet and sacrifice for the cause of Islam remain beyond any question.
4. The Qur'an devotes one full Sura (107/Ch. 7.1) condemning an observant of prayer who "rebuffs the orphan and does not encourage feeding the poor" (107:2-3), (and those) who aim to be seen (in public) (6) but hold back from helping (others)" (107:6-7). Thus, the Qur'an does not project prayer (salah) as an ultimate safeguard against corruption and vices, as most traditional Muslims tend to believe, though as mentioned above, Salat performed with devotion can keep people away from abominations.
5. The Qur'an does not restrict the obligation of salah to the Muslims alone. It attests that salah was enjoined on the Jews,²⁵ the Prophet Jesus,²⁶ and the followers of Ishmael,²⁷ and that the Prophet Abraham was regular in prayer.²⁸ Thus the Qur'an treats salah in similar light as its other universal virtues, notably good deeds, zakah and Taqwa. Accordingly, the Qur'an refers to pious people remembering God and doing salah in all places of worship, morning and evening,²⁹ and his name being regularly proclaimed in monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques (22:40).

6. The popular notion of carte blanche blessings (thawab) of salah offers the easiest path to earn forgiveness of sins and divine rewards – a path that needs no sharing of wealth and no sacrifice of any material possession. The steep path as the Qur'an describes is "freeing a slave, or feeding during famine an orphaned relative, or the needy (lying) in the dust" (90:13-16/Ch. 17.1).

In view of the foregoing considerations, the Qur'anic injunctions on salah must be considered in conjunction with the invigorating and liberating aspects of its message to do full justice to the holistic message of the Qur'an.

Historically, barring exceptions, Muslims have remained divided in two diagonally opposite camps: one, the majority, seek the easiest path and regard salah as the 'key to the paradise.' The other, a small section, knowingly or unknowingly pursue the 'steep path,' use reason and rationalism, and focus on the universal dimensions of the Qur'anic message, notably good deeds and social, moral and ethical responsibilities. Both the groups have to maintain a balance, and bear in mind the risks of tottering on the extremities.

Pure rationalism or dynamism (that underlined the Islam's successes) can open the door successively to gnosticism, agnosticism, through to atheism, while singular emphasis on prayer can grout the Muslims to the seventh century Arabia,³⁰ and lead to intellectual stagnation and social and cultural mortification. Prayer is somewhat like the fragrance of a flower (the soul of Islam), and the dynamic forces of Islam its body. Without fragrance the body may not have any value in the court of God and without the body, it is a piece of fossil on the desert sand.

Notes

11:114.

2. 17:78.
3. 17:79.
4. 73:1-6, 73:20
5. 76:26.
6. 50:39, 20:130.
7. 40:55.
8. 20:130.
9. 50:40.
10. 52:49.
11. 52:48.
12. 15:98.
13. 76:25.
14. Muhammad Husayn Haykal, The Life of Muhammad, English translation by Ismail Ragi, 8th edition, Karachi 1989, p. 144.

15. 9:112, 22:77, 38:24. 50:40, 76:26.
16. 2:149.
17. 2:239.
18. 4:101- 103.
19. 5:6.
20. 7:55.
21. 7:205/206.
22. Muhammad Umer Chapra, Objectives of the Islamic order (article); appearing in Islam - its Meaning and Message, U.K. 1975, 1988 reprint, p. 177.
23. This is the same Bilal who was tortured by his master during the Meccan period (Note 18/Ch. 3.1)
24. 2:45, 2:153.
25. 2:83, 5:12.
26. 19:31.
27. 19:54/55.
28. 14:40.
29. 24:36/37.
30. As noted in the opening paragraph of this chapter, the verses revealed in the Mecca period emphasized on prayer and meditation, as Muslims were too small in number and too weak in the land to show any 'dynamism' or wage a struggle for reform.

[30 references]

46. The Zakat (Obligatory Charity)

46.1. Evolution of the institution of Zakat

During the Prophet's era, the Qur'anic exhortations to spend on the needy (Ch. 18) encouraged the affluent believers to give charity all the year round, and more generously during the month of Ramadan for the special blessings of this month. Thus, on one occasion the Prophet asked the Muslim women attending the mosque for Eid congregation to give their ornaments in charity (sadaqah),¹ and accordingly they gave away their rings and ornaments.² Towards the end of the Qur'anic revelation however, charity (sadaqah) was made mandatory, and later Caliph Umar institutionalized it as the Zakat (9:60/Ch. 18.8). In early Islam, the Zakat was collected by the state, and distributed to the different categories of people as the Qur'an prescribes (9:60).

The rate or amount of the Zakat was calculated at two and a half percent for cash, gold and liquid assets if possessed in excess of 12 English Guinea gold, or equivalent,³ but higher levels were fixed for other contemporaneous assets such as yield of land, perfume etc. With time this traditional model has been rationalized at two and half percent for all assets beyond the specified threshold value.

46.2. Present day implications of the traditional model of Zakat

With the growth of commerce and industry in recent centuries, the base of asset has expanded enormously, and is in fact expanding continually with time. Thus, a complex computation, and an ongoing agreement of Islamic scholars and financial experts will be needed to define the threshold limit and determine the asset base for the computation of the Zakat. But this will be a stupendous exercise that will need constant upgrading and agreement of Islamic scholars. Moreover, the exercise will inevitably lend itself to gross manipulation. For example, diamond and precious metals are excluded from the traditional list of Zakat-chargeable assets, obviously to the benefit of the rich. Likewise, one may exclude many capital items of modern highly complex business world to give selective advantage to a group. Alternatively, one can acquire money by questionable or unlawful means, or by grossly exploiting the poor, and then 'purify' it by giving away two and a half per cent as the Zakat. Therefore, the traditional model of the Zakat appears inadequate for the present day complex financial scenario. This brings us to the broader notion of zakah as enjoined by the Qur'an.

46.3. The Qur'anic notion of zakah (pl. zakat)

The Qur'an uses the word zakah and its other roots in versatile manner. In many of its verses, the Qur'an pairs its injunction to keeping up prayer (salah) with the exercise of zakah, thereby enjoining it on all believers, regardless of income.⁴ Accordingly, the Meccan Muslims, the ancient prophets and the wives of the Prophet who were all mostly wanting in material resources were asked to exercise zakah.⁵ The Qur'an also connotes zakah with the purifying of one's wealth by giving charity.⁶

These illustrations suggest that the Qur'an uses the word zakah for all kinds of humanitarian deeds. Thus all believers, rich and poor, can exercise zakah by showing mercy and extending emotional and psychological support to distressed humanity, by caring and nursing the sick and wounded, and other similar gestures, while the rich must also give the mandatory charity (institutionalized Zakat) as part of their zakah obligation.

Traditionally, various civil works, such as removing garbage from roadside, planting trees, giving a helping hand in lifting luggage to a mount, helping out someone in need of help, or even doing good deeds were regarded as sadaqah,⁷ which is integral to the broad Qur'anic concept of zakah. Therefore, in the historical and present day context, all civil and social welfare activities and scientific achievements that mitigate the sufferings of people, or are otherwise beneficial to humans fall in the domain of zakah. There are also traditions on the merit of looking after domestic pets as well as any animate.⁸

In sum, the Qur'anic notion of zakah is far more outreaching and expansive than that of the institutional Zakat that is regarded as a pillar of faith. For all practical purposes, the institutional Zakat is nothing but a form of property tax that is collected from those who have some property and given to the poor or put to community use. Ironically in the Western world far greater proportions of 'property tax' (veritably Zakat) are collected and circulated among the poor and unemployed (in the form of various allowances and benefits), than in the Muslim world, where the rich tend to evade the property tax as their primary focus is on the nominal two and half percent Zakat on cash, gold, and liquid

assets, and thus the community gets a trifling share of their wealth. God knows best the rightly guided.

Notes

1. Sahih al-Bukhari, English translation by Mohsin Khan, New Delhi 1984, Vol.2, Acc. 545.
2. Ibid., Vol.2, Acc. 94, 95A, 95B.
3. Ibid., Vol.2. Acc. 526.
4. 2:83, 2:110, 2:177, 2:277, 5:55, 22:41, 22:78, 24:37, 24:56, 27:3, 31:4, 98:5.
5. 21:73, 23:4, 33:3.
6. 9:103, 92:18.
7. Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol.2, Acc. 524; Vol.3, Acc. 513; Vol.4, Acc. 232.
8. Ibid., Vol.1, Acc. 174; Vol.3, Acc. 551.

[8 references]

47. Hajj – The Pilgrimage to Mecca

The Qur'an calls upon the Muslims who can afford,¹ to perform hajj or 'umrah in the service of God,² and as a pilgrimage to the 'First House of Worship' at Mecca,³ which was set up by the Prophet Abraham, and remains a place of peace and security to all visitors.⁴ Accordingly, it is forbidden to commit any obscenity or immorality or to quarrel⁵ or kill games⁶ during the hajj. Shortened hajj rites performed off-season is called 'umrah.

The hajj falls during specific months.⁵ The pilgrims can depart at the end of two days of the hajj rites, but may also extend their stay,⁷ and can seek of God's bounty, such as by engaging in business during the hajj season.⁸ Accordingly, since the Prophet's time, hajj caravans carried merchandise for trading during the pilgrimage period. This was essential for providing food and basic necessities and services to the large number of pilgrims, who came from far and away.

The Qur'an embraces the key elements of hajj rites, such as circumambulating the Ka'ba,⁹ striding between the two hills Safa and Marwa,¹⁰ streaming forth from the plain of Arafat,¹¹ seeking divine blessings,¹² shaving the head,¹³ cutting short the hair,¹⁴ and symbolic sacrificing of animal (22:36/37):

“As for the (sacrificial) animal, We have made them among the symbols of God for you, in which there is good for you; so mention God's name over them (as they are) lined up (for sacrifice). Once they fall down on their sides, eat of them and feed the needy, and the miserable. We have thus subjected them to you, that you may be grateful (22:36). Neither their flesh nor their blood reaches God, but your heedfulness (Taqwa) does indeed reach Him. Thus, He has subjected them to you, that you glorify God as He has guided you; and give good news to the compassionate ” (22:37).

47.1. Sacrifice of animal is symbolic – the goal is Taqwa

The foregoing verses (22:36/37) make three clear points. First, the slaughtering of cattle in the name of God is purely symbolic, as the flesh or blood of the slaughtered animal

does not reach God. Second, in the material context, the meat of the slaughtered cattle is to be eaten by the pilgrim, and shared with the poor and the needy. Finally, the real goal is Taqwa – heedfulness of God, which is also stressed in another verse.⁵

In the nomadic society of pre-Islamic Arabia, cattle head constituted the main instrument of asset. They were treated with honor, and sacrificed to please various deities. The Qur'an permitted the continuation of this rite, but reserved it only for God.¹⁵

Today, the pilgrim does not personally slaughter the cattle, nor does he eat its meat or share it with the poor (22:36). Besides, God's bounty has multiplied exponentially and a cattle head is hardly a cherished asset as in the earlier times. It is therefore worth pondering whether mere slaughtering of cattle by arranging through a bank or agent, and then a state sponsored processing and distribution of the meat to poor nations really meets the letter or the spirit of the Qur'an - or there could be better ways to helping the world's needy, such as through the generation of an International Hajj Relief Fund. God knows best!

Notes

1. 3:97.
2. 2:196, 22:27.
3. 3:96.
4. 2:125, 3:97.
5. 2:197.
6. 5:95.
7. 2:203.
8. 2:198.
9. 2:125
10. 2:158.
11. 2:199.
12. 2:201/202.
13. 2:196.
14. 48:27.
15. For centuries the pagans from all over Arabia used to bring their idols as well as merchandise to Mecca during the twelfth month of their lunar calendar (Dhu 'l hajj) on annual pilgrimage (hajj), suspending all sorts of feuds and hostilities. Apart from worship and business, it afforded them a respite from inter-tribal warfare that knew no end. With the integration of Mecca, the Qur'an allowed the continuity of this tradition, dedicating it to God.

[15 references]

48. Fasting – In the Month of Ramadan

The Qur'anic precepts on fasting are clearly stated in a passage (2:183-185) and an explanatory verse (2:187).

“You who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you become heedful (Tattaqun) (2:183). (Fast) for a fixed number of days; but any of you who is ill or on a journey (should complete the) prescribed period from the later days. Those who are (hardly) able to (fast), their redemption is the feeding of a needy person; but anyone who can willingly do more (than this), it is better for him; but it is better still that you fast - if you only knew (184). Ramadan is the month in which the Qur'an was revealed as guidance for humanity with a clear (mandate) for guidance, and as the criteria (of right and wrong). So any of you who is at home during this month, should fast; while anyone who is ill, or on a journey, should (fast on) later days (to complete the) prescribed period. (Remember,) God desires ease for you, and He does not desire any hardship for you. So complete the prescribed period and glorify Him for having guided you, that you may be grateful” (2:185).

“It is permitted to you to make approaches to your wives on a night of the fast: they are (a source of) comfort (libas)* for you, and you are (a source of) comfort (libas)* for them. (Remember,) God knows that you were deceiving yourselves (and keeping away from your wives). He has therefore turned to you, and removed (this hardship) from you. So now approach them and seek what God has prescribed for you. Eat and drink until the white streak (of dawn) is distinct from the dark streak (of night) at daybreak. Then fast until nightfall, and do not approach them while you are in devotion in the mosque. These are the limits set by God; so do not get near them. Thus does God clarify His messages to humanity, that they may be heedful (yattaqun)” (2:187). *[libas literally means ‘garments’, used in the verse figuratively for ‘comfort’.]

The underlined statement indicates that the timing for commencing a fast is not contingent on sighting the sunrise. Thus, people living near the poles, where there is practically no sunrise for months together, can also comply with it depending upon their traditional sky-signs at dawn. Jurists agree that such people may follow the timings of a nearby town at lower latitude, or that of Mecca.

48.1. General conditions on fasting

The Qur’anic verses spell out the broad requirements of fasting, but do not explicitly address various contingencies that arise in day-to-day life, such as whether a fasting person can brush his teeth, or rinse his mouth; or, what happens if he inadvertently eats or drinks – to cite some common examples. This is interpreted below from Qur’anic illustration, and is corroborated by traditions.

Since the Qur’an affirms that God desires ease for people (2:185), any inadvertent eating, or drinking, or swallowing in of water such as during gargling etc. may not mar the spiritual merit of fasting.¹ However, if a person feels completely exhausted and is unable to continue his fast, it will be against the Qur’anic spirit for him or her to continue the fast. Thus, while on a journey, the Prophet publicly broke his fast under

exhaustion.² Likewise, if a fasting person bleeds or vomits, it will be up to him to continue or break the fast; and in the case of minor bleeding or vomiting, one may continue his fast.³ Similarly, a fasting plane-passenger, flying due west, might break his fast following his hometown timing.⁴

48.2. The stated goal of Fasting

The fasting Muslims are normally extremely concerned about the finer aspects relating to their abstinence from food and drinks, and compliance with the timings for commencing or breaking the fast. They, however, ought to bear in mind that the Qur'an prescribes fasting as a means to acquiring Taqwa (2:183, 2:187) or heedfulness (Ch. 8). Thus, those who keep fast must endeavor to comply with the whole range of Qur'anic precepts that go with Taqwa to merit the highest spiritual blessing from their fast.⁵

Notes

1. Sahih al-Bukhari, English translation by Mohsin Khan, New Delhi, 1984, Vol. 3/ Book XXXI, Ch. 26; Acc. 154.
2. Ibid., Acc. 169.
3. Ibid., Chap.32.
4. Ibid., Acc. 162.
5. Ibid., Acc. 127.

[5 references]

ENCLOSURES

1. ENCL.1 THE PROPHET'S EARLIEST BIOGRAPHY

1.1. Inherent limitations of early biographic accounts

Ibn Ishaq (d. 151/768) is regarded as the first biographer of the Prophet, whose manuscript, compiled about 125 years after the Prophet's death, was edited and published by Ibn Hisham (d. 218/834) around the close of the 2nd century of Islamic calendar. Practically all scholars in the subsequent centuries used this work, or any of its versions that came to their hands, as the primary source material on the Prophet's personal life. However, the work has its limitations:

- i. The work contains commentaries on major events - battles, martyrdom of the Prophet's followers and killing of enemies etc. in poetry, attributed to popular poets, who excelled in creating compelling poetic imageries rather than leaving hard facts for the posterity.
- ii. All events, as well as dialogues (between the Prophet and his disciples) are based entirely on verbal accounts, originating from one or a few individuals, traced back to the Prophet's lifetime through a chain of oral transmitters. So the reliability of his source material is debatable.
- iii. It was compiled in an era when myth and fantasy dominated human mind, and narrators turned simple events into legends through, what we shall today call, gross exaggeration and bizarre embellishment. Thus, quoting from contemporaneous sources, i) King Solomon is reported to have bedded with all his

one hundred wives one night,¹ and ii) Sir Key of King Arthur's court is described to have thrown a stone 'as large as a cow' to dislodge the 'stranger', who had leaped up to the top of a tree, two hundred cubits high in a single bound.²

Taking all these factors into account, it will be a grievous error to regard the work of Ibn Ishaq as an historical document. This can amply be demonstrated by the following examples of inconsistency and speculativeness of his work:

- One section of the work shows a martyred companion of the Prophet, Khabib, articulating his deep parting emotions in a poetic imagery as he stood on the gallows just before he was hanged.³ Another section contradicts this imagery suggesting that the martyr was weeping unceasingly as he stood on the gallows.⁴
- The work quotes the parting dialogue between the propagandist poet Ka'b Ibn Ashraf and his wife, just as he was coming out from 'under the blanket' at the call of Abu Naila, who had gone to his house to kill him.⁵ The poet was killed suddenly, and it is inconceivable that his widow would tell the parting words of her slain husband to those who killed him. The quoted words were obviously speculative.

The same holds for the works of al-Waqidi (d. 206/822) and Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845) In fact, these early biographers have been sharply criticized by many Muslim scholars of their own era.⁶

1.2. Impact of early accounts on modern scholarship

Through constant repetition down the centuries, the works of the early biographers of the Prophet have become part of history. Thus, the modern scholarship on the Prophetic mission is virtually laden with materials that, in today's objective vocabulary, can be termed speculative, imaginative, exaggerated and even legendary. Since the persona of the Prophet occupies a very important and sacred place in Islam, and in the understanding of its message, it is essential to segment those parts of the Prophet's biography, which are not supported or otherwise contradicted by the Qur'an. Since the historical accuracy of the Qur'an is above debate (Ch. 1.6), all reports in this segment of the Prophet's biography must be treated, as parables and embellishments - to be fair to the early biographers, rather than historical facts.

Thus there are scores of reports about miracles attending the birth of the Prophet, his childhood and the later years of his life, though the Qur'an repeatedly attests to the Prophet's incapability to showing any miracles (Note 9/Ch. 3), while asserting that the literary grandeur and the inter-consistency of the Qur'an were the proofs of the miraculous nature of the revelation (Notes 17, 18, 20/Ch. 1.3). There are also many colorful accounts about his marriages, spun around some passing commentaries in the Qur'an (Enc. 2). There are divergent reports on his 'vision' about which all that the Qur'an says is this:

"Glory to (God) Who transported His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Furthest Mosque, whose precincts We blessed, that We might show him some of Our Signs: for He is Aware and Observant (17:1). Indeed We have told you (O Muhammad) that (the scheme of) your Lord encompasses humanity: We caused the vision We showed you, only as a trial for people - as also the Cursed Tree

(mentioned) in the Qur'an: We put fear into them, yet it only increases their inordinate transgression" (17:60).

Then there is the story of the Satanic verses: the Prophet allegedly uttering verses venerating the chief pagan deities under Satanic influence, and later expunging them from the Qur'an.⁷

Down the centuries, this story (summary in the footnote 7) has been picked up by the Prophet's critics to challenge his integrity and genuineness, and has triggered extensive research by Muslim scholars to proving its fictitious nature. Any discussion on these lines will detract from the stated modality of this exercise: to circumvent Islamic theological literature and use the Qur'an as the primary source material.

So, delving into our primary source material, the Qur'an is loud and clear in its claim on textual integrity (Note 21/Ch. 1.4). The Qur'an also attests that it was not up to the Prophet to alter the revelation in any way (Note 161/Ch. 3.14), and that he was endowed with a firm character that prevented him from inclining towards the promptings of his enemies for compromise (Note 208/Ch. 3.16). Therefore, had there been an iota of truth in the story, that is timed at an early stage of the revelation to which practically all the referred to verses belong, the shrewd Quraysh as well as Muhammad's followers would have seen a charlatan in him and cast him away as a false prophet and his name and mission would have been lost into oblivion. But precisely the opposite has happened. Hence, in any honest and rational judgment, the report must be treated as a myth.

Then there is the traditional account of the background of the Badr expedition, projecting the Prophet as a raider. This also contradicts the Qur'anic records as already discussed (Note 42, 43/Ch. 3.3).

Last but not the least, there is a propensity to projecting the Prophet as a ruthless person when it comes to dealing with enemies. Thus on the strength of Ibn Ishaq, Maxime Rodinson cites the examples of vindictive killing of five named persons⁸ and the massacre of some eight hundred to nine hundred adults of Banu Qurayzah Jewish tribe⁹ at the Prophet's command.

The authors do not pretend to suggest that the above incidents of killing are baseless. The Prophet had no police force, no secret service or military intelligence, and no court of law. So, he had to personally give all major decisions, however hard. It is conceivable that under compelling circumstances, the Prophet gave his consent for the elimination of the poets as reported by Ibn Ishaq. But there can be no doubt that the incidents are reported out of historical context, and are sprinkled with vindictiveness that was alien to the Prophet's temperament. As for the Banu Qurayzah, as summarily pieced together in Chapter 3 based on the Qur'anic testimony, they had committed high treason by allying with the attackers in the Trench battle, and some of them were slain, some were taken captive, and their lands and houses and goods were seized (Note 116, 117/Ch. 3.7). However, the figure quoted by Ibn Ishaq, appears grossly exaggerated on the following grounds.

- Ibn Ishaq describes the alleged massacre in a cursory manner in a small paragraph,¹⁰ the brevity of which raises serious questions about its accuracy.

- In the communal society of Medina, people knew each other by their names. Accordingly, Ibn Ishaq has named many of the familiar figures from the enemy camp, who were either killed in battles, or slain individually. He, however, furnishes only four names: three males and one female against this alleged massacre of some eight hundred to nine hundred people.
- There is no evidence of any poet, Muslim or Jewish, referring to this event of allegedly mass killing, which must have been the first of its kind in the entire history of Arabs, as traditionally the victors took captives and refrained from any mass or major killing.
- There is no reference of this alleged massacre in any of the subsequent agreements with the Jewish communities, settled in other parts of Arabia.
- Only sixty-three horses are mentioned as the booty from this affair. If indeed the entire adult community of some eight to nine hundred men and women were slaughtered, an enormous amount of gold and cash, and a few thousands of minor captives would have come to the hands of the Muslims; but, there is no reference at all of any such enormous booty or captives.
- Had the alleged massacre taken place, Muslim rulers in the subsequent generations would have wiped the entire Jewish community out of the Islamic world. But this did not happen. On the contrary, the Jews were protected and supported in the Islamic world.
- As reported by Rafiq Zakaria, quoting Barakat Ahmad: "It is not normal for Jews not to record their misfortunes. There is no mention of this massacre in Samuel Usque's book, A Consolidation for the Tribulations of Israel, third Dialogue, which is a classic of Jewish martyriology."¹¹

In view of all these compelling considerations, taking the figures quoted by Ibn Ishaq on its face value will be making a mockery of history.

In sum, there are many speculative and legendary reports in the classical biography of the Prophet that are no more than embellishments, parables and conjectures, and must be treated as such. The most accurate insight on the life of the Prophet and his mission can only be obtained from the Qur'an (Note 1/Ch.3) and this is what has been attempted in this work.

Notes

1. Sahih al-Bukhari, (23 above), Vol.7, Acc. 169.
2. Mark Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, USA 1988, p. 23.
3. Ibn Hisham, Sirrat un Nabi, Urdu translation by Gholam Rasul, Delhi 1984, Vol.2, Chap.124, p. 197.
4. Ibid., Vol. 2, Chap.124, p. 198.
5. Ibid., Vol.2, p. Chap.109, p. 35.
6. To quote Rafique Zakaria:

"He (Ibn Ishaq) has been sufficiently meticulous in the collection of facts, but sometimes he does not distinguish between facts and fiction. That is why many of his contemporaries denounced him... Malik, one of the founders of four schools of Muslim theology, who was a contemporary of Ibn Ishaq, called him 'a devil'. Hisham bin Umara, another prominent theologian of the time said, 'the rascal lies.' Imam Hanbal, one of the greatest jurists of Islam refused to rely on the traditions collected by him. There were many other learned men who held similar views about Ibn Ishaq's works. The same is more or less true of his successors like al-Waqidi, Ibn Sa'd..." - Muhammad and the Qur'an, London 1992, p. 12.

7. Tradition related by Ibn Ishaq (d. 151/768) in his original manuscript, and reported by al-Tabari (d. 313/926) suggests that as the Prophet was preaching to a Quraysh audience, he followed up the recitation of the verses 53:19/20 with the following underlined words venerating three most popular pagan deities:

"Have you considered al-Lat and al-'Uzza (53:19), and another, the third (goddess), Manat (53:20)". **These are the exalted birds whose intercession is approved.**"

The story further suggests that these (underlined) words were later expunged from the Qur'an and replaced with what we find in the Qur'an today:

"What! For you the male sex and for Him the female (53:21)? Behold, such would indeed be the most unfair division" (53:22)?

Ibn Hisham (d. 218/834) omitted this episode in his final edited version and the compilers of the traditions make no mention of it, indicating that Ibn Hisham and his contemporaries must have been suspect of its genuineness. Some Muslim scholars have, however, accepted the episode on the basis of the Qur'anic verses 22:52/53, but the latter relate to Satan influencing the desires (tamanna) of the prophets and messengers in general and not about Satan tampering with the revelation. Therefore, the connection is untenable.

- Rafiq Zakaria, Muhammad and the Qur'an, London 1992, p.13.

8. The reported vindictive killings were:

- The Jewish poetess Asma bint Marwan of Banu Khatama, slain while asleep by 'Umair Ibn 'Adi.'a
- The poet Abu Afak, killed while asleep by Salim Ibn 'Umayr.b
- The poet Ka'b Ibn al-Ashraf, killed by his foster brother in a secret meeting, and then the latter carried his severed head to the Prophet and threw it at his feet.c
- Sufian Ibn Khalid, the head of Banu Lihyan tribe, killed in a very conspiratorial manner while asleep, and his severed head, carried by Abdullah and flung at the feet of the Prophet, who was pleased at this.d

- Maxime Rodinson, Muhammad, English translation, 2nd edition, London 1996, p.171 [a], 172 [b], 176 [c], 189 [d].

9. Ibid., p. 213.

10. All that Ibn Hisham wrote about the alleged massacre of some eight to nine hundred adults, is as follows (renderd from Urdu) :
- “After they (the Jews) dislodged themselves from their fortresses, the Prophet confined them in the house of a lady of Banu Najar. Then the Prophet strolled towards the market of Medina. It was a market day. He got ditches dug. Then he called the members of Banu Qurayzah, in groups, one after another, and got them thrown into the ditches after getting them beheaded.”
- Ibn Hisham, Sirat un Nabi, Urdu translation by Gholam Rasul, Delhi 1984, Vol.2, Ch. 131, p. 278.
11. Rafiq Zakaria, Muhammad and the Qur'an, London 1992, p.36.

[11 references]

2. Encl.2 Muhammad's Marriages

When Muhammad's first wife (Khadija) died, he was around 50. In the years to follow, until his death at age 63, he married some eight or nine widows - many past the prime of their lives and well into their middle ages. During this period, he also married Aisha, the young daughter of his close companion Abu Bakr; Safia, a Jewish captive of high birth, and finally Mariah, a freed Christian slave.

There has been a lot of research and speculations on the Prophet's marriages both by Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, and the interpretations are often conflicting. However, of late extensive research has been carried out on the subject, which conclusively proves that all the Prophet's marriages after Khadija's death were dictated either by humanitarian reasons or for the cause of Islam. This can be appreciated by the following considerations:

1. The concept of marriage in those days was different from today. Marriage offered protection, status and security, and therefore, it was expected of the community leaders and rulers to take the widows of their men who laid down their lives in community cause, or those of their rivals slain in the battlefield. Thus as the head of the upcoming Muslim community, Muhammad married a number of such distressed women who were weak and powerless in the community, purely on humanitarian grounds.
2. While his Meccan enemies hurled a medley of diatribes against him, they never even remotely questioned the integrity of his character in dealing with the opposite sex.
3. In the year following Mecca's integration (630) or 21st year into the Prophetic mission, the Qur'an restricted the Prophet from taking any further free woman in his wedlock:

“No woman shall henceforth be lawful to you, except those you have already married, nor may you exchange them for other wives no matter how their beauty should appeal to you. (Remember,) God is Watchful over everything” (33:52).

If Muhammad were indeed the author of the Qur'an, as the non-Muslims contend, he could never have imposed this restriction upon himself, having recently ascended to the

position of virtually the King of the whole Arabia, after over 20 years of threat, uncertainty and struggle.

4. Questions are often raised why the Qur'an exempted the Prophet from any limitations in the number of wives (33:50), though restricting a man to having maximum four, but preferably only one wife (4:3/Ch. 31.1).

“O Prophet, We allow you your wives whom you have given their dower, and anyone under your lawful possession out of what God has provided you, and the daughters* of your* paternal uncles and aunts, and your maternal uncles and aunts, who have emigrated with you, and any believing woman who may offer herself to the Prophet, provided the Prophet wants to marry her. This is exclusively for you and not for (other) believers. We know what we have prescribed for them concerning their wives and anyone under their lawful trust. Therefore, (your marrying any of these) will not be held against you. God is Most Forgiving and Merciful” (33:50). *[The pronoun, ‘you’ and noun ‘daughters’ each appear four times in the compound Arabic construction of the verse, but we have used them sparingly for easy reading.]

There are two different explanations:

Some sources say that the verse restricting the number of wives to four came down towards the end of the revelation when the Prophet had already contracted his marriages. Since the Qur'an had declared the wives of the Prophet to be the mothers of the believers and prohibited their remarriage even after the Prophet's death (33:53/Ch. 3.15), the wives that he would divorce (beyond the number four) would not be able to remarry, while the women divorced by other Muslim men would get remarried. Thus, if the Prophet were made to comply with the restriction, the wives he divorced would have faced immense hardship because they would have to live by themselves in the society, where unlike today, it was extremely hard for a woman to live independently. Therefore, it would have been unjust for the Prophet to divorce his wives, and accordingly he was exempted from the restriction. However in keeping with the restriction verse, the Prophet was prohibited from contracting any further marriage and from divorcing any of his wives (33:52 above).

Other sources say that the Prophet was exempted from the limitation in the number of wives because of his unique role in the community, implying that the Prophet continued to contract marriages even after the limitation verse had been revealed, and the restriction verse came down as his mission approached its end.

5. Since questions have been raised about the Prophet's marrying young Aisha, and his divorced cousin Zaynab and since the Qur'anic references to the Prophet's wives is restricted to only the two of them, the matter merits clarification:

The case of marriage with Aisha: This was an historical necessity. At around age 50, Muhammad lost both his uncle Abu Talib and his first wife Khadija, and was thus left without any clan protection. This was about the tenth year of his prophetic mission in Mecca. The Quraysh, who had opposed him since the very beginning of his mission, now threatened to kill him. His marriage with Aisha, daughter of Abu Bakr, gave him the

clan protection that he needed for the security of his life. The marriage also served as a strong testimony of the truth of his mission. Abu Bakr was a highly prestigious member of the Meccan society. He would never take Muhammad, a veritable pariah of the society at that moment in history, as his son-in-law, unless he was convinced of the truth of his prophetic mission.

According to several reports, Aisha was 9 at the time of her betrothal. But this figure is only indicative of how she looked and not how old she was. In the early years of Islam (and until the introduction of the Islamic hijra during the reign of Caliph Umar), people did not maintain any calendar of events such as birth dates, age etc. So, their age was described by how old they looked and not in terms of their real age. Thus a young girl in her teens who looked childlike could be described as 8 or 10 years old. Aisha, therefore, might have been 15 or so at the time of her betrothal to Muhammad as some sources describe her. However, her youth made her the target of a scandal that caused her great agony for some time, until a Qur'anic revelation declared her innocence.¹

Non-Muslim scholars have invariably attacked the Prophet over this marriage, as Aisha was very young, and therefore, it needs to be noted that in the tribal society of Arabia it was a normal custom for people to plan the marriage of their daughters from their childhood. Accordingly, the marriage of minors was a common thing, and what the Prophet did was in complete agreement with the prevalent social norms. To judge the Prophet's marriage with Aisha with the modern yardstick is therefore totally unfair. Those who attack the Prophet over this marriage are either ignorant of the realities of seventh century Arabia or do so out of malice and ill will.

Marriage with Zaynab bint Jash: Conceivably, with the intent of elevating the status of a freed slave, Muhammad prevailed upon his first cousin, Zaynab, to marry his freed slave (by custom, adopted son) Zayd. The marriage did not work out well. Zayd complained to the Prophet several times of his intention to divorce Zaynab, but the Prophet dissuaded him from doing so, as it would have been very hard for his cousin. Finally when the Prophet's efforts to keep the marriage failed and Zayd divorced Zaynab, her position became terrible. The prevalent Arab custom treated an adopted son like a real son, and in the medieval community, no one would marry the woman who is the divorcee of its chief's son – a position Zayd held in the eye of the community. Eventually, the Prophet married her as a way of honoring her.² This marriage clarified any confusion in the definition of parentage that was needed for the implementation of Qur'anic inheritance laws (Ch. 38). It also abolished this type of status sanctimony, whereby a freed slave (by tradition, an adopted son) is regarded like a real son.

Since the Qur'an makes no reference to the Prophet's other marriages, any discussion on the latter will detract from the main theme of this work. However, the following quotations from some eminent scholars of recent times may clarify the matter to the lay readers.

“As was customary for Arab chiefs, many were political marriages to cement alliances. Others were marriages to the widows of his companions who had fallen in combat and were in need of protection.” – John L. Esposito³

“This was an age that looked upon plural marriages with favour and in a society that in pre-Biblical and post Biblical days considered polygamy an essential feature of social existence...[Muhammad’s marriages were due] partly to political reasons and partly to his concern for the wives of his companions who had fallen in battle defending the nascent Islamic state” - Caesar E. Farah⁴

“It is practically certain that he had the feelings towards the fair sex well under control and that he did not enter into marriages except when they were politically and socially desirable.” - Montgomery Watt⁵

Notes

1. While returning from a campaign, the Prophet’s caravan departed early in the morning, and Aisha was accidentally left behind. A young Emigrant, who had also missed the caravan, got her to ride with him on his mount to the next halting site. The hypocrites (who were out to find fault with the Prophet) maligned Aisha and stirred up emotions against the Emigrants, and soon the Prophet’s followers stood sharply divided in rival camps and on the verge of taking up arms against each other. The matter lingered on for long, until the revelation testified to Aisha’s nobility (24:11-20), and removed all rivalry and dispute.
2. 33:36-38.
3. John L. Esposito, Islam the Straight Path, New York 1994, p. 18.
4. Caesar E. Farah, Islam: Beliefs and Observances, 4th edition, New York 1987, p. 69.
5. Montgomery Watt, extracted from Rafiq Zakaria’s Muhammad and the Qur’an, London 1992, p. 54.

[5 references]

3. Encl.3 Polemics Surrounding the Prophet Of Islam

No prophet or world leader even remotely matches Muhammad in driving his foes to researching into his personal life to prove that he was anything but a prophet. For well over a millennium scholars in the West wrote countless books with the singular aim of projecting Muhammad as a false prophet. They used every fragment of hearsay and shady accounts and stories to malign, satirize, vilify and demonize him, and totally ignored the Qur’anic testimony and various Church chronicles that contradicted their claims. However, thanks to critical modern scholarship, the attitudes are changing as illustrated by the following remarks by some of the eminent scholars of modern times.

“No great religious leader has been so maligned as Muhammad. Attacked in the past as a heretic, an impostor, or a sensualist, it is still possible to find him referred to as ‘the false Prophet.’” - Geoffery Parrinder¹

“It seems incredible now that so much of what was said of Muhammad was believed in good faith. But not only audiences, but authors believed whatever tended to show that Muhammad could not really have been the Messenger of God.” Norman Daniel²

“Part of the Western problem is that for centuries Muhammad has been seen as the antithesis of the religious spirit and the enemy of the decent civilization. Instead perhaps we should try to see him as a man of the spirit, who managed to bring peace and civilization to his people.” - Karen Armstrong³

“Even in the height of his glory Muhammad led, as in his days of obscurity, an unpretentious life in one of those clay houses consisting, as do all old-fashioned houses of present day Arabia and Syria, of a few rooms opening into a courtyard and accessible only from there. He was often seen mending his own clothes and was all times within the reach of his people.” - Philip Hitti⁴

The skeptics of Islam are still active today and writings are in circulation on the Prophet's personal life, which are full of inaccuracies and misrepresentation, let alone the lampooning of the Prophet by cartoons,⁵ or scholarly character assassination.⁶ It is hoped that this briefing will help in defending the Prophet against all kinds of propagandist literature, which the Muslims must ignore in the spirit of Qur'anic exhortations to leave the matter to God (6:112, 25:31/Ch. 3.16).

Notes

1. John L. Esposito, *Islam the Straight Path*, New York 1994, p. 18.
2. Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West, The Making of an Image*, London 1992.
3. Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad*, London 1991, p. 44.
4. Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 1937, 10th edition; London 1993, p. 120.
5. A cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad pbuh was published in the [Danish](#) newspaper [Jyllands-Posten](#) on 30 September 2005 ostensibly as an attempt to contribute to the debate regarding [criticism of Islam](#) and [self-censorship](#), but obviously to lampoon the Prophet.
6. In his latest publication (2007), Christopher Hitchens, who has been named as number five on a list of “Top 100 Public Intellectuals” by Foreign Policy and Britain's Prospects, vicariously assassinates the character of the Prophet by comparing him with Joseph Smith, the founder of “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints” (also known as the Mormons), in this insinuating manner: 1) ‘He (Joseph Smith) did resemble Muhammad in being able to make a borrowing out of other people's bibles’ and 2) ‘Like Muhammad, Smith could produce divine revelations at short notice and often to simply suit him (especially, and like Muhammad, when he wanted a new girl and wished to take her as another wife.’ Furthermore, the author inserts a little glimpse from Dante's *Inferno* in which “Muhammad is found being disemboweled in revolting detail.” [We must however thank this towering intellectual, Mr. Hitchens, for not spelling out these details, as that would have hurt any descent reader of the book, regardless of his faith.]:
god is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything, Toronto 2007, p. 161, 164/165, 168.

[6 references]

4. Encl. 4 Sunnah of The Prophet And The Hadith Literature

In pre-Islamic Arabia, the term Sunnah denoted the normative behavior and practices of the ancestors. In the absence of any books, written materials, or any other forum or institution of learning, the sunnahs [technically, sunnat] served as the sole repository of ancestral wisdom. Accordingly, different Arab tribes had their own sunnahs, handed down to them from their forebears. The Qur'an also uses this word, and its other roots, as a generic concept: sunnat al-Lah:¹ natural and moral laws as prescribed by God, or a practice approved by Him; sunan al-ladhina min qablikum:² the ideal way of life of those who lived before you; sunnat al-awwalin:³ example set by ancient people.

The Arabs transmitted the sunnahs of their ancestors in the form of oral accounts or narratives (ahadith sing. hadith). Accordingly, the verb haththathna and its other roots (including hadith) appear in the Qur'an with varying connotations: an ancient story,⁴ an account,⁵ a truthful account or speech,⁶ a topic of conversation or theme of discussion,⁷ social conversation (33:53/Ch. 3.15) – for example.

The term sunnah remained in use in its generic sense during the time of the Prophet, through to the closing decades of the second century of Islam.

In the initial years after the Prophet's death, the hadiths [technically ahadith] were few in number, and were rarely cited by the Prophet's companions, jurists, and scholars, while the common man was discouraged from quoting them. The second generation Muslims entertained a greater number of hadiths representing the sunnahs of the Prophet as well those of his companions, and the jurists and scholars of the first generation. This process continued down the generations resulting in an exponential growth in the number of hadiths with the passing of successive generations. The multiplication in number was inevitably influenced by the following factors:

- The dynastic rulers, as well as those with vested interest forged and concocted a great many hadiths to serve their purpose or justify their practices.
- Many of the juridical experts based their opinions on the practices of their regions. So the hadiths representing their sunnahs were conditioned by local and personal factors.
- State of knowledge, and social and political conditions of the time when a given hadith came into currency.
- Propensity of the introducers of new hadiths in each generation to trace their hadiths back to the Prophet by establishing a chain of transmitters in each generation (called isnad) going back to one of the Prophet's companions who had seen or heard the Prophet doing or saying a thing. This was to lend credibility to their accounts.

Thus, by the later part of the second century hijra, that is, around six to seven generations after the Prophet's death, the hadiths (oral accounts) became too many in number, with massive infusion of forged and concocted accounts, and inevitable influence of various local, personal, and historical factors. This created serious complications for the community, and a sharp conflict arose among the scholars.

Muhammad al-Shafi'i (d. 205/821), a great jurist of the time, and one of the greatest in Islamic history, saved the situation by rejecting all those hadiths which originated from any individual other than the Prophet, and accepted only those hadiths which could be attributed to the Prophet through a chain of reliable narrators (isnad). This literally meant redefining the generic sunnah and hadith to strictly the Prophetic Sunnah[Sunna] and Prophetic Hadith [Hadith] - the terms are capitalized for distinction. In other words, the term Sunnah [Sunna] became specific to only those accounts (hadiths) [Hadiths], which encapsulated the Prophet's normative behavior and practices, or Sunnat al-Rasul Allah. The latter expression, however, does not appear in the Qur'an, which enjoins the emulation of the Prophet's exemplary moral conduct and behavior (33:21/Ch. 15).

4.1. Compilation of the current Hadith literature

al-Shafi'i's redefinition of sunnah (hadith) to Prophetic Sunnah (Hadith), however, did not prevent the introduction of new accounts (Hadith) in the subsequent generations. Moreover, it was simply impossible as well as pre-mature for al-Shafi'i to address all the local, personal and historical factors that had influenced the very genesis of the hadiths in the preceding six to seven generations that separated him from the Prophet's era. Thus, with time, there was a growing need for a thorough scrutiny and containment of the Hadith that were attributed to the Prophet. This was addressed from early third century hijra onward by Muslim compilers notably, al-Bukhari (d. 256/870), Muslim (d. 251/865), Abu Daud (d. 265/879), al-Tirmidhi (d. 282/895), Ibn Maja (d. 276/890), and their successors.

Each of these compilers screened a few hundred thousands of accounts (Hadiths) in oral circulation, by traveling long distances and contacting and verifying with the contemporaneous narrators. The first two of the compilations (by al-Bukhari and Muslim) are regarded as the most authentic and therefore called sahih (meaning, true or correct). Their compilations cover about 7000-10,000 accounts, in the form of sayings or tradition of the Prophet, or narratives attributed to him through a chain of narrators (isnad). Their works, and those of their successors have been passed down to the posterity and constitute the present day Hadith literature.

4.2. Effect of time on the screening process of the Hadith literature

Since the first compilation of the Hadith literature (by al-Bukhari) was undertaken at least two centuries, or eight to nine generations after the Prophet's death, it was humanly impossible for the compilers to address the historical factors (listed above) that had interacted during this long period. The compilers could only rely on the integrity of the narrators in the transmission chain (isnad) through the preceding generations stretching back to the Prophet's era. This is the best they could do, as the state of knowledge of the era was not conducive to verifying, whether:

- the narrators and transmitters of the Prophetic traditions (Hadiths) in each successive generation ever met in their lifetime.
- the substance of a given tradition (Hadith) was revoked by a subsequent Qur'anic revelation - which had continued until a few months before the Prophet's death.

As a result of these limitations, a large number of forged, spurious and fabricated accounts skipped the screening process and found their way into the authentic corpus. Many learned people of the era were aware of this, but religious passion was so intense that even the most learned and pious were afraid to question the truth of an apparently 'questionable' account, if it furnished a chain of reliable transmitters. Muslim, who was a disciple of al-Bukhari, raises this point, albeit obliquely, in the foreword (Muqaththimah) to his compilation.⁸ He talks about an arbitrary critical scholar, who would authenticate an account, only if there was clear evidence that its narrators and recipients in each of the preceding generations had personally met at least once; but would be suspect of those accounts that lacked this evidence. Muslim then goes on to state: "If we discuss about all those accounts which are held authentic before the learned, and suspect by this (arbitrary) scholar - we would simply be tired (because they are so large in number)." He then gives a few examples of such 'suspect' accounts, and makes this final remark in defense of his novel way of argument: "This argument is novel in its approach, and it is wrong that early scholars did not believe in this. Neither is its denial by those who came later, any ground for its repudiation... and God is there to help repudiate what is wrong in the religion of the learned and I trust in Him."

Moreover, some accounts (Hadith) that might have been authentic in isolation were context specific and lend themselves to contradictory propositions,⁹ while some were specific to the era and not valid anymore.¹⁰

Last but not least, the later rulers of Islam, notably the Tatars, actively popularized many weak accounts (Hadith) (Ch. 11.5), which in the words of Muhammad Abduh, were no more than "lethal superstitions and fables."¹¹

In consideration of the foregoing factors, it will be simplistic and in many cases a grievous error to take the Hadith literature left by the early compilers and in currency to this day, on their face value, as the true representation the Prophet's Sunna.

Furthermore, since the literary style, setting, paradigms, and dialectical constructions of the Hadith literature date back to the early medieval era, their continued teaching and propagation, such as in traditional religious schools (madrasas), can adversely impact the mental development of the students, shackling their power of reasoning and virtually freezing their intellect into the early medieval era.

Notes

33:38.

2. 4:26.

3. 8:38.

4. 12:6, 23:44.

5. 4:42.

6. 4:78, 4:87.

7. 4:140, 6:68.

8. Sahih al-Muslim, Urdu translation by Wahiduz Zaman, Delhi 19..., Vol.1, p. 71.

9. Sahih al-Bukhari, English translation by Mohsin Khan, New Delhi 1984. Examples of context specific traditions that lead to contradictory propositions:
 - hajj is redemption of all past sins [Vol.2, Acc. 596]. The reward for hajj is commensurate to the hardship undertaken for it [Vol.3, Acc. 15].
 - The dog is a clean animal as dogs used to roam about the Prophet's mosque and even urinate there [Vol.1, Acc. 174]. The dog is an unclean animal, and so if a dog eats from a container, it is to be washed seven times to purify it before human use [Vol.1, Acc. 173].
 - The dog is a blessed creature as a man was promised Paradise by God because he brought water from a well to quench the thirst of a dog [Vol.1, Acc. 174]. The dog is an accursed creature as its sale is forbidden [Vol.3, Acc. 439, 440].
 - The Prophet forbade the killing of women and children [Vol.4, Acc. 257, 258]. The Prophet tacitly approved the killing of pagans at night when women were also exposed (and could be killed during attack) [Vol.4, Acc. 256].
10. Ibid., Examples of era specific traditions include accounts forbidding Muslims from carrying the Qur'an to a hostile land [Vol.4, Acc. 233], keeping agricultural implements at homes [Vol.3, Acc. 514], taking the price of a dog [Vol.3, Acc. 439, 440], or selling fruits until they are ripe and red [Vol.1, Acc. 565].
11. Muhammad Husayn Haykal, The Life of Muhammad, English translation by Ismail Ragi, 8th edition, Karachi 1989, p. 584.

[11 References]

APPENDIX

1. Theological Development In Islam

All major religions had their births at given space, time brackets, and as they spread out to new lands, they were interpreted and adapted differently to suit local customs, temperaments, and needs. Thus, with time, the core message that their founders preached got superimposed by different layers of interpretation and secondary materials, written or oral, as part of theological development. Islam is no exception. Its first three to four centuries saw concomitant evolution of the Sunna of the Prophet (Hadith) as well as diverse dogmas, philosophies and schools of law. Having reviewed the evolution of Hadith in the preceding section (Enc. 4), any further discussion on Islamic theological development may appear superfluous as well as academic, as the Hadith occupies the central place in Islamic theology today. However, a summarized review in a broad timeframe covering the key areas of Islamic theological development will inform the reader, that except for the sciences of tafsir (exegesis or interpretation of the Qur'an), all other elements of Islamic theology have been purely the constructs of history and must be treated as such and therefore, emphasis must be placed on exploring the broader dimensions of the Qur'anic message as attempted in this book. However, the domain on hand is too expansive, interactive, heterogeneous and fragmented to be compressed into a consolidated write up without confusing the lay reader. We have therefore attempted to present the gist in simple, logical, condensed and schematic

form with the sole objective of driving home our underlined views to the non-specialist and lay readers. Accordingly, we have used current vocabulary to capture the essence of various juristic and doctrinal notions instead of using classical definitions that employ specialist vocabulary.

In historical perspective, Islamic theological development, apart from the evolution of the Hadith literature, can be divided into the following segments and indicative timeframe:

1. Founding of the sciences of tafsir and asbab al-nuzul [The first century of Islam]
2. Fundamental Juristic Principles and Notions [First century]
3. Theological doctrines [Second century]
4. Emergence of diverse juristic views [Second century]
5. The doctrine of infallibility of the consensus (ijma') of scholars [2nd- 3rd centuries]
6. The doctrine of precedence (taqlid) [3rd – 4 th centuries]
7. The rise and fall of Mu'tazila school and emergence of orthodox Sunni Islam [3rd – 4th centuries]
8. Broadening the scope of exegesis (tafsir) [The fourth century of Islam onwards]

1.1. Founding of the sciences of tafsir and asbab al-nuzul [The first century of Islam].1

As the revelation was underway, the learned among the Prophet's companions were keen to understand the fuller meaning of the revealed verses and passages, particularly those, relating to their own lives and circumstances. From time to time, they approached the Prophet for clarification, and he helped them out with interpretation. This marked the beginning of the discipline of exegesis or tafsir, the science of interpreting the Qur'an. Many of the Prophet's companions had earned reputation for their exegetic knowledge. Foremost among them were Ubayy Ibn Ka'b, 'Abdullah Ibn 'Abbas and Sa'id Ibn Jubair: their compilations have been referred to in later literature, but not preserved.

With time, the scholars tried to construct the background of the entire process of the revelation. This led to the founding of the sciences of asbab al-nuzul, which probed the circumstances attending the Qur'anic revelations. Iqrama (d. 107/729) was among the first to undertake such exercise but his work is not preserved.

1.2. Fundamental Juristic Principles and Notions [The first century of Islam]

The first generation jurists of Islam used the Qur'an and the sunnah of the Prophet in juristic process. However, when they couldn't resolve an issue by the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet, they drew on the Qur'anic exhortations on trying to understand, or going into the depth of an issue through independent reasoning (root FQH, 6:65/Afterword 1.2), This led to the evolution of the principle of rational logic and reasoning (usul al-fiqha). Accordingly the jurists exercised their independent

reasoning (fiqh), by drawing analogies (qiyas) from parallel examples, and where necessary using their own better judgment (istihsan): their own idea of what is appropriate in a given situation to get to a final opinion (ra'y). Some jurists also made independent intellectual probe to arriving at a judgment (ijtihad) for more complex cases. The transliterated notions were in currency since the early decades of Islam as underscored by the wordings of Caliph Umar's decrees to his governors (Note 3/Ch. 21.4), but it was only in the second century that they crystallized into legal sources or instruments.

1.3. Theological doctrines [The second century of Islam]

While the jurists were developing the basic tenets of law (1.2 above), the religious intellectuals and philosophers were debating over a host of theological and philosophical issues, such as concerning free will, predestination, Spirit (ruh), hur (Note 4/Ch. 6.2), nafs (soul), whether the Qur'an was created or a replica of an original preserved in the heaven (Note 22/Ch. 1.4), use of reason and speculation in religion and philosophy etc. These debates were taking place in cluster groups in mosques, madrassas and halaqahs (gatherings), led by local theologians and intellectuals in all major centers of Islamic civilization. This resulted in the emergence of different theological doctrines. The majority group called themselves ahl al-Sunnah. They were traditionalists and claimed to follow the right and ideal practice of their ancestors who had lived with the Prophet and modeled their lives according to his Sunnahs. Their main rivals, the ahl al-Kalam were rationalists, who attempted to interpret the Qur'an in light of objective reality. They advocated pursuit of knowledge in all fields, and promoted material prosperity within the framework of the Qur'an. The most prominent among them were the Mu'tazilites, who interpreted the Qur'an against its historical context and advocated ethical answerability to God – themes that ran counter to the populist discourses that drew on theological and philosophical speculations.

The doctors of each group legitimized their views by quoting traditions (hadiths) and applying the principle of consensus (ijma'), and repudiated and excommunicated the others. This created a chaotic situation in the theological domain. With the convergence of different sunnahs into the umbrella of the Sunna of the Prophet (Sunnat al-Rasul Allah) towards the end of this period (Enc.4), the appellation ahl al-Sunnah became ahl al-Hadith, and with time, assumed the simplistic title of Sunni Islam, and retained as such by the posterity to this day.

1.4. Emergence of diverse juristic views [The second century of Islam]

The doctrinal differences among the theologians and philosophers, the proliferation of hadiths apace, created confusion in the juristic discipline leading to the emergence of divergent juristic views. To offset theo-philosophical influences however, the jurists took into consideration the views and practices of the consensual majority (jama'ah) in their respective communities.² The jurists also used the prevalent secondary instruments of jurisprudence, notably, their own reasoning (fiqh), analogical deduction (qiyas), best of their judgment (istihsan) and independent intellectual probe (ijtihad) – the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet being the primary sources of law. Their views were conditioned by their doctrinal inclination (ahl al-Sunnah or ahl al-kalam, or any other

school), creating serious legal differences across the different regions of the Islamic world.³ This triggered debates lasting for decades with jurists of different regions of Islam expounding their own views and doctrines. Among the foremost jurists of the era belonging to the *ahl al-Sunnah* were: Abu Hanifa (d. 149/766), Malik ibn Anas (d. 179/795), Muhammad al-Shafi'i (d. 205/821), and Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 240/854). At a later date, as we shall see below (1.7), their discourses and those of their followers were canonized as the only legitimate schools of Shari'ah law (*mathahib*) in Sunni Islam, the term *Shar'iah* (*Shari'a*) derived from the Qur'an (5:48/Ch. 9.4). In course of time a distinct Shi'a School also evolved,⁴ led by Ja'far as-Sadiq (d. 148/765), who was regarded as the greatest teacher of his time in Medina.

1.5. Infallibility of the consensus (*ijma'*) of scholars [The 2nd – 3rd centuries of Islam]

The sprawling of law schools only combined with theo-philosophical diversification and hadith multiplication to further accentuate the differences among the jurists. This brought the agreed views of the majority (*jama'ah*) into sharper juristic focus and precipitated the evolution of a juristic notion of consensus (*ijma'*) of the community.⁵ They subjected a few Qur'anic verses to analogical deduction (*qiyas*) and independent intellectual probe (*ijtihad*), using the prevalent scholastic methods to establish that the consensus reached by the community was infallible.⁶ They later argued that since the scholars of the community determined its consensus, the consensus reached by the scholars must be regarded as infallible. Many scholars, however, were opposed to this view. They argued that since an individual can make an error of judgment, there was no basis to regard the collective opinion above error. In historical perspective, the doctrine of consensus played a vital role in conserving the past heritage and in cementing differences among the scholars and jurists. As a juristic tool however, it has always remained problematic, and remains a complicated jurisprudential issue to this day. As Hasan observes, "the classical theory of *ijma'* was not recognized in full even during its formative period. Because of its purely theoretical nature and perhaps for want of some definite practicable machinery it could not be utilized to reform the Muslim society."⁷ The fact remains, it is not an established principle of law and never was.

1.6. The doctrine of precedence (*taqlid*) [3rd – 4th centuries of Islam].

The ideological clash between the divergent theological, philosophical and juristic factions, and between the proponents and opponents of the doctrine of infallibility of the consensus of scholars, generated enormous debates, confusion and bitterness among the scholars and the intelligentsia that lasted for generations and appeared to have no end. The jurists found a way out by stressing on the past precedence, unless there was good reason to break away from the precedent. With time, the notion or principle of precedence got popularized into following conventions and established views without applying any creative thinking or individual efforts: what the orientalist scholarship has described as repetitive or blind conformity with the views of the past scholars. This led to a misconception among a section of scholars and orthodoxy that what had to be learnt was already there in the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet

(Hadith) and the posterity had to simply imitate them. This was the doctrine of taqlid, as we have touched earlier in the book in several places. The doctrine was however, not binding on all jurists and scholars, and Islamic legal system continued to remain vibrant, creative and energetic until colonization in the 17th and 18th centuries.

1.7. The rise and fall of Mu'tazila school and emergence of orthodox Sunni Islam [3rd –6th centuries].

The Mu'tazila School (1.3 above) enjoyed the patronage of the Caliphs and intellectual elite during the third and fourth centuries of Islam. Although its rationalism was rooted in the belief in God and the revelation, it was condemned and bitterly opposed by the traditionalists as it challenged many of their notions and doctrines. However, soon the Mu'tazilites grew arrogant and fanatic. Thus in 217/833, the Caliph [al-Mamun] decreed that no judge (qadi) could hold his office or be appointed to one unless he subscribed to the Mu'tazili view that the Qur'an was created. Later he instituted summary trials (minha) and convicted the opponents of his dogma - Ahmed Ibn Hanbal, of whom we have heard earlier (1.4 above) being among his victims. His two successors continued the persecution of 'ulama, until 233/848, when al-Mutawakkil abrogated it and restored the dogma of the Qur'an being uncreated, preserved in the 'Guarded Tablet' (Note 22/Ch. 1). However, Mu'tazila school remained dominant through to the end of the century until al-'Ashari (d. 323/936) refuted their theories in favour of traditional Islam. The succeeding generations saw a gradual waning of Mu'tazili influence and increasing popularity of orthodox Islam and finally al-Ghazzali (d. 504/1111), a supremely gifted religious scholar, regarded as the master of dialectical theology,⁸ exploded Mu'tazila theories, and fully established the orthodox views. The major schools of Sunni Islam were canonized, and Mu'tazilism was declared unlawful. The mainstream Sunni Islam was thus set on an orthodox course: the doctrine of taqlid (1.6 above) was espoused as the most popular way of learning, independent intellectual probe (ijtihad) was discouraged, and rationalism was forbidden.

1.8. Broadening the scope of exegesis (tafsir) [The fourth century of Islam onwards]

The confusion created by the continued fragmentation and diversification in doctrinal, legal and scholarly domains during the second and third centuries as reviewed above prompted many among the learned to access the Qur'an to understand the fundamentals of their faith. This resulted in a revival of interest in the science of tafsir, which now combined the knowledge of the sciences of Hadith with the asbab al-nuzul (1.1 above).

al-Tabari (d. 313/926) is credited with the compilation of one of the earliest and most elaborate works on tafsir [jami al-bayan fi tafsir al-Qur'an]. Down the centuries, a succession of scholars devoted their entire lives to producing comprehensive exegetic works. However, with the popularity of the principle or doctrine of taqlid (1.6 above), most of the exegetes in the succeeding centuries down to the recent times followed a stereotype approach of copying from the work of a past scholar of their choice. Thus, as Abul Kalam Azad observes:⁹ "If an error was made in an interpretation in the third century hijra, it is inevitably copied and recopied down to the ninth century. No one

thought for a moment to step out of the taqlid (strict compliance with the precedent) regime even for a moment to investigate the truth. By and by, the spirit of interpretation dipped so low that it got restricted to merely putting new margins (with comments) on the old contents.”

Copying from, and embellishing upon past works was however not all. The early exegetes presented several optional arguments while interpreting the critical verses of the Qur'an. The later interpreters often chose the weakest of these arguments. Thus in later periods, “only those tafsir gained popularity for education and adoption, which totally lacked the beauty of those (advocated by the) ancients.”¹⁰

Furthermore, the literary style of the era, as mentioned earlier (Enc. 1) was characterized by exaggeration, embellishment and fantasy, while the Qur'an was in plain and straightforward language. The Muslim scholars were not happy that the Qur'an should remain in its simple form. “They started clothing every statement of the Qur'an in a robe (that satisfied) their intellectual ego. As this robe did not suit the Qur'an, they force-fitted it, and as a result, the consistency was compromised and all became inconsistent and complicated.”¹¹ This characterized the traditional exegetic discipline until the turn of the last century.

However, with the revival of the spirit of independent intellectual probe (ijtihad) in recent times, the science of exegesis has gained a high level of scholarship. Thus modern exegetic works take cognizance of the social and historical context of the revelation and draw on a much broader resource base than in the past centuries.

1.9. Summing Up

In a nutshell, the first four centuries of Islam saw the evolution of the diverse fields and domains of Islamic theology as tabled above. This came about as a result of the attempts of the jurists, theologians and philosophers of diverse regions, backgrounds and religious heritage to accommodate their theological, cultural, and philosophical paradigms and normative practices into the faith. It did not happen in any structured, organized or coordinated manner, nor was it the outcome of well-defined academic or theological projects undertaken at exclusive centers of learning, or sponsored by the Caliphs, nor did it follow any strict timeframe as indicated above. It all happened spontaneously in the wake of a turbulent flux of history, suddenly put off-course by the Qur'anic revelation. It was participated by jurists, theologians and philosophers in each successive generation at their own initiatives and in their own stations: courts of law, mosques, madrassas and halaqahs (gathering of the learned) that dotted the major centers of Islamic civilization (Mecca, Medina, Baghdad and Kufa). The foregoing schematic review only lists the culminating points of the evolutionary process in the given timeframe.

Since the entire process of theological development in all the major fields has stemmed from the external history of the early centuries of Islam, dating over a millennium ago; any effort or aspiration to replicate its culminating achievements will be highly anachronistic and wishful. The only exception, however, is the discipline of tafsir, the interpretation of the Qur'an, which like the Qur'an remains an eternally alive domain.

Notes

The earliest literature on the subject now reportedly extant is a book (Arabic) by Burhanuddin Zarkhasi (d. 794/1293). The first authoritative English book on the subject is by Ahmad Von Denffer, 'Ulum al-Qur'an, An Introduction to the Science of the Qur'an, U.K. 1983, which has been used as the source material for the write up under this title.

2. As quoted by al-Tabari (d. 316/926), Malik Ibn Annas (d. 179/795) cited a dialogue between a jurist Ibn Abi Bakr (d. 132/750), a proponent of the views of the consensual majority (jama'ah), and his brother, an advocate of the hadith, to conclude that "Whatever practice was agreed upon in Madinah, the agreed practice according to them was more authoritative than the Hadith."
- Yusuf Guraya, Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence, Delhi 1992, p. 29/30
3. In his briefing to Caliph al-Mansur (d. 157/777), his secretary al-Muqaffa wrote: "The blood, and marital relation that are permitted in Hira are prohibited in Kufah. The same kind of legal diversification is happening in the middle of Kufah. A thing is being permitted in one locality, but is being prohibited in another locality..."
- Yusuf Guaraya, Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence, Delhi 1992, p. 21.
4. The Shi'a school does not recognize any sunnah of the Prophet unless narrated by a member of the Prophet's family, and does not accept the validity of consensus (ijma'). It advocates the divine right of the Prophet's descendants through Caliph Ali to act as the Imam (temporal as well as religious head) and to pass laws or validate ijma' (consensus) as an infallible authority. Among Sunnis, the Caliph is the head of the community, responsible for the implementation of Islamic Law (Shari'a), and defense of the realm of Islam. He is either elected, or nominated by his predecessor, and is answerable to the Islamic court of Law like any subject.
5. While the term ijma' was in currency since the pre-Islamic era, it re-emerged as an authoritative force to contain the differences in Islam. - Ahmad Hasan, The Doctrine of Ijma' in Islam, New Delhi 1992, p. 7.
6. The opening statement in the verse 2:143 (Ch. 42.3), "Thus We have made you a justly balanced community" was cited to infer God's special favour to Muslim community for all times. From this inference it was deduced that the judgment of the Muslim community could, in the Prophet's absence, carry as much authority as that of the Prophet himself.

The opening stipulation in the verse 3:110 (Ch. 29.1), "You are the best community brought forth for humanity; you enjoin the good, and forbid the evil" was interpreted to imply that the Muslim community could never agree on error, because, if that was so, the Qur'an could never have praised it in the above terms. The underlined corollaries were combined to evolve the doctrine of infallibility of the consensus of the Muslim community.
7. Ahmad Hasan, The Doctrine of Ijma' in Islam, New Delhi 1992, p. 259.

8. Dialectical theology is a scholastic method of establishing or contradicting a theological proposition by laying down trains of arguments for and against it in a systematic fashion and then weighing them against each other.
9. Abul Kalam Azad, Tarjuman al-Qur'an, 1931, reprint New Delhi 1989, Vol.1. p. 42.
10. Ibid., p. 43. [Translated from Urdu]
11. Ibid., p. 34, 35. [Translated from Urdu]

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Afterword

1.1. Today's relevance of Shari'a Law

Historically, jurists have insisted that the lay Muslims lack the scholarship to interpret the Qur'an, and must therefore belong to a Shar'ia law school (mathhab) for their proper guidance in religious matters and conformity to a given legal system. Thus, the Shari'a law schools (App. 1.4) virtually divide the Muslim community in theological, as well as juristic levels. Accordingly, the classical Islamic civilization saw each Muslim individual belonging to a Shari'a school, and each Islamic state governed by a Shari'a law. This did not pose much problem in the past centuries, when demography in Muslim lands was more or less on mathhab lines. However a number of things have happened in recent centuries, which raise serious questions about the present day relevance of Shari'a law based division in Islam.

First, with increased mobility of people, the geographic identity of the law schools has been greatly blurred, if not obscured, and Muslims belonging to diverse law schools are now living in the same geo-political regions.

Second, the common Muslims have drifted so far away from their mathhab roots that it will be virtually impossible to i) dig out their mathhab lineage and ii) orient them to the basic discourses or paradigms of their mathhab.

Third, with the advent of globalization, the barriers that historically divided humanity into rival groups – race, culture, nationality, language, and even religion are being pushed on the sidelines as a massive surge of history, and it will be antithetical to historical realities to try to reinstall a dormant or dead barrier between the global Muslim communities.

Fourth, an increasing number of Muslims of divergent mathhab rooting are living in predominantly non-Muslim countries as minorities, making any segmentation of population and personal law on mathhab lines virtually impossible.

Finally, with colonization, the Shari'a laws in the Muslim lands have given way to Western system of jurisprudence, and barring few exceptions, modern legal systems have been fully established with all their instruments and ramifications in Muslim lands. Any attempt to reintroduce any school or schools of Islamic law in these countries would be like going in the reverse gear in civilization, let alone the controversy this will generate due to the incipient divergence in the opinions and backgrounds of present day scholars

as well as those of their terms of reference - the juristic traditions of the divergent schools of law.

In consideration of these complementing factors, which are only accentuating with time, it may be too late in history to revive the division of the global Muslim community into primarily region based mathhabgroups or to reintroduce Shari'a laws. This only reinforces the underlined corollary of the preceding section under Summing Up, and therefore should not come as a shock or surprise.

From a different and purely academic perspective, with the abolition of Caliphate (1924) close to a century ago, the office of the head of Shar'iat (Sultan) remains vacant, while the world has changed so dramatically in the interim period that Islamic Caliphate has become a closed historical event, and "there is no one to execute the behests of the Shar'iat ... and Islamic law all over the world must now be considered in a different light juristically."¹

However, this does not mean that we have to consign the entire province of Islamic law to the archives. Far from it!

The rich heritage of Islamic law must be studied and its principles must be applied to broaden the scope of modern law for the greater good of humanity. Thus the jurists of Islam have to tailor their discourses to suit the callings of the heterogeneous societies of the present day world. They can help in making refinements in the constitution and legal system of their countries, Islamic or otherwise by voicing their opinions through juristic, diplomatic and academic channels based on the universal message of the Qur'an, without the cultural orientation, adaptation and accretions of its early history. As Chiragh Ali (1844-1895), a protégé of Syed Ahmed (1817-1898), the renowned Muslim intellectual of British India, puts it succinctly: "The only law of Muhammad or Islam is the Qur'an, and only the Qur'an"² - a priori, encapsulated in the Qur'anic claim to representing the Shari'a of Islam (45:18/Ch. 9.4, Note, iii).

The corollary reached may affront the champions of Shari'a Law school and the proponents of political Islam, and therefore some clarifications are warranted based on the Qur'an – the ultimate authority on all issues.

Most Islamic scholars insist on the ultimate sovereignty of God and claim that the Western secular laws are man-made while the Shari'a laws are derived from the Qur'an and thus represent God's will. But this argument is specious if not fallacious. From the Qur'anic perspective, all humans stand on equal footing as God's deputy on earth and recipients of some of His Spirit (15:29, 38:72/Ch. 5.3), and therefore all noble works of man have their origin in God's Virtues, and human accomplishments in all fields including jurisprudence and governance of a state are nothing but the result of God's Mercy and Grace to humankind. Therefore, rejecting any so-called secular or modern institution, just because its architects are not Muslims will be as fallacious as rejecting all the good things of modern life that characterize the Western civilization just because their origin is non-Islamic. Thus, there could be no Qur'anic basis to reject the so-called secular laws and institutions, as long as they do not repudiate any of the explicit tenets of the Qur'an. Muslims, therefore, should have no aversion to abiding by such Western/ secular laws

that do not contradict the Qur'an, in as much as they readily avail of all lawful things of convenience of the Western secular world.

Finally, an answer may be needed to the concern and contention of many pious Muslims living in the West that the social environment there is not conducive to practicing their faith, and that implementation of Islamic laws could help cleanse their external environment. The Qur'an answers this upfront: "O You who believe, on you rests (the responsibility) of your souls...." (5:105). In other words, the preservation of faith and the compliance with the activities that are intrinsic to the faith is a personal responsibility and one can't relate it with the external environment. Moreover, according to the Qur'an, Satan is an eternal tempter and those who can't control their lower desires can commit vices in the purest of lands while those who are heedful (muttaqi) can remain steadfast in their ways in the most corrupt and vile setting. So a Muslim does not need a spiritually healthy environment to remain a good Muslim, and those Muslims living in the West can cultivate themselves to be models of goodness to earn divine blessings.

To sum up, the immediate challenge facing the global Muslim community today is to rediscover their universal identity as God's deputy and a true believer as encapsulated in the articles and prescribed activities of faith, rather than to divide themselves into Shar'ia schools (mathahib) without even knowing their mathhab rooting.

1.2. Sectarianism and Islam

As a first principle theological, ideological and political differences in any community often precipitate sectarian division, either in the natural course of history, or under the behest of vested interest. In Islam the first prominent signs of differences emerged upon the death of the Prophet (632). His dead body awaiting burial, the community was tormented on the question of his succession. Since this marked a turning point in its history and led to the evolution of a fanatic breakaway sect (Kharijites) (659) and the birth of Shi'a Islam upon the assassination of Ali (661), we are giving a synopsis of the historical developments of the interim period in the Notes for the benefit of curious readers.³

In a nutshell, the evolution of Shi'a Islam and the birth of the Kharijites have been purely the result of the external history of Islam dating from the demise of the Prophet, and do not derive from the Qur'anic message. With time both Shi'a Islam and the Kharjites were subdivided into many factions and the process continued down the centuries. Thus, writing in the fifth century of Islam, Abdul Quader Jilani enumerated some seventy-one sects,⁴ in addition to the mainstream Sunni Islam. The onslaught of history caused the disappearance of many of the marginal sects while localized circumstances created others. Thus, there are some ten sects in Islam today.

Historically, as in Christianity, the sectarian division in Islam has resulted in inter-sect accusations, communal riots, civil wars and even wars between nations. Thus the Islamic dynastic Caliphate (Umayyads and Abbasids) saw many Shi'ite and Kharjite revolts, and Shi'a-Sunni antipathy has punctuated Islamic history down the centuries to this very day. There are other present day examples of Muslim sects putting the label of non-Muslim on different Islamic sects because of differences in theological beliefs.

Now turning to the Qur'an, it is clear and unambiguous in forbidding sectarian division:

"Say, He has the power to send torment upon you, from above you and beneath your feet, and to confuse you with sects (shi'aon) to make you taste each other's oppressions. See how do we illustrate our messages that you may understand (yafqahun)" (6:65).

"As for those who split their religion into sects (shi'aon) - you have nothing to do with them (O Muhammad!). Their affair is up to God, and He will tell them of what they had been doing" (6:159).

"(Believers! Do not be) among those who have split their religion and become sects (shi'aon) – each faction pleased what they have (by way of tenets)" (30:32).

"God has enjoined on you the religion (din) that God had ordained for Noah, and that We have revealed to you (O Muhammad), and that We ordained for Abraham and Moses and Jesus. So holdfast to the din and make no division in it..." (42:13).

The present day diverse Muslim communities must also recognize that they have no legitimacy to claim any superiority in God's sight over members of other sects. If they do so, they will be only replicating the mistake of the Jews and Christians for which they were reprov'd in the Qur'an (2:111/Ch. 13.3). Moreover, no faithful Muslim must assume spiritual superiority over any fellow Muslim or a believer in God because only God knows the rightly guided (Note 1/Ch. 14).

The fact remains, sectarianism is an exaggerated form of tribalism. Islam came to root out tribalism but ended up with sectarianism because of obvious historical reasons. Fourteen centuries have passed since the birth of Islam and the global civilization has moved far away from tribalism and sectarianism; so it is time for Muslims to take cognizance of the fact that their sectarian division is out and out a construct of history and has nothing to do with the teachings of the Qur'an.

1.3. Final note of appeal for Muslims

It has been long overdue for Muslims to make an objective and honest assessment of their secondary theological literature, notably the Hadith sciences. There can be no doubt that they are essential to understanding how the Prophet and early Muslims complied with various Islamic rites and rituals, including Salat, Zakat and hajj. But the truth remains, their evolution is purely a construct of history, and accordingly they are conditioned and corrupted by a wide array of factors impacting across some two to three hundred years as analyzed earlier (Enc.4). Considering the canonized Hadith as we have in our hands today, on their face value as truths supplementing and complementing the Qur'an as many orthodox scholars advocate, or indirect inspiration as the classical theory of Islamic law suggests,⁵ may lead to the following, to the great detriment of the Muslim community:

- The vast majority of Muslims, lay or educated, will have neither time, nor the necessary books, nor the scholarship to explore their expansive domains.
- Different individuals, agencies, groups and states, will be able to pick conveniently from their theological sources to legitimize their views and deeds in

the whole range of matters concerning their societies. Such matters could be of social, political or theological nature, or pertain to statecraft, educational curriculum and women's status, for example. Likewise, they will be able to enter into polemics, and have their clerics pass fatwas against conflicting views on all such matters.

- They will be questioning the completeness of the Qur'an as a font of guidance and divine criteria of right and wrong, despite its claim to be a book of wisdom that makes things clear with all kinds of illustrations and elaboration (Notes 7-10/Preface).
- Their theologians will continue to nurture and perpetuate the thought process, scholastic disposition, and paradigms that were normative in the early centuries of Islam and characterize the Hadith literature, that is revered and taught by them, and thus keep those Muslims under their direct influence, intellectually rooted in that era, with grave consequences.
- The modern Kharijites⁶ and Qaramites⁷ of Islam – the violent extremists, active in many countries of the world, will reduce Islam, in the eyes of the non-Muslims exposed to a patently biased media,⁸ to a cult of terrorism and suicide bombing, creating enormous difficulties for the common peace loving and law abiding Muslims settled in predominantly secular and non-Muslim societies.

Therefore, as suggested by some of the eminent Muslim scholars, Muslims must endeavor to take guidance directly from the Qur'an.⁹ The best way to accomplish this, as the Qur'an advocates, is to probe into it,¹⁰ and seek the best meaning,¹¹ as attempted in this work.

Furthermore, Muslims must endeavor to cultivate an exemplary moral conduct and behavior (uswatun hasana) to do full justice to the heritage of their Prophet (33:21/Ch. 15), and to excel in all good things (that includes lawful pursuits) as enjoined by the Qur'an (2:148/Ch. 16; 5:48/Ch. 9.4).

There is also a pressing need to substitute the predominantly theological content of the curriculum of traditional religious schools (madrassas) with a focused study of the Qur'an and a comprehensive study of the ever expanding fields of universal sciences and diverse faculties of knowledge that are nothing but the manifestations of the Words (kalimat) of God (18:109, 31:27/Ch. 2.1), that cannot be divided between Islamic and non-Islamic domains (Concluding paragraph, Ch. 10.2).

As for the theological discourses, notably the Hadith literature, Muslims must not accept them blindly, and cite them freely, without knowing their background and the classification.¹² The Hadith remains a critical part of Islamic religion, in so much as it preserves the legacy of the Prophet, no less his companions. However, since this is a very technical field, it should be reserved for enlightened specialists who have attained sufficient maturity, knowledge, and training to distinguish between weak and reliable Hadith, and not to confuse them with the Word of God.

Last but not least, there is an over-riding need for the Muslim intelligentsia to protest the demonization of their Holy book by some of their own theologians and jurists, who,

in the name of implementing the Qur'anic ordinances, justify blatantly anti-Qur'anic heinous crimes, particularly against womenfolk, as typified by examples that hit the world media in recent years and can be readily accessed on the Internet.¹³

1.4. Note of reassurance for non-Muslims

As to those who are not Muslims, they need not be suspicious or antagonistic about this book. There is no compulsion in religion. So they do not have to believe in the divinity of the Qur'an and keep their faiths. But the practical aspect of the Qur'anic message, as reviewed in the preceding pages, and summed up below, offers a great deal to humanity and the sympathetic reader may benefit from it.

At a personal level, the Qur'anic message fosters love, mercy, forgiveness and a balance of privileges and responsibilities between spouses. At the community level, it promotes goodwill and understanding with friends and foes, neighbors and strangers, and good inter-faith relationship. Besides, the moral and ethical paradigms of the Qur'an can moderate and balance the consumption and acquisition patterns and aspirations of people, and favourably influence their moral behavior and ethical norms towards making them good global citizens.

There can be no doubt that much of the principles espoused by the Qur'an have, with time, permeated the global human society, but a serious reflection on the whole gamut of Qur'anic injunctions can be of benefit to many readers regardless of their faith, or even if they have no faith.

Finally, as a word of reassurance, the violent extremists – the modern Kharijites⁶ and Qaramites,⁷ of Islam are no more than poisonous sediments of history, and like their counterparts of almost a millennium ago, they are bound to be increasingly marginalized, and eventually jettisoned from the world of Islam.

Notes

1. Asaf A.A.Fyzee, *Outlines of Muhammadan Law*, 5th edition, Oxford University Press, Delhi 2005. p. 37.
2. Chiragh Ali, *Islam and Change*, extracted from John L. Esposito, *Islam the Straight Path*, New York 1994, p. 44.
3. Upon the death of the Prophet, his companions agreed that none could replace him in his spiritual capacity as God's messenger, but a successor was needed to lead and govern the community that had recently assumed the character of a national federation having treaty with diverse nomadic tribes. As it happens in a situation of sudden leadership vacuum, the major groups in the community aspire that their candidate should fill the vacuum. There were two major rival candidates.
i) Abu Bakr, the elderly father-in-law of the Prophet representing the Emigrants [the converts of the Meccan period who had struggled with the Prophet throughout his mission]. ii) Ali, also an Emigrant, and a cousin and son-in-law of

the Prophet; his supporters, then known as Shi'i (literally followers) believed in the divine right of leadership (imamah) through family lineage.

The elders in the community chose Abu Bakr. But Ali and his followers were not happy, though they accepted the community's decision in the greater cause of Islam. The resentment in Ali's camp continued during the successive caliphate (those of Umar and Uthman) and finally eased with his election after Uthman's assassination (656). However, more anguish was in store for them.

Uthman's supporters were critical of Ali for not avenging his assassin, who allegedly belonged to his [Uthman's] camp. Thus the community was divided between the supporters of Ali and the sympathizers of Uthman. The differences were however more deep-rooted and had built up over time.

Uthman was of the Umayyah family of the Quraysh, who had entered Islam after the integration of Mecca – some 18th year into the Prophetic mission. During his caliphate however Uthman appointed members of his Quraysh kin in many senior positions thus favouring those who entered Islam much later, having failed to destroy it, and having made no sacrifices for it either. This had caused deep frustration and a profound sense of betrayal among the Emigrants, and more so in case of the supporters of Ali.

The division between the rival camps reached a climax when Mu'awiyah, a nephew of Uthman and governor of Syria claimed the caliphate and sent a powerful army against Baghdad, the capital of the Caliphate. Ali dispatched a strong force to resist them. In the final encounter (July 28, 657), Ali's army was on the verge of victory, when Mu'awiyah's shrewd leader raised the pages of the Qur'an in the air by fastening them at the tips of the lances. The sight of the sacred pages brought the battle to a halt. Mu'awiyah then proposed arbitration to spare Muslim blood, to which Ali agreed. This alienated an extremist faction of his followers. They felt that arbitration between a genuine Caliph (Ali) and a governor making a fictitious claim (Mu'awiyah) was no more than a political ruse, and rebelled. Ali attacked their camp and almost annihilated them (659) but eventually one of their zealots assassinated him (Jan 24 661). This shattered Ali's followers. They viewed Ali's betrayal successively by the first three Caliphs and then by his own men as a sign of Divine trial. So they venerated him as their supreme saint, the wali of God just as Muhammad was the messenger of God. The Shi'a Islam was born. The rebels who had broken away from Ali's camp were called Kharijites (the secessionists). The first sect was born in Islam.

4. Abdul Quader Jilani, Ghunitu at-talebin, Urdu translation by Shahir Shams Barelwi, Arshad Brothers, New Delhi p.177-193.
5. Asaf A.A.Fyzee, (1 above) p. 33.
6. Philip K. Hitti refers to the Kharijites (See 3 above for their evolution) as a brutally fanatic sect, who readily killed their opponents and "caused rivers of blood to flow in the first three centuries of Islam." History of the Arabs, 1937, 10th edition; London 1993, p. 247.

Drawing on classical sources, Abdul Quader Jilani (d. 561/1166) has described the Kharijites as a sect that disowned the community of Muslims, “raised swords against the caliphs and made lawful their blood and their wealth.” He also mentions about some of their sects justifying the killing of the children of polytheists, their own parents, and all the non-Muslims of the world. - Ghunit al-talebin, Urdu translation by Shahir Shams Barelwi, Arshad Brothers, New Delhi p.178-180

7. The Qaramites. Founded by Hamdan Qarmat, a power hungry Iraqi peasant, around 860 (third century of Islam), the sect grew as a Bolshevik style revolutionary movement “that developed into a most malignant growth into the body of political Islam.” Qarmat’s successors “founded an independent state on the western shore of the Persian Gulf (899), ... from where they conducted a series of terrible raids on neighboring lands,.. laid waste most of lower al-Iraq, became the terror of the caliphate ... and kept Syria and al-Iraq drenched in blood.” Philip K. Hitt, History of the Arabs, 1937, 10th edition; London 1993, p. 445.
8. The international media tends to mention the faith of the perpetrator of terror when the terrorist is a Muslim, but makes no mention of religion if he is from any other confessional community. Thus commenting on the ‘bloody partition and cleansing of Bosnia Herzegovina’, by ‘extremist Catholic and Orthodox forces’, Christopher Hitchens observes: “Confessional terminology was reserved only for the Muslims even as their murderers went to all the trouble of distinguishing themselves by wearing large Orthodox crosses over their bandoliers, or by taping the portraits of the Virgin Mary to their rifle butts” - god is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything, Toronto 2007, p. 22.
9. “If Muslims will resolve and strive, taking their inspiration from the Qur’an, they can attain the rank of the Europeans, the Americans and the Japanese in learning and science and making progress,” Shakib Arsalan. “Islam is based on the Qur’an, and the Qur’an is to be interpreted in its historical setting and on chronological principles,” Asiff A.A. Fyzee.
- Extracted from Islam in Transition, by John L.Esposito, York 1982, p. 64. 190 respectively.
10. The Qur’an states:
“We have sent down the Book to you (O Muhammad,) with blessings so that the prudent may probe into its verses (message) and be mindful of it” (38:29).
“Will they not probe into the Qur’a? - or are there hearts sealed” (47:24)?
11. The Qur’an states:
“Those who listen to this speech and follow the best (meaning) – it is they who are guided by God, and it is they who are prudent” (39:18).
“Follow the best (meaning) of what has been sent down to you from your Lord, before suffering comes upon you of a sudden and without your knowledge” (39:55).

12. An agreed classification of Hadith features five categories depending upon authenticity 1) sahih (authentic), 2) hasan (sound), 3) dha'if (weak), 4) dha'if jiddan (very weak), and 5) mawduh (fabricated).

http://www.albalagh.net/qa/hadith_authenticity.shtml

Checked and approved by Mufti Ebrahim Desai

13. Recent incidents that hit world media and shocked the Muslim intelligence include:

- i. Local clerics issued a [fatwa](#) asking a woman molested by her father-in-law to divorce her husband and marry the rapist father in-law under the behest of the Hanafi law. [June 06, 2005]
- ii. A local Islamic jury awarded gang molestation of a newly wed girl to avenge the sexual crime committed by her brother, and the punishment was executed with the consent of the bride's father-in-law, before the eyes of the bride. [June 05, 2005]
- iii. A gang molested housewife, was awarded exemplary punishment by Muslim court for violating segregation laws, while the rapists, seven in number, were given far lighter punishment than what the law prescribed. [November 16, 2007]

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