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

Have We not expanded for thee thy breast,
And removed from thee thy burden,
Which weighed down thy back,
And exalted for thee thy mention?
Surely with difficulty is ease.
With difficulty is surely ease.
So when thou art free (from anxiety), work hard,
And make thy Lord thy exclusive object.

This chapter is an early Makkah revelation. It serves as an appendix to the last chapter, Ad-Duha (The Dawn), for here the same theme is continued thus highlighting the Divine promise that every future period of the Holy Prophet’s life and mission will be superior to the past one, and that his religion will make headway and his name will be exalted. As a sign of future events he should consider his past life and reflect on the mighty favours of Allah which He had already miraculously bestowed on him.

The Holy Prophet therefore should be consoled with the promise that this flow of favours would not be cut off. That is, the past is proffered as strong proof of the continuation of Divine blessings in the future. Accordingly, the chapter begins thus:

Have We not expanded for thee thy breast,
And removed from thee thy burden,
Which weighed down thy back,
And exalted for thee thy mention?

As regards this inshirah sadr, that is, expansion of the heart, most of our Qur’anic commentators refer to an event that took place three times in the life of our Holy Prophet – in his childhood, after adolescence, and at the time of his mi’raj (ascension), and that is the vision in which the Holy...
Prophet was shown that his chest was cut open and his heart was cleansed of every kind of impurity. From this, no one can deny that Allah, Most High, had cleansed the Prophet’s heart of all kinds of pollution. But that event does not seem to bear any relationship to the subject matter that is discussed here.

Contraction and expansion are two conditions of the human heart. When a man has to bear a burden greater than his strength will allow, and considers a task beyond his ability, then his heart becomes tight and that state is called inqibaz (contraction). However, when he begins to experience ease in consequence of the weight having been lifted, and he thinks that he will carry on the job and that it will be accomplished, then his heart expands and that is known as inshirah sadr (expansion of the heart). The Holy Qur’an has made it clear that prophethood is an immense responsibility. To have the burden of reforming the whole world hanging around one’s neck is no joking matter. To mend and ameliorate one’s own conduct is in itself a gigantic task. So can one imagine the condition of this person on whose shoulders had fallen the weight of reforming the whole world?

When the Holy Prophet was given the Divine command in chapter Hud: Continue then in the right way as thou art commanded, as also those who turn penitently (to Allah) with thee. And be not inordinate (O men!) - 11:112), it had a very great effect on the Messenger of Allah. It is recorded in the Hadith that the heavy emphasis placed in this verse on reforming others besides himself increased the weight of the responsibility in the Holy Prophet’s mind so much so that part of his beard became white and he uttered the words: “Chapter Hud has made me old.”

When prophethood came to Prophet Moses (as), such was his consternation over this ponderous task that he first recommended his brother Aaron for the job saying: He is more eloquent in speech than I (28:34), attempting thus to avoid the responsibility. When his attempt at evasion was rejected, he pleaded with Allah thus: My Lord, expand my breast for me, and ease my affair for me, and loose the knot from my tongue, that they may understand my word. And give to me an aider from my family: Aaron, my brother (20:25-30).

See how perturbed he was by this responsibility of prophethood, that he called it a weight or a burden for bearing which he requested an assistant in his brother, Aaron!

So, the matter here really relates to the great responsibility of prophethood on the Holy Prophet (sas) and his concern about reforming not only his own people but also the whole world which was deeply sunk in evil. The extent to which he would be able to fulfill that obligation in the eyes of Allah also formed part of his worries. When this burden of prophethood was placed on his back, he became greatly troubled and on returning home he told his noble wife, Lady Khadijah: “Cover me, cover me,” and having related the whole experience to her, he confessed: “I am afraid that I will not be able to bear this task.” Whereupon Lady Khatijah greatly consoled him and, recounting his noble qualities, she averred: “Allah will never destroy so beneficent a soul as you.”

He began to feel that this affair was beyond his capabilities. He could not perceive in what way he could rescue and transform that degenerate society, nor how he would be able to account for that responsibility in the presence of the Almighty. Nevertheless, the light of Allah, the tranquility of mind, and the Divine revelation that began to descend on him uninterruptedly filled his blessed heart with peace. All kinds of knowledge and rational arguments were disclosed to him and the immeasurable help he received from Allah for the betterment of the world (which had put a great fear in his heart before), brought about so much ease and comfort, and so many doors were opened for him, that that burden became light and his heart began to expand. In other words, he had sought no helper for the burden that was placed on his back. However, his Lord embraced him with His help and favour and Himself assisted him to remove the burden thus causing his heart to become large with joy and so relief came to his prophetic mission.

Not only did Allah, Most High, lift his burden, but more than that, He elevated his name and caused a whole world to salute the honour of that formerly unknown and obscure person. If one should read about his early condition and ponder over his lonely, inconspicuous, helpless and forlorn circumstances and then direct one’s attention to the honour and glory which Allah conferred on him in just a few years, then one’s amazement will transcend all limits.

In Makkah, he was an uneducated, illiterate, helpless, destitute and unknown man. Yet Allah placed him on such a lofty pedestal of dignity and
majesty that even mighty potentates considered it a privilege to show respect to him as this letter from the Caesar of Rome attests. It said in part: “I wish I were in your service and were given the task of unloosing the thongs of your sandal.”

In addition to this, so sublime a treasure of knowledge and wisdom was bestowed on this unlettered man, that even sages and philosophers of great knowledge and wisdom regarded it as a signal honour to acquire knowledge from him. Indeed, the truth is that he spread throughout the world the golden principles of knowledge and wisdom which have become a fountain from which all later seekers of truth can imbibe.

Surely with difficulty is ease, with difficulty is surely ease.

These verses contain golden principles of guidance that can lift the spirit of man and strengthen his fortitude and engender in him the spirit of patience, perseverance and hard labour. This Divine promise, that after every difficulty there will come a period of ease, prevents man from becoming despondent even in the face of the greatest trial. Hazrat Ali says that the alif lam (that is, the definite article) is placed on ‘usr (difficulty) in order to particularise and single it out, whilst yusr (ease) is used in a general sense. So, the repetition of this expression not only emphasises the assertion but also points out the fact that in both verses, ‘usr is singular because of the definite article that precedes it and yusr is dual. In other words, there is an implicit promise here that after each difficulty there will be two measures of ease. That is, the relief that follows every calamity will be two times greater than the hardship.

Besides these subtleties, there is another apparent promise in these verses that, just as the Holy Prophet experienced peace after his initial distress, that is, after the burden of prophethood and its consequent tribulations, Allah, Most High, lifted the weight and eased his distresses and there came the time when the Prophet’s honour was universally acknowledged and his teaching was accepted by people. Similarly, when hard times will come over the Prophet’s religion in future, and trials and tribulations will multiply, peace will descend after this storm, and difficulty will be changed into ease, and the renown of the Holy Prophet will rise higher than before.

Today, too, Islam has fallen on hard times and all kinds of filthy allegations and vicious slander have been heaped on the Holy Prophet by Christian priests and Arya Samajists and the foulest kinds of literature have been circulated against the religion. Muslim political power has been broken and no stone is left unturned in the attempt to humiliate Muslims. But Allah has promised that ease is bound to come after difficulty and that Prophet Muhammad’s dignity will definitely be more exalted. Signs of this are already evident. For example, the reason behind the appointment of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as the Mujaddid of the Age was that ease may come after hardship and that our Holy Prophet’s name may become more illustrious. Therefore, one can clearly discern that through the literature of the Mujaddid and his disciples that that era of tranquillity is already beginning to take shape today in its own form. It is true that it is still only a seed but, Allah willing, the time will soon come when it will grow into a gigantic tree for all to behold.

This is what the Mujaddid meant when he spoke consolingly to Maulana Nur-ud-Din who was in a state of depression at the time (concerning the piteous state of Islam). He relieved his mind with the following words: “Maulvi Sahib,” he said, “when the moon is just born, only those gifted with excellent eye-sight can see it on the first night. No one else can. When it becomes a full moon, then the whole world sees it. In the same way, I have beheld the crescent moon of the resurgence of Islam. Allah willing, the time will come when it will shine in its full splendour for all the world to see.”

It is this same idea that he expressed in poetic form in the following couplet:

A rahi hai ab to khusbu mere Yusuf ki mujhe The scent of my Joseph is coming to me now.

Go kaho diwana lekin main karunga intezar Even if you call me mad, I shall continue to look in expectation.

Here “Joseph” stands for the iminent rise and advance of Islam which the Mujaddid was eagerly awaiting just as the Prophet Jacob was longingly looking out for his son, Prophet Joseph.

Thus, Allah, Most High, is now gradually disclosing the signs of the
progress of Islam and even in Europe itself, which energetically sought to destroy Islam, one can see that Islamic principles are slowly but surely beginning to captivate the hearts of people to such an extent that Bernard Shaw, the famous English playwright and a man of great insight and wisdom, predicted that the spiritual victory of Islam would be completed in a hundred years. And concerning the Holy Prophet, he made the pronouncement that if he should return to earth and assume the dictatorship of the world, then the world would be delivered from its present state of crisis.

In other words, the inevitability of ease and hardship and the exaltation of the Holy Prophet’s name are Divine promises which, Allah willing, shall be fulfilled.

So when thou art free (from anxiety), work hard, And make thy Lord thy exclusive object.

Look at how confidently the Holy Qur’an has stated the coming of relief after hardship when it says that when we are free from anxiety, that is, when difficulty is replaced by peace, then we should engage ourselves in productive work. In other words, the coming of ease after distress is a certainty. However, in this world, people’s condition change in consequence of their actions. Therefore, some mechanism is needed to ensure that when peace replaces hardship, it should remain permanent. Thus, this chapter has also taught us the formula for preventing the return of distress after a period of tranquility.

It is common knowledge that when a man emerges from arduous and straitened circumstances and begins to enjoy comfort and leisure and acquires power, wealth and contentment after his distresses and discomforts, he tends to fall into indolence, easy living and inactivity and so becomes complacent and unproductive. Abandonment of work and falling into the trap of inertia and slothfulness always bring about the degradation of man and are the mother of pain and distress. This is what ‘Umar Faruq warned about when he said: “When we were tried by adversity, we exhibited patience and steadfastness, but when we were tested by ease and opulence, we lost the capacity for restraint.”

Those who lost that capacity were the later Muslims who, when blessed with dominion and riches, did not practise constancy in their endeavours and in their taqwa (God-fearingness and piety). As a result, they trod the path that led to national decadence and so created the causes for the return of hardship. Thus, there is one defect that contentment generates, and that is that man makes himself useless by forsaking creative work and falls into luxurious and voluptuous living which is the foundation of decline and travail.

Another defect which comes with easy circumstances is that man forgets the Almighty and, giving up himself to a life of luxury and pleasure, he becomes entangled in all kinds of vice and immorality which are the second foundation-stone of decadence and distress.

So, to save man from the danger of these two paths of destruction, the Holy Qur’an has laid down the following principles of guidance. Firstly, when ease comes after difficulty and there is more leisure-time at his disposal, man must not make himself unproductive, but instead he should make use of this free time to undertake more serious work so that he will make greater advancement and become the heir to serenity and comfort. Secondly, he should devote himself more and more to the remembrance of Allah so that temporal and spiritual progress may walk hand in hand. If he does these things, his condition of ease cannot decline nor vanish.

If there is a nation which does not shirk hard, purposeful work when it experiences easy circumstances and tranquil times, but instead puts its leisure time and its power to greater benefit and thus makes further advances in its pursuits, and avoiding the intoxication of power and dominion, it never forgets the Almighty but instead derives increased benefits from its power and opulence and devotes more attention to worship and to service and kindness to Allah’s creation, then such a nation can never suffer decline in its ease and contentment and difficulty can never show its face. This holds good for any family or individual also.

Muslims lost their comfortable existence only when they abandoned hard work and, forgetting Allah, they fell into a life of sinfulness and impiety. The European nations followed only one aspect of this formula and today they are the embodiment of ease and luxury. In other words, their wealth and power did not make them lazy. In fact, the diligence of the European people and their consequent easy cir-
cumstances are plain as daylight.

But then let us look at the second side of the formula, which is never to forget the Almighty. Europe has already forgotten Him and so the wise and intelligent among them are of the opinion that although their diligent application to hard work is supporting their ease and luxury, however, their forgetfulness of Allah has brought about a state in which greed for worldly things, self-idolatry and vice and immorality will ultimately dominate their lives. The consequence of this can never be good and will bring lasting hardship.

Thus, if man wants to protect himself from distress, then when he is free from worries and enjoys peace, that is, in times of yusr (ease) he should not forsake productive work and sit idly, but instead he should devote more time and energy to beneficial work that comes through the blessings of wealth and power, and leisure and ease, so that he may walk along the road of greater and greater advancement. In addition, he should not forget Allah, but, benefiting from the gifts of freedom and peace, he should turn more to Allah and serve His creatures with more enthusiasm for this, too, is a way of showing gratitude to Allah for His favours, and without this thankfulness, a nation cannot achieve moral and spiritual excellence. Thus, ease cannot desert such a nation that follows this path for this is the genuine formula for both worldly and religious progress.

If Muslims had worked along these lines, their period of ease would never have vanished. But the situation is not irreversible, for if even today they embark upon the above principles of success, then as surely as the night gives way to the day, their present difficulties will be transformed into ease and peace.

Note: Many anti-Islamic sites accuse our beloved Holy Prophet, Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, of, God forbid, marrying a minor. We present here an article that will clear our beloved Holy Prophet (sas) of this blasphemous charge. May Allah guide the opponents of Islam aright. Ameen!

Most narrations carry misstatements about the age of Hazrat ‘Aishah Siddiqah at the time of her marriage to the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). They place this marriage in the tenth year of the Call and state that Hazrat ‘Aishah was only six years old at that time. On proper sifting of the material facts, these statements turn out to be incorrect and it becomes evident that she, in fact, was about nineteen or twenty years of age when she arrived in the house of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sas) as his wife in 2 A.H.

It will be in the fitness of things to quote from the writings of two well-known Muslim scholars of the present century who are the main exponents of the view that Hazrat ‘Aishah Siddiqah was six years old at her nikah (marriage) and nine years old at the time of the consummation of her marriage. Both Maulana Syed Sulaiman Nadvi and Maulana Syed Abul Ala Maududi are well-known Muslim authors of seerat (biography).

Nadvi’s view
Maulana Syed Sulaiman Nadvi writes on page 21 of his book Seerat-i-Aishah:

“Books of history and biography are generally silent about the birth date of Hazrat ‘Aishah. The historian, Ibn Sa’d, whom many later biographers have followed, has written that Hazrat ‘Aishah was born in the fourth year of the Call, and was married at the age of six years in the tenth year of the Call. Apparently, this cannot be correct, because if her birth in the fourth year of the Call be admitted as correct, then her age at the time of her marriage in the tenth year of the Call works out to seven and not six years. The fact remains that
some matters about the age of Hazrat ‘Aishah are admitted to be correct by most historians and biographers, and these are:
She was married three years before the Hijrah (the Flight) at the age of six years; the marriage was consummated in the month of Shawal in the year 1 A.H. when she was nine years old, and she became a widow in Rabi-al-Awwal 11 A.H., at the age of eighteen years. According to this account, the correct date of her birth works out to the end of the fifth year of the Call or 614 A.D. of the Christian calendar. For a proper comprehension of the events of history, one should bear in mind that out of a total period of twenty-three years of the Call, the first thirteen years were passed in Makkah and the last ten years in Madinah. Thus, the fourth year of the Call had already been out before her birth and the fifth year was running.”

Maududi’s view:
In the article, “The Nikah Date of Sayedah ‘Aishah,” published in the Tarjuman al-Qur’an of September 1976, Maulana Abul Ala Maududi wrote:

“It is apparent from the detailed reports of Imam Ahmad Tibrani, Ibn Jareer and Baihaqi that the nikah of Sayedah ‘Aishah was solemnised before the nikah of Sayedah Saudah. It is also evident that her nikah with the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, was solemnised in the month of Shawal of the tenth year of the Call, three years before Hijrah, when she was six years old. Here a question arises, that if Sayedah ‘Aishah was six years of age in Shawal of the tenth year of the Call, then she should have been nine years of age at the time of Hijrah and should have been eleven years in 2 A.H. at the time of consummation. But all narrators agree that her nikah was solemnised when she was six years old and the marriage was consummated when she was nine years old. Some ‘ulama have tried to meet this discrepancy by saying that the marriage was consummated seven months after Hijrah. Hafiz Ibn Hajar has preferred this view. On the other hand, Imam Nauvi, in his Tahzeeb al-Asma’a al-Lughat, Hafiz Ibn Katheer in his Al-Badaya and Allama Qustalani in his Mawahib al-Deeniah report consummation in 2 A.H. Hafiz Badr-ud-Din Aini has written in his Umdat al-Qari that the marriage of ‘Aishah Siddiqah was consummated in Shawal 2 A.H. after the return of the Holy Prophet (sas) from the battle of Badr. Both Imam Nauvi and Allama Aini consider the above-quoted reports of consummation of marriage seven months after Hijrah as irresponsible and untrustworthy. Thus, we are faced with a question that if the marriage was consummated at the age of nine years in Shawal 2 A.H., then what should be the date of nikah which should tally with her age of six years? An answer to this question is found in Bukhari wherein it is reported from Urwah ibn Zubair: “Sayedah Khadijah died three years before Hijrah; the Holy Prophet solemnised nikah with Sayedah ‘Aishah two years after that. Then it was consummated at the age of nine years.” This works out to be correct that the nikah was solemnised one year before Hijrah when she was six years old and consummation took place in 2 A.H. when she was nine years.”

The above quotations amply bear out that both Syed Nadvi and Syed Maududi agree to the correctness of
reports stating the age of Sayedah ‘Aishah at six years at *nikah* and nine years at the consummation. Their only worry seems to be the calculation of the correct year of the Call and the *Hijrah* for fixing these ages in those calendar years. Both of them start with a preconception that the age of six years for *nikah* and nine years for consummation are correct and true, and set out in search of the correct year of the Call and *Hijrah* in which these preconceived ages will fit. This hardly can be called a scientific method of finding her correct age. This, rather, may be called an effort to find a correct date for a given age.

**The other view**

As far as my information goes, the first voice against the common misconception about the age of Sayedah ‘Aishah at her marriage was raised by Maulana Muhammad Ali, MA, LL.B., in 1924, in his *Muhammad the Prophet*, wherein he wrote:

“The popular misconception as to Aishah’s age may be removed here. That she had not attained majority is clear enough, but that she was not so young as six years of age is also true. In the first place, it is clear that she had reached an age when betrothal could take place in the ordinary course and must therefore have been approaching the age of majority. Again, the *Isabah* ( ), speaking of the Prophet’s daughter Fatimah, says that she was about five years older than ‘Aishah. It is a well-established fact that Fatimah was born when the Ka’bah was being rebuilt, that is, five years before the Call or a little before it, and so ‘Aishah was certainly not below ten years at the time of her marriage with the Holy Prophet (sas) in the tenth year of the Call. This conclusion is borne out by the testimony of ‘Aishah, herself, who is reported to have related that when the chapter of the Holy Qur’an entitled *The Moon* (the 54th chapter) was revealed, she was a girl playing about and that she remembered certain verses then revealed. Now, the fifty-fourth chapter could not have been revealed later than the fifth year of the Call, and therefore the report which states her to have been six years old in the tenth year of the Call when her marriage ceremony was gone through cannot be correct, because this would show her to have born about the time of the revelation of the 54th chapter. All these considerations show her to have been not less than ten years old at the time of her marriage. And, as the period between her marriage and its consummation was not less than five years, because the consummation took place in the second year of the Fight, it follows that she could not have been less than fifteen at that time. The popular account that she was six years at marriage and nine years at the time of consummation is decidedly not correct, because it supposes the period between the marriage and its consummation to be only three years, while this is historically wrong.”

Sulaiman Nadvi took Maulana Muhammad Ali to task (for his above-quoted view) in note 2 on page 26 of the third edition of his *Seerat-i-Aishah* in the following words:

“Some irresponsible persons who think that the marriage with a girl of tender age was not befitting for the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) have tried to prove that the age of Hazrat ‘Aishah Siddiqah at her marriage was sixteen years instead of six years. All such efforts are useless and all such claims are illogical. Not a single word in the *Hadith* and in history can be found in their support.”

**Nadvi contradicts himself**

In spite of this severe criticism of
Muhammad Ali’s view, Nadvi not only contradicts himself about the age of Hazrat ‘Aishah, but provides supporting evidence to Muhammad Ali’s views when, writing about the last days of the life of Hazrat ‘Aishah, he writes on page 111 of the same Seerat-i-Aishah: “Hazrat ‘Aishah was a widow and she passed forty years of her life as a widow.” Further, on page 153 he writes: “The last days of the Khilafat (Caliphate) of Amir Muawiyya were the last days of the life of Hazrat ‘Aishah and her age at that time was sixty-seven years.” Now, if we deduct forty years of her widowed life from sixty-seven years, then we find she was twenty-seven years of age at the time of the passing away of the Holy Prophet in 11 A.H. and not eighteen years as reported by Nadvi in the earlier pages of the same book. Since the total period of the Call is twenty-three years, therefore, according to this account she was born about four years before the Call and not in the fourth year of the Call as Nadvi tried to make us believe in his earlier pages quoted herein above. Consequently, her age at the time of the nikah in the tenth year of the Call works out to fourteen to fifteen years and not six years, as Nadvi himself so assertively reported. According to this account, Hazrat ‘Aishah’s age at the time of consummation of her marriage in 2 A.H. works out to nineteen to twenty years before the Call.

Other sources
There are other important events recorded in history which provide definite evidence about the age of Hazrat ‘Aishah.

1. The well-known historian, Ibn Jareer al-Tabari, writes on page 50 of volume 4 of his Book of History: “Abu Bakr married two ladies in the days of ignorance (pre-Call era). Fateelah, daughter of Abd al-Aza, was the first, from whom Abdullah and Asma were born. Umm-i-Rooman was the second, from whom Abd al-Rahman and ‘Aishah were born. All four children of Abu Bakr were born in the days of ignorance (Jahiliyyah, that is, pre-Islamic days) from the two above-named ladies.

2. It is a well-known fact of history that Abu Bakr’s son, Abd al-Rahman, fought against the Muslims in the battle of Badr. His age at that time was twenty-one to twenty-two years, and although he was older than ‘Aishah, there is no evidence to show that the difference between their ages was more than three or four years. This fact lends support to the view that Hazrat ‘Aishah was born four or five years before the Call.

3. The well-known historian and scholar, ‘Allama ‘Imad-ud-Deen Ibn Katheer, writes in his Al-Badayah about Sayedah Asma, daughter of Hazrat Abu Bakr, (Allah be pleased with him) (and we hope Maulana Syed Abul Ala Maududi must have seen it as he referred to Al-Badaya in his article): “Asma died in 73 A.H. at the age of one hundred years. She was ten years older than her sister, ‘Aishah. Now, according to this report, Asma would have been twenty-seven to twenty-eight years old at the time of Hijrah, and since she was ten years older than Sayedah ‘Aishah, therefore, the age of Sayedah ‘Aishah would have been seventeen or eighteen years at the time of Hijrah. Accordingly, her birth falls about four or five years before the Call, and her age at the time of the consummation of marriage in 2 A.H. will work out to nineteen to twenty years.

4. The author of the well-known collection of Hadith, Mishkat al-Masabeh, Sheikh Waheed-ud-Deen, writes in his well-known book Ahmal fi Asma’ al-Rijjal:

“At the time of the consummation of her marriage, Sayedah ‘Aishah’s age was not less than eighteen to nineteen years.”

All the above quotations give ample refutation to the common misconception that Sayedah ‘Aishah’s age at the time of her nikah was six years and at the time of consummation of marriage it was only nine years. If Muslim scholars of the present era deem fit to make an objective research instead of beating the old track, they will find ample material in the pages of history to arrive at a correct age for Sayedah ‘Aishah. This indeed would be a great service to the cause of Islam. – Islamic Review, December 1980, U.S.A. ◆
The Muslim Literary Trust of Trinidad and Tobago expresses heartfelt condolences to Brother Fazlu Ali and his family on the recent passing away (9/8/2002) of his dear wife, Patsy.

Sister Patsy was the President of the Sum Sum Hill Women’s Association and a dedicated worker for the jama’at. This was evidenced by the large numbers of persons who attended the two nights of wake and the funeral service to pay final respects and to give consolation to the bereaved family.

Editor of The Message, Imam Kalamazad Mohammed, one of the speakers on the programme on the second night of the wake, gave the following words of consolation:

1. Allah, Most High, is with those who show patience and perseverance. O you who believe, seek assistance through patience and prayer; surely Allah is with the patient (2:153).

2. In the opening chapter of the Holy Qur’an (Al Fatihah) we pray for guidance, that is, Guide us on the right path, and Allah promises us that if we are patient and rely on Him, He will make us of the rightly guided ones (muhtadun). Those are they on whom are blessings and mercy from their Lord; and those are the followers of the right course (2:157). Guidance here means union with Allah.

3. A source of great strength is the knowledge that Allah does not place more burdens on us than we can bear. Allah imposes not on any soul a duty beyond its scope. For it, is that which it earns (of good), and against it that which it works (of evil). Our Lord, punish us not if we forget or make a mistake. Our Lord, do not lay on us a burden as Thou didst lay on those before us. Our Lord, impose not on us (afflictions) which we have not the strength to bear. And pardon us! And grant us protection! And have mercy on us! Thou art our Patron, so grant us victory over the disbelieving people (2:286). He also gives us the kinds of difficulties that He knows we can handle, and for which He has prepared us.

4. We can rest assured that Allah knows our condition. He knows indeed your condition (24:64); And He is with you wherever you are (57:4).

5. Allah invites us to call upon Him: Pray to Me, I will answer you (40:60); I answer the prayer of the supplicant when he calls on Me (2:186), for He is nearer to us than our life vein: We are nearer to him than his life-vein (50:15).

6. We should never despair of His mercy, for if we have taqwa (piety), help and blessings will come to us from unexpected sources: And whoever keeps his duty to Allah, He ordains a way out for him.... And whoever trusts in Allah, He is sufficient for Him.... And whoever keeps his duty to Allah, He makes his affair easy for him.... Allah lays not on any soul a burden beyond that which He has given it. Allah brings about easy after difficulty (65:2,3,4,5,7).

Even in the depths of our despair we shall experience periods of ease and relief: Surely with difficulty is ease. With difficulty is surely ease (94:5-6).

7. We are given the assurance that if we are truly sincere to Allah, He will remove our evils from us and elevate us from the state of utter distress and despondency (mudtarr) to that of vicegerents of His (khalifas): Or who answers the distressed one (mudtarr) when he calls upon Him and removes the evil, and will make you successors (khalifas) in the earth (27:62). In fact, such will be our status that our lives will constitute a living proof of the existence of Allah (hujjat-ul lah).

8. Everyone in the world has to experience periodically some disappointment, grief, pain, anguish and various other kinds of calamities, but the true believer is purged of his weaknesses, achieves high moral and spiritual rank and comes closer to Allah as a result of his ordeals. Remember that iron has to pass through fire before it becomes steel: And be not weak-hearted, nor grieve, and you will have the upper hand.
if you are believers. If a wound has afflicted you, a wound like it has also afflicted the (disbelieving) people. And We bring these days to men by turns, that Allah may know those who believe and take witnesses from among you (3:139-140).

9. In times of great tribulation, we are given the opportunity to colour ourselves with some of the colours of Allah: (We take) Allah’s colour, and who is better than Allah at colouring (2:138). For example, Allah is As-Sabur (The One Who is most patient and forbearing), so if we show patience (sabr) we, too, can become like Him according to our capacity.

10. When we suffer a heavy blow, we gain deep insight into our inner qualities. We discover our weaknesses and our strengths and even more, we have the opportunity to develop high morals that we did not possess before. As the poet, Ghalib, exhorts us: “Think of what the drop of water has to undergo before it becomes a pearl.”

11. If we bear our calamities in the right manner, our faith will penetrate every nerve and tissue of ours and move to our limbs from our heart just as blood flows from the heart to every part of our body. We must remember that mere theoretical knowledge of swimming does not make us great swimmers. To be of use, our knowledge must be put into practice.

12. Another source of encourage-

ment is the realisation that others have suffered more than we have and they have survived and even excelled in life. The greatest exemplar of this is the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sas) who lost eleven children and never complained to Allah nor questioned Him.

13. Finally, when all is said and done, we must never forget that Allah is peace, and that peace comes from Him and peace is returned to Him and only in Him do hearts find tranquillity: Those who believe and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah, now surely in Allah’s remembrance do hearts find rest (13:28). Or, as Jigar Moradabadi puts it:

Koi yeh keh de gulshan gulshan
Lakh balaa’en, ek nasheman.

Let everyone in the world know,
That there are millions of tribulations, but only one nest.

It is our fervent wish that we display the requisite sabr (fortitude) for each circumstance in life, as the Holy Qur’an commands us in 3:198:

O you who believe, show (normal) patience and (extraordinary) steadfastness and guard the frontiers (of your heart from despondency, depression, etc.) and keep your duty to Allah (love Him and take Him as your shield) so that you may be successful (that you may develop to the fullest the hidden faculties of your body and soul).

We must always bear in mind that it is our duty to encourage and support others also, especially in their hour of trial, as the Holy Qur’an exhorts us:

… exhort one another to Truth and exhort one another to sabr (patience) (103:3).

In addition, we must seize the opportunity during our dark hours to develop high moral qualities like determination, tolerance, sympathy, empathy and to be lenient and understanding not only to our own selves, but to others also, as these two sayings of the Holy Prophet (sas) and an anonymous poet advise us:

“Allah is kind only to those who show kindness to those on earth.”

“If you are compassionate to those on earth, Heaven will be kind to you.”

Poem:

If you have learned to walk
A little more sure-footedly than I,
Be patient with my stumbling then
And know that only as I do
my best and try
May I attain the goal
For which we both are striving.
If through experience your soul
Has gained heights which I
As yet in dim-lit vision see,
Hold out your hand and point the way,
Lest from its straightness I
After due consideration, I have come to the conclusion that this was a very difficult topic to answer. In his Last Sermon, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sas) said: “All those who listen to me shall pass on my words to others and those to others again.” Let us see how far his message has reached and which countries have most of his followers.

The Holy Qur’an says in 9:33: *He it is Who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth that He may cause it to prevail over all the religions, though the polytheists are adverse.*

The prophecy of the ultimate triumph of Islam in the whole world is repeated thrice in the Holy Qur’an. The Prophet’s death, instead of putting a check on the advancement of Islam, was a signal for an unparalleled advance of his religion. The first century of the Muslim era saw North America, Africa, Asia Minor, Persia and Central Asia but also brought to light the amazing fact that Islam, coming in contact with all the great religions of the world, conquered the hearts of the followers of every religion and they accepted the message of truth in vast numbers, so that great Muslim communities sprang up in the whole known world and the light of Islam enlightened the whole world from the farthest East to the farthest West.

Islam spread from the West throughout South Asia from the early eighth century to become the largest minority religion in India. In fact, with 101.5 million Muslims (12.1% of the population), India has at least the fourth largest Muslim population in the world after Indonesia (174.3 mil-

Let us constantly bear in mind that Allah is Ash-Shakur (the Recogniser, the Appreciator, the One Who gives large rewards even for the smallest of works and multiplies them beyond measure; that He knows our condition (24:64) and that He does not waste the reward of a worker from among us, whether male or female (3:194).

Therefore, let us all heed the creed of this unknown poet:

**A good creed**

*If any little word of ours Can make one life the brighter; If any little song of ours Can make one heart the lighter; God help us speak that little word,*

*And take our bit of singing And drop it in some lonely vale To set the echoes ringing. If any little love of ours Can make one life the sweeter; If any little care of ours Can make one step the fleeter; If any little help may ease The burden of another; God give us love and care and strength To help along each other. If any little thought of ours Can make life the stronger; If any cheery smile of ours Can make its brightness longer; Then let us speak that thought today,*

*And be patient and thy patience is not but by (the help of) Allah.... Surely Allah is with those who keep their duty and those who do good (to others) (16:127-128).* 

*To Him do ascend the goodly words, and the goodly deed - He exalts it... (35:10).* 

May Allah bless us all and may we never despair of His mercy. Instead, may we use whatever calamities He ordains for us to develop moral and spiritual beauty and be of benefit to others also. ❖
lion), Pakistan (124 million) and Bangladesh (103 million). Some analysts put the number of Indian Muslims even higher - 128 million (in 1994), which would give India the second largest Muslim population in the world.

Islam was by far the dominant religion in Indonesia, with the greatest number of religious adherents - approximately 143 million or 86.9% of the population in 1985 which when adjusted for the 1992 estimates represent between 160 to 170 million adherents. This high percentage of Muslims made Indonesia the largest Islamic country in the world in the early 1990s.

About 97% of all Pakistanis are Muslims. Official documentation states that Sunni Muslims constitute 77% of the population and Shia Muslims make up an additional 20%. Christians, Hindus and members of other religions each account for about 1% of the population.

One of every four persons in the world is a Muslim. The Muslim population has increased by over 235% in the last fifty years to nearly 1.6 billion. By comparison, the Christian population has increased by only 40%, the Hindu by 117% and the Buddhist population by 63%. Islam is the second largest religious group in France, Great Britain and the United States. The Muslim population in the United States is significantly larger than the Jewish by 4 million.

The Muslim population has grown since the period 1989 to 1998 in the following countries: North America (by 25%), Africa (by 2.15%), Asia (by 12.57%), Europe (by 142.35%), Latin America (by 4.73%), and Australia (by 257.01%). The world Muslim population in 1998 was 1 678 400 000. The projected Muslim population in the world in the year 2000 was 1 902 095 000.

Islam has also been making progress in countries such as Afghanistan, Albania, Brunei, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Greece, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Kenya, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Sweden, Tanzania, Thailand, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Vietnam and Yemen.

When one considers the small number of Muslims who initially spread Islam from Spain and Morocco in the West to India and China in the East, I am reminded of the verse of the Holy Qur’an which states: And remember when you were few, deemed weak in the land, fearing lest people should carry you off by force, He sheltered you and strengthened you with His help, and gave you of the good things that you might give thanks (8:26).

One should feel proud of the great empire that Islam is establishing. Consider 41:53 of the Holy Qur’an which states: We will soon show them our signs in the farthest regions and among their own people until it is quite clear to them that it is truth.

What is stated here is that Islam will quickly spread, not only in Arabia, but in the remote regions of the earth and this prophecy was revealed early at Makkah when Muslims were being severely persecuted and the message of Islam has apparently little hope of finding acceptance anywhere. If the prophecy is so clear, its fulfilment is clearer still. Within twenty years of its birth, Islam spread through the whole of Arabia, and within one hundred years, it reached the farthest regions of the earth, both in the East and the West.

Is it not encouraging knowing that we belong to the best and fastest growing religion?◆

He it is Who has sent His Messenger with the guidance and the religion of Truth that He may make it prevail over all religions. And Allah is enough for a witness. H.Q. 48:28

You are the best nation raised up for men: you enjoin good and forbid evil and you believe in Allah. And if the People of the Book had believed, it would have been better for them. Some of them are believers but most of them are transgressors. H.Q. 3:109
[More than one hundred years ago, the Imam of the Age, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Sahib proclaimed to the world that contrary to the established belief among the ‘ulama of Islam, the door of *ijtihad* in religious matters was always open and that no one had the authority to abrogate this God-given right of Muslims. Of course, this was greeted with the usual uproar of emotional outrage, but this did not deter him from proclaiming the truth.

Later on, one of his devoted disciples, Maulana Muhammad Ali, listed in an Urdu publication (1931) some of the differences in belief between so-called conservative Muslims and Ahmadis. The following excerpt is taken from Maulana SM Tufail’s English translation (*The Ahmadiyyah Movement*) of Maulana Muhammad Ali’s Urdu publication, *Tahrik-e Ahmadiyyat*:

“The sixth distinction (between Ahmadis and non-Ahmadis): The door of *ijtihad* is still open

However good and perfect principles may be given to a nation, unless that nation has an opportunity for progress, such principles cannot be of much use. Principles are like the roots of a tree and the other details like its branches. If there is enough space for the tree to spread its branches far and wide, its strong roots indeed become a help for its proper growth. If there is no scope for its branches to spread, its roots shall also soon shrivel and cramped cause an early death to the whole plant. The tree of Islam had strong roots in the form of sound principles and its branches had a great scope to spread because of the opening of the door of *ijtihad* (exercise of judgement). *Ijtihad* means to exert oneself and make use of one’s intelligence for some cause. This door was kept open in Islam in respect of details of *shari’ah*. In matters of Law where no details were found in the Qur’ān and the *Hadith*, Muslims could make use of their intellectual faculties for understanding and solving the new problems with which they might be faced from time to time.

Islam is a universal religion in its scope and teachings, free from and above all limitations of race, colour and nationality. Although there was no religion to emerge after it, yet human needs are limitless and every age, nation and country is faced with new problems for the solution and fulfilment of which human faculties must be utilised. In other words, by means of Divine revelation existing in the Qur’ān in the form of wahy jali or wahy matluww (revelation which is recited) and in the *Hadith* in the form of wahy khafi (inner revelation), man’s intellect has been given the status for the working out of laws for human needs. It is also evident that if no use is made of human faculties, they become obsolete. Thus, if Muslims were not guided to make use of their mental powers they would have suffered the same fate. Accordingly, as long as they considered the door of *ijtihad* open and made use of their faculties of judgement, they made progress in all walks of life. But, after the death of some great *Imams*, when the door of *ijtihad* was considered to have been closed, their intellectual powers were also paralysed and their spiritual and material progress quickly ceased. The Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement removed this fatal misunderstanding from the minds of Muslims and showed them that the door of *ijtihad* was opened by the Prophet Muhammad, himself, and no one else has any right to close it. And none of the four *Imams* had said anything contrary to it. The world of today has given rise to so many new problems that there is a growing need of rejudication and *ijtihad* in details of Law. by opening the door of *ijtihad* all over again, Ahmadiyyat has, in fact, opened new vistas for the progress of Islam and Muslims” (pp. 287-288).

In the light of the above, it is refreshingly invigorating and heartening to read the following article by a Muslim scholar Zia-ud-Din Sardar, Pro-
fessor of Postcolonial Studies, Lon-
don, who, we emphasise, is not an
Ahmadi. We are reproducing the ar-
ticle, entitled “Rethinking Islam”,
from the magazine, The Dawn (which
is published quarterly in Suriname,
South America). However, it was
originally taken from Islam-
Online.net. – Ed.]

SERIOUS RETHINKING

Serious rethinking within Islam is
long overdue. Muslims have been
comfortably relying, or rather falling
back, on age-old interpretations for
much too long. This is why we feel
so painful in the contemporary world,
so uncomfortable with modernity.
Scholars and thinkers have been sug-
gesting for well over a century that
we need to make a serious attempt at
Ijtihad, at reasoned struggle and re-
thinking, to reform Islam. At the be-
eginning of the last century,
Jamaluddin Afghani and Mohammad
Abduh led the call for a new Ijtihad;
and along the way many notable in-
tellectuals, academics and sages have
added to this plea - not least
Mohammad Iqbal, Malik bin Nabbi
and Abdul Qadir Audah. Yet,
Ijtihad

Need of Ijtihad

We have failed to respond to the sum-
mons to Ijtihad for some very pro-
found reasons. Prime amongst these
is the fact that the context of our sa-
cred texts – the Qur’an and the ex-
amples of the Prophet Muhammad,
our absolute frame of reference – has
been frozen in history. One can only
have an interpretative relationship
with a text – even more so if the text
is perceived to be eternal. But if the
interpretative context of the text is
never our context, not our own time,
then its interpretation can hardly have
any real meaning or significance for
us as we are now. Historic interpre-
tations constantly drag us back to his-
tory, to frozen and ossified context of
long ago; worse, to perceived and
romanticised contexts that have not
ever existed in history. This is why
while Muslims have a strong emo-
tional attachment to Islam, Islam per
se, as a worldview and system of eth-
ics, has little or no direct relevance
to their daily lives apart from the ob-
vious concerns of rituals and worship.
Ijtihad
and fresh thinking have not
been possible because there is no con-
text within which they can actually
take place.

The freezing of interpretation, the
closure of ‘the gates of Ijtihad’, has
had a devastating effect on Muslim
thought and action. In particular, it
has produced what I can only describe
as three metaphysical catastrophes:
the elevation of the Shari’ah to the
level of the Divine, with the conse-
quent removal of agency from the
believers, and the equation of Islam
with the State. Let me elaborate.

Shari’ah and Qur’anic Law

Most Muslims consider the Shari’ah,
commonly translated as ‘Islamic law’,
to be divine. Yet, there is nothing di-
vine about the Shari’ah. The only
thing that can legitimately be de-
described as divine in Islam is the
Qur’an. The Shari’ah is a human con-
struction; an attempt to understand
the divine will in a particular context.
This is why the bulk of the Shari’ah
actually consists of fiqh or jurispru-
dence, which is nothing more than
legal opinion of classical jurists. The
very term fiqh was not in vogue be-
fore the Abbasid period when it was
actually formulated and codified. But
when fiqh assumed its systematic le-
gal form, it incorporated three vital
aspects of Muslim society of the
Abbasid period. At that juncture,
Muhammad became the universal
Prophet and Islam was the only
faith. The fiqh rulings on apostasy,
for example, derive not from the
Qur’an but from this logic. Moreover,
the world was simple and could eas-
ily be divided into black and white;
however, the division of the world into
Daral Islam and Daral Harb. Furthermore, as the framers of law were not by this stage managers of society, the law became merely theory which could not be modified - the framers of the law were unable to see where the faults lay and what aspect of the law needed fresh thinking and reformulation. Thus fiqh, as we know it today, evolved on the basis of a division between those who were governing and set themselves apart from society and those who were framing the law; the epistemological assumptions of a ‘golden’ phase of Muslim history also came into play. When we describe the Shari’ah as divine, we actually provide divine sanctions for the rulings of by-gone fiqh.

Evolution of fiqh

What this means in reality is that when Muslim countries apply or impose the Shari’ah – the demands of Muslims from Indonesia to Nigeria – the contradictions that were inherent in the formulation and evolution of fiqh come to the fore. That is why whenever the Shari’ah is imposed – that is, fiqhi legislation is applied, out of context from the time when it was formulated and out of step with ours - Muslim societies acquire a medieval feel. We can see that in Saudi Arabia, the Sudan and the Taliban Afghanistan. When narrow adherence to fiqh, to the dictates of this or that school of thought, whether it has any relevance to real world or not, becomes the norm, ossification sets in. The Shari’ah will solve all our problems becomes the common sentiment; and it becomes necessary for a group with vested interest in this notion of the Shari’ah to preserve its territory, the source of its power and prestige, at all costs. An outmoded body of law is thus equated with the Shari’ah, and criticism is shunned and outlawed by appealing to its divine nature.

The elevation of the Shari’ah to the divine level also means the believers themselves have no agency: since The Law is a priori given, people themselves have nothing to do expect to follow it. Believers thus become passive receivers rather than active seekers of truth. In reality, the Shari’ah is nothing more than a set of principles, a framework of values, that provide Muslim societies with guidance. But these sets of principles and values are not a static given but are dynamically derived within changing contexts. As such, the Shari’ah is a problem-solving methodology rather than law. It requires the believers to exert themselves and constantly reinterpret the Qur’an and look at the life of the Prophet Muhammad with ever changing fresh eyes. Indeed, the Qur’an has to be reinterpreted from epoch to epoch – which means the Shari’ah, and by extension Islam itself, has to be reformulated with changing contexts. The only thing that remains constant in Islam is the text of the Qur’an itself – its concepts providing the anchor for ever changing interpretations.

Islam contains universal moral and ethical values

Islam is not so much a religion but an integrative worldview: that is to say, it integrates all aspects of reality by providing a moral perspective on every aspect of human endeavour. Islam does not provide ready-made answers to all human problems; it provides a moral and just perspective within which Muslims must endeavour to find answers to all human problems. But if everything is a priori given, in the shape of a divine Shari’ah, then Islam is reduced to a totalistic ideology. Indeed, this is exactly what the Islamic movements – in particularly Jamaat-e-Islami (both Pakistani and Indian varieties) and the Muslim Brotherhood – have reduced Islam to. Which brings me to the third metaphysical catastrophe. Place this ideology within a nation state, with divinely attributed Shari’ah at its centre, and you have an ‘Islamic state’. All contemporary ‘Islamic states’, from Iran, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan to aspiring Pakistan, are based on this ridiculous assumption. But once Islam, as an ideology, becomes a programme of action of a vested group, it loses its humanity and becomes a battlefield where morality, reason and justice are readily sacrificed at the alter of emotions. Moreover, the step from a totalistic ideology to a totalitarian order where every human situation is open to state-arbitration is a small one. The transformation of Islam into a state-based political ideology not only deprives it of its all moral and ethical content; it also de-bunks most of Muslim history as un-Islamic. Invariably, when Islamists rediscover a ‘golden’ past, they do so only in order to disdain the present and mock the future. All we are left with is messianic chaos, as we saw so vividly in the Taliban regime, where all politics as the domain of action is paralysed and meaningless pieties become the foundational truth of the state.

The totalitarian vision of Islam as a State thus transforms Muslim politics into a metaphysics: in such an enterprise, every action can be justified as ‘Islamic’ by the dictates of political expediency as we witnessed in revolutionary Iran.
The three metaphysical catastrophes are accentuated by an overall process of reduction that has become the norm in Muslim societies. The reductive process itself is also not new; but now it has reached such an absurd state that the very ideas that are supposed to take Muslims societies towards humane values now actually take them in the opposite direction. From the subtle beauty of a perennial challenge to construct justice through mercy and compassion, we get mechanistic formulae fixed with the extremes repeated by people convinced they have no duty to think for themselves because all questions have been answered for them by the classical *'ulamas*, far better men long dead. And because everything carries the brand name of Islam, to question it, or argue against it, is tantamount to voting for sin.

**Definition of a true Islamic scholar**

The process of reduction started with the very notion of *'alim* (scholar) itself. Just who is an *'alim*? What makes him an authority? In early Islam, an *'alim* was anyone who acquired *'ilm*, or knowledge, which was itself described in a broad sense. We can see that in the early classifications of knowledge by such scholars as al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali and Ibn Khuludun. Indeed, both the definition of knowledge and its classification was a major intellectual activity in classical Islam. So all learned men, scientists as well as philosophers, scholars as well as theologians, constituted the *'ulama*. But after the *gates of ijtihad* were closed during the Abbasid era, *'ilm* was increasingly reduced to religious knowledge and the *'ulama* came to constitute only religious scholars.

**Concept of *ijma* in Islam**

Similarly, the idea of *ijma*, the central notion of communal life in Islam, has been reduced to the consensus of a select few. *Ijma* literally means *consensus of the people*. The concept dates back to the practice of Prophet Muhammad himself as leader of the original polity of Muslims. When the Prophet Muhammad wanted to reach a decision, he would call the whole Muslim community – then, admittedly not very large – to the mosque. A discussion would ensue; arguments for and against would be presented. Finally, the entire gathering would reach a consensus. Thus, a democratic spirit was central to communal and political life in early Islam. But over time the clerics and religious scholars have removed the people from the equation – and reduced *ijma* to *the consensus of the religious scholars*. Not surprisingly, authoritarianism, theocracy and despotism reign supreme in the Muslim world. The political domain finds its model in what has become the accepted practice and metier of the authoritatively *religious* adepts, those who claim the monopoly of exposition of Islam. Obscurantist *Mullahs*, in the guise of the *'ulama*, dominate Muslim societies and circumscribe them with fanaticism and absurdly reductive logic.

Numerous other concepts have gone through similar process of reduction. The concept of *Ummah*, the global spiritual community of Muslims, has been reduced to the ideals of a nation state: ‘my country right or wrong’ has been transpose to read ‘my *Ummah* right or wrong’. So even despots like Saddam Hussein are now defended on the basis of ‘*Ummah* consciousness’ and ‘unity of the *Ummah*. *Jihad* has now been reduced to the single meaning of ‘Holy War’. This translation is perverse not only because the concept’s spiritual, intellectual and social components have been stripped away, but it has been reduced to war by any means, including terrorism. So anyone can now declare *ijtihad* on any-one, without any ethical or moral rhyme or reason. Nothing could be more perverted, or pathologically more distant from the initial meaning of *jihad*. Its other connotations, including personal struggle, intellectual endeavour, and social construction have all but evaporated. *Istislah*, normally rendered as ‘public interest’ and a major source of Islamic law, has all but disappeared from Muslim consciousness. And *Ijtihad*, as I have suggested, has now been reduced to little more than a pious desire.

**Justification of terrorism from the Qur’an?**

But the violence performed to sacred Muslim concepts is insignificant compared to the reductive way the Qur’an and the sayings and examples of the Prophet Muhammad are brandied about. What the late Muslim scholar, Fazlur Rahman called the ‘atomistic’ treatment of the Qur’an is now the norm: almost anything and everything is justified by quoting individual bits of verses out of context. After the September 11 event, for example, a number of Taliban supporters, including a few in Britain, justified their actions by quoting the following verse: We will put terror into the hearts of the unbelievers. They serve other gods for whom no sanction has been revealed. Hell shall be their home (3:149). Yet, the apparent meaning attributed to this verse could not be further from the true spirit of...
the Qur’an. In this particular verse, the Qur’an is addressing Prophet Muhammad himself. It was revealed during the battle of Uhud, when the small and ill-equipped army of the Prophet, faced a much larger and well-equipped enemy. He was concerned about the outcome of the battle. The Qur’an reassures him and promises the enemy will be terrified with the Prophet’s unprofessional army. Seen in its context, it is not a general instruction to all Muslims; but a commentary on what was happening at that time. Similarly ahadith are quoted to justify the most extremes of behaviour. And the Prophet’s own appearance, his beard and clothes, have been turned into a fetish: so now it is not just obligatory for a ‘good Muslim’ to have a beard, but its length and shape must also conform to dictates! The Prophet has been reduced to signs and symbols – the spirit of his behaviour, the moral and ethical dimensions of his actions, his humility and compassion, the general principles he advocated have all been subsumed by the logic of absurd reduction.

The accumulative effect of the metaphysical catastrophes and endless reduction has transformed the cherished tenets of Islam into instruments of militant expediency and moral bankruptcy. For over two decades, in books like The Future of Muslim Civilisation (1979) and Islamic Futures: The Shape of Ideas to Come (1985), I have been arguing that Muslim civilisation is now so fragmented and shattered that we have to rebuild it, ‘brick by brick’. It is now obvious that Islam itself has to be rethought, idea by idea. We need to begin with the simple fact that Muslims have no monopoly on truth, on what is right, on what is good, on justice, nor the intellectual and moral reflexes that promote these necessities. Like the rest of humanity, we have to struggle to achieve them using our own sacred notions and concepts as tools for understanding and reshaping contemporary reality.

**Reinterpretation of the Qur’an means to provide guidelines to Muslims**

The way to a fresh, contemporary appreciation of Islam requires confronting the metaphysical catastrophes and moving away from reduction to synthesis. Primarily, this requires Muslims, as individuals and communities, to reclaim agency: to insist on their right and duty, as believers and knowledgeable people, to interpret and reinterpret the basic sources of Islam: to question what now goes under the general rubric of Shari’ah, to declare that much of fiqh is now dangerously obsolete, to stand up to the absurd notion of an Islam confined by a geographically bound state. We cannot, if we really value our faith, leave its exposition in the hands of under-educated elites, religious scholars whose lack of comprehension of the contemporary world is usually matched only by their disdain and contempt for all its ideas and cultural products. Islam has been permitted to languish as the professional domain of people more familiar with the world of the eleventh century than the twenty-first century we now inhabit. And we cannot allow this class to bury the noble idea of Ijtihad into frozen and distant history.

Ordinary Muslims around the world who have concerns, questions and considerable moral dilemmas about the current state of affairs of Islam must reclaim the basic concepts of Islam and reframe them in a broader context. *Ijma* must mean consensus of all citizens leading to participatory and accountable governance. *Jihad* must be understood in its complete spiritual meaning as the struggle for peace and justice as a lived reality for all peoples everywhere. And the notion of the *Ummah* must be refined so it becomes something more than a mere reductive abstraction. As Anwar Ibrahim has argued, the *Ummah* is not ‘merely the community of all those who profess to be Muslims’; rather, it is a ‘moral conception of how Muslims should become a community in relation to each other, other communities and the natural world’. Which means *Ummah* incorporates not just the Muslims, but justice-seeking and oppressed people everywhere. In a sense, the movement towards synthesis is an advance towards the primary meaning and message of Islam – as a moral and ethical way of looking and shaping the world, as a domain of peaceful civic culture, a participatory endeavour, and a holistic mode of knowing, being and doing.


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**Do they not reflect on the Qur’an? Or, are there locks on the hearts?** H.Q. 47:24
Humming Bird Gold Medal for Sister Zarina

Recognition of Her Services to the Promotion of Inter-religious Understanding and Community Welfare

It is with feelings of unbounded happiness and gratitude to Allah that the Muslim Literary Trust of Trinidad and Tobago extends congratulations to and praise for Allah’s choicest blessings on one of its senior foundation members, Sister Zarina Mohammed. Our dear sister has devoted her entire life to the service of humanity and the Trust is particularly elated that the Trinidad and Tobago Government has recognised her contribution to society by conferring upon her the very high award of the Humming Bird Gold Medal for Religious and Community Service.

We pray that Allah may grant her long life, health and strength, honour and dignity, and as long as she is alive, may she continue to be beneficial to mankind.

We also give praise and thanks to Allah and beseech Him for blessings on her family, relatives, friends, helpers and all those who assisted in shaping the exemplary personality of our Sister Zarina.

The Holy Qur’an has given us the secret of success when it says: Seek assistance through patience, perseverance, creative work and prayer (2:153), for Allah is not the least unjust to His servants as He, Himself, promises: I will not suffer the work of any worker among you to be lost, whether male of female… (3:194).

Al-hamdu lil-Lah.

Enayat Mohammed, Chairman.

Zarina Mohammed, social worker – Humming Bird Medal (Gold) presented to her by the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, His Excellency A.N.R. Robinson on 31st August, 2002 at President’s House on the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of Independence.

The following is a brief review of Sister Zarina’s contribution to religion and community service by Nasir Ahmad, Editor of The Message.

A resume of her religious and social activities

Sister Zarina Muhammad was born to Bro. Muhammad Yusuf and Sister Sharifan of Prince of Wales Street, San Fernando, Trinidad. She was involved from her early childhood in practising her religion, having received elementary training by attending evening and Sunday-morning Maktab classes.

Because of her strong, solid foundation in Islam, though it was quite an inner struggle, the nuns were unable to convert her to Roman Catholicism at the Convent where she spent her entire school life as the first non-Catholic to gain entry there. Having that background of masjid and maktab environment, soon after graduating, she became active in the Prince Albert Street Masjid Jama’at activities, and it was during this time, by Allah’s inspiration, that she planted the seed for the formation of the San Fernando Muslim Women’s Association. She served as its secretary for three years and later as president for eleven years until 1973 when, because of her marriage, she was obliged to move from San Fernando to Mc Bean, Couva and became a prominent member of the Freeport/Uquire Muslim Association (The Fireburn Jama’at).

The year 1964 was a significant turning point for Sister Zarina, for although she was involved in several Islamic activities, something deep within her was not satisfied. There was a missing link to contentment, a yearning to do something more meaningful.

It was then that the late Maulana S. M. Tufail came to Trinidad and she attended his first public lecture in Princes Town. She was so impressed by his calm but forceful manner in his dissertation of the Ahmadiyya Movement – a term about which she had heard much adverse comments – as well as his admirable display of humility and charisma, that she vowed that if this Movement could produce persons of his calibre with so much knowledge and such a sincere manner of putting over the significance
of the Ahmadiyya Movement so lucidly and convincingly, then she would endeavour to join that group – and the missing link was found.

She did not have much contact with the Maulana then, because she left the very next day for England where she took the opportunity to visit the famous Shah Jehan Mosque at Woking and meet two distinguished ladies - Mrs. Nasira Tufail and Mrs. Mahmudah Abdullah. She was very much touched by their hospitality and friendliness and their concern for her, a stranger, as well as their perception of the Ahmadiyya Movement. This experience, added to her fine impression of the earlier encounter with the Maulana, absolutely convinced her that with this Movement, which she realised was “true Islam”, she could find satisfaction in working for Islam and ultimately become a better and more fulfilled person. From then she became involved in several more religious and cultural activities.

During Maulana Tufail’s three-year station as the Missionary in Trinidad, she played a major role in his numerous activities by implementing the decisions of the Religious Committee of which she was an ardently active member. Being one of the successful students in learning Arabic in a three-month crash-course programme with the Maulana, she taught the elementary students at all the classes conducted at different jama’ats.

When the Council of Ahmadiyya Anjumans for the Western Hemisphere was formed in 1969, Sister Zarina Yusuf was elected General Secretary. Functioning in this position caused her to visit Guyana and Suriname several times to discuss and plan strategies for propagation work in these regions.

With the introduction of the local and regional conventions which took her and large contingents to Tobago, Grenada, Barbados, Guyana, Suriname, Pakistan and England, Sister Zarina filled an important component in these annual conferences as the Convention Secretary.

In 1976, when the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha’at-i Islam Trinidad and Tobago was established, she was elected Correspondence Secretary, a position in which she served for several years.

It was during the tenure of her position as president of the San Fernando Muslim Women’s Association that she was instrumental in the publication of Songs of Islam and The Qur’an Reader, two popular works of Maulana Tufail.

She worked as a librarian at the Carnegie Free Library, San Fernando, for almost twenty-two years (1953-1974). On the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Library she received an award for her dignified, unobtrusive and efficient service. After marriage, she resigned from the Library to join her husband, Brother Haniff Mohammed, a devoted Lahore Ahmadi, in his business.

Apart from being responsible for the formation of the San Fernando Women’s Association, she was instrumental in establishing the Ahmadiyya Women’s Movement in 1977 and was its president until 1988. Later, in 1989, she also organised the formation of the Freeport/Uquire Muslim Women’s Association and filled the role as president until 1995 when she returned to her San Fernando home after the demise of her husband.

During her trips to Guyana and Suriname, she revived the Guyana Ahmadiyya Women’s Movement which was dormant and also organised one in Suriname.

At the close of the 1969 Ahmadiyya Convention in Trinidad she was awarded a gold-pin for efficiency in the Convention work by the president of the Suriname Ahmadiyya Anjuman, the late Mr. Mohammed Radja.

And again, in 1989, she was honoured in Suriname at the 100th Anniversary Celebrations of the Ahmadiyya Movement for meritorious services rendered to the cause of the Ahmadiyya Movement in the Western Hemisphere. In this same year, she was blessed by Allah Who allowed her to proceed to the Holy City of Makkah to perform the Hajj. In 1999, at the 50th anniversary celebrations of the San Fernando Women’s Association, she received two awards for being a foundation member and the longest serving president. She is one of the founding trustees of the Muslim Literary Trust, Trinidad and Tobago which was formed in 1999. The Trust publishes a quarterly journal, The Message, and other publications on Islam. She is currently the President of the San Fernando Women’s Association and an executive member of the Prince Albert Street Mosque Board as well as a member of the National Muslim Women’s Organisation.
The books, *Commentary on Chapters 102-114 of the Holy Qur’an* and *Commentary on Chapters 86-101 of the Holy Qur’an* by Dr Basharat Ahmad. Translated by Kalamazad Mohammed, BA. Dip. Ed and Nasir Ahmad, BA. LL.B. An in-depth study and well-structured comprehensive explanation of the short popular *surahs* of al-Qur’an. Suitable for *imams* on which to base their *khutbahs*. Published by The Muslim Literary Trust 93 Calcutta Road No. 4 Freeport, Trinidad Phone: 868 673 0085 Price - $20.00 Cassettes containing songs of Islam Price - $20.00 Available from any member of the Trust.

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Commentary on Chapters 78-85 of the Holy Qur’an (Part 3) by Dr. Basharat Ahmad will be available Insha Allah, for Ramadan 2002

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