

Al-Fajr

# THE DAWN

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## ISLAM IS:

### INTERNATIONAL

- It recognizes prophets being raised among all nations and requires Muslims to believe in them all.
- Truth and goodness can be found in all religions. God treats all human beings equally justly, regardless of race, nationality or religion.

### PEACEFUL

- Allows use of force only in unavoidable self-defence.
- Teaches Muslims to live peacefully under any rule which accords them freedom of religion.

### TOLERANT

- Gives full freedom to everyone to hold and practise any creed or religion.
- Requires us to tolerate differences of belief and opinion.

### RATIONAL

- In all matters, it urges use of human reason and knowledge.
- Blind following is condemned and independence of thought is granted.

### INSPIRING

- Worship is not a ritual, but provides living contact with a Living God, Who answers prayers and speaks to His righteous servants even today as in the past.

### NON-SECTARIAN

- Every person professing Islam by the words *Lâ ilâha ill-Allâh Muḥammad-ur Rasûl-ullâh* (There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah) is a Muslim and cannot be expelled from Islam by anyone.

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*By Ziauddin Sardar,  
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AL-FAJR

Institute for Islamic Studies and Publications

# SIGNS OF GOD?

**As almost all religions teach, man will be held responsible for his deeds in this world by the Almighty. He will be rewarded or punished in this world or the Hereafter.**

**For nations, however, there will be no Day of Judgement in the next world; they will see the consequences of their deeds in this world. Many examples of this can be found in religious scriptures. In this respect, 7:59-171 of the Holy Qur'an can be mentioned, which narrate the stories of well-known prophets such as Noah, Lot and Moses, who were sent to their people.**

In the case of Moses, both the Bible and the Qur'an report that he warned Pharaoh but that Pharaoh was not willing to accept his message. According to the Bible (Exodus 7-12), ten plagues were sent in order that Pharaoh would repent. Despite these signs (17:101 of the Qur'an mentions nine signs in this respect), Pharaoh was not willing to accept Moses' message, resulting in the destruction of Pharaoh and his people by drowning in the Red Sea.

With this event in mind, we take the reader to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1865, Suffolk Vicar, J.C. Ryle (later Bishop of Liverpool), gave a speech about the foot and mouth epidemic of that time in England. He made an interesting comparison between this epidemic and several Biblical plagues:

1. The flood in the days of Noah (Gen. 6:17)
2. The famine in the days of Joseph (Gen. 41:25)
3. The murrain on the cattle (Ex. 9:3)

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## EDITORIAL

*The Dawn* is the English equivalent of the Dutch *De Dageraad*, which is published quarterly in Suriname. Although, nowadays, there are many magazines being published in English, the editorial team still decided to publish an English version of *De Dageraad* with the aim of presenting issues, which are being discussed in Suriname, to the world. For more Islamic articles in English, we recommend to the reader, in addition to *The Dawn*, magazines such as *The Message* (from Trinidad) and *The Light* (from the USA), among others. Articles published in these magazines are also published in our Dutch edition for our readers in Suriname and Holland.

We wish all readers much reading pleasure.

ples (almost) the same rights as heterosexual couples.

4. **April 2001:** Legalisation of abortion pills in Belgium. Dutch women are also very enthusiastic about these pills which, of course, encourages adultery and related sins.
5. **April 2002:** The law on (conditional) legalisation of euthanasia comes into force after acceptance by the

## The events:

- **Legalization of soft drugs**
- **Lifting ban on brothels**
- **Legalisation of gay marriages**
- **Legalisation of abortion pills**
- **Legalisation of euthanasia**

4. Disease on the Philistines (1 Samuel 5:7)
5. The pestilence in the days of David (2 Samuel 24:15)
6. The famine in the days of Elisha (2 Kings 8:1)
7. The stormy wind and tempest in the days of Jonah (Jonah 1:4).

He related these events to the foot and mouth epidemic and he named this 'The Finger of God', opposite to which he placed several national sins, such as covetousness, luxury and love of pleasure, neglecting of the Lord's day, drunkenness, adultery and the growing disposition to scepticism and infidelity.

Recently, Pastor Dr. Alan Clifford added some present-day sins to this list, such as racism, the lottery, rising divorce rate, child abuse, teenage promiscuity, drugs, legalised abortion, homosexuality, pornography and paedophilia.

Let us now take some more recent events into consideration. During the last few years, we have noticed several occurrences, to which several religious and other organisations protested. We mention in this respect:

1. **October 1996:** Legalisation of soft drugs in Holland. Also, Switzerland, Belgium and Paris are discussing relaxation of their drug policy. Not long ago, a 'drive-thru drug shop' was established in Venlo, Holland.
2. **October 1997:** Lifting of the ban on brothels in Holland. Also, Italy and Germany are discussing a similar decision.
3. **December 2000:** Legalisation of gay marriages in Holland. France and Belgium also want to establish regulations, which give gay cou-

Dutch Upper Chamber, (Holland being the first country in the world to legalise this), in April 2001.

In this article, we will not go into the question of whether these events are acceptable or not. But it is striking that, together with the aforementioned events, some other developments come to mind, which brought Europe into great agitation, such as food and mouth disease, BSE, swine-fever and the salmonella bacteria. (It is worth noting that in the time of Moses, murrain was sent as a sign.)

We wonder whether there is a relation between these murrains and the aforementioned developments. Should the murrains be considered as signs of God? And, if yes, are not all of us, due

to the increasing globalisation, responsible for halting the moral decline, such as with alcoholism, racism, gambling, pornography, adultery, etc, all over the world?

Apart from the question of whether the murrains and the developments in the Western world correspond with each other, it will surely be worth considering to work

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### The 'signs':

- **Food and mouth disease**
  - **BSE**
  - **Swine-fever**
  - **Salmonella bacteria**
- 

on maintaining norms and values. This can only have a positive effect on the citizens of the present-day

world.

### **Sources:**

- Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf*
- Dutch newspaper *Trouw*
- The Bible
- The Qur'an

*This article was published before in the Surinam daily newspaper 'De Ware Tijd', April 18, 2002.*

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## THE QUR'AN, THE ASIAN MARRIAGE DECREE AND THE PRACTISE

**After abolishment of slavery in Suriname in 1863, contract workers were transported from several parts of the world to Suriname to keep the work on the plantations going. Among these, there were people from India and Indonesia. These people had their traditional marriage services but marriages were not registered with the Government, which caused many problems regarding law of succession and registration of children.**

**To resolve these problems, the Asian Marriage Decree was established during the government of Prof. Kielstra. This Decree consists of two separate decrees, being the Muslim Marriage Decree and the Hindu Marriage Decree and the goal of these Decrees was to legalise the marriages performed by Hindu and Muslim religious leaders.**

The *Asian Marriage Decree* has often been in the forefront in recent months and the main part of the discussion is whether it is necessary to make adjustments to this Decree according to changed social circumstances. Not long ago, the regulations regarding divorce, as recorded in this Decree, were discussed in a television program. Thus, it appeared that in Hinduism and Christianity, divorce is not allowed, but that changed social circumstances make it necessary to work out a way to make this possible. It also appeared from this television program that the regulations regarding divorce, as recorded in the Surinam Civil Code, are not sufficient in practise.

In this article, the regulations regarding marriage and divorce, as stated in the Qur'an, the *Muslim Marriage Decree* (part of the *Asian Marriage Decree*) and the Surinam Civil Code are discussed. We will also see the reason why the *Muslim Marriage Decree* contains regulations regarding divorce, but the *Hindu Marriage Decree* does not.

### Marriage

Islam regards marriage as a sacred contract and the Qur'an strongly recommends believers to marry <sup>[1]</sup>. This Book also clarifies which categories of persons are lawful to marry for a Muslim and which not. The following persons are not lawful for a Muslim to marry:

- People with whom a close relationship exists (mother, sister, etc.);
- People of the family-in-law, with whom a close relationship exists (mother-in-law, etc.);
- People who have been suckled by the same woman <sup>[2]</sup>;
- Idolaters / idolatresses <sup>[3]</sup>;
- Adulterous people <sup>[4]</sup>.

On the other hand, a Muslim is allowed to marry anyone who has been given the Book before them <sup>[5]</sup>. In the narrow view, only Jews and Christians are considered followers of the Book, but as the Qur'an states that every nation had a messenger <sup>[6]</sup>, except the Ara-

bian idolaters before the mission of Muhammad <sup>[7]</sup>, the concept of 'followers of the Book' can be understood in a broad sense: Jews, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, etc. can be considered as such.

The *Muslim Marriage Decree* speaks only of marriages between Muslims <sup>[8]</sup>. At a glance, this seems contradictory to the aforementioned, but in this respect, the purpose of this Decree should be considered. The most important consideration to establish this Decree was that marriages performed according to Islamic traditions were not registered at the Government. As marriages between people of different religions are generally performed as civil weddings, and therefore the question of registration is not relevant, the *Muslim Marriage Decree* is only applicable for marriages between Muslims.

Another reason to apply the *Muslim Marriage Decree* to Muslims only is to prevent misuse of this decree by non-Muslims, for example, bypassing the marriageable age or parental consent.

### Divorce in the Qur'an

From the aforementioned television program it appeared, as already stated, that divorce is not permitted in Hinduism and Christianity; a marriage is considered sacred and the partners are to stay with each other till death. Although the Qur'an considers marriage as a sacred contract too (as this Book considers the fulfilment of every contract sacred - see 16:91), it gives the option of divorce, and also the spouse has the right to sue for divorce <sup>[9]</sup>. A divorce, however, is the last step which has to be taken only if all attempts to arrange reconciliation between wife and husband have failed. The Qur'an commends reconciliation in two ways:

1. In the first instance by appointing an arbitrator from both families

- to arrange reconciliation <sup>[10]</sup>;
- In second instance if, despite this effort to achieve reconciliation, a divorce is unavoidable, by establishing a waiting time of three months, before the divorce becomes final <sup>[11]</sup>.

After this waiting period, recovery of the marriage bond is recommended <sup>[12]</sup>. This procedure of divorce and recovery of the marriage bond is allowed only two times <sup>[13]</sup>; if divorce is performed for a third time, the husband is allowed to marry the same wife only if she has been married to another man and this marriage has ended in divorce <sup>[14]</sup>. With this regulation, the Qur'an undoubtedly aims at protection of the wife; the husband cannot repudiate his wife and take her back an unlimited number of times, as happened in Arabia before the mission of Muhammad.

It should be mentioned that the popular theory regarding divorce, according to which the husband expresses certain words three times in succession, is not based on Islamic teachings. We have already seen that several attempts at reconciliation should be taken before a divorce becomes final. And it should also be mentioned that two witnesses should be present when the wish to divorce is being expressed <sup>[15]</sup>.

The *Muslim Marriage Decree*, in the explanation on article 4, mentions the same procedure as stated above, with the exception that this decree allows divorce by expressing the corresponding wish three times in succession. However, this procedure is not put into practice anymore, to avoid misuse of this regulation.

### **Divorce in the Surinam law**

According to the Surinam Civil Code, every married couple has the right to divorce <sup>[16]</sup>. As marriages performed according to Hindu or Christian rituals cannot be dissolved, no separate regulation on divorce could be made for these religious groups, but the regulations as stated in the Civil Code are applicable. Therefore, people married according to the *Hindu Marriage Decree* can apply for a divorce based on the Civil Code.

Regarding Islamic marriages, however, the right to divorce has been

recorded in the Qur'an and other Islamic sources. Therefore, the legislator could insert a separate regulation regarding divorce into the *Muslim Marriage Decree*. The existence of a separate regulation regarding divorce for Muslims and not for Hindus and Christians is thus merely a case of taking over existing regulations of the different religious Books by the legislator.

### **Grounds for divorce**

The Surinam Civil Code contains four grounds for divorce <sup>[17]</sup>. In practice, these grounds appear not to be sufficient and lead to the use of adultery as the most common ground for divorce.

Islamic teachings, however, know no specific grounds for divorce. Every reason, which makes it impossible for husband and wife to live together peacefully, can be used as a legitimate ground for divorce <sup>[18]</sup>. The husband, married according to the *Muslim Marriage Decree*, can divorce himself from his wife according to the aforementioned procedure. The wife, married according to this decree, has two options to divorce herself:

- She can apply for a divorce, based on Article 4 of the *Muslim Marriage Decree*;
- She can apply for a divorce via a magistrate.

In this second case, the magistrate is not tied to the grounds for divorce, as stated in the Civil Code, but he hears an expert in Islamic teachings, who will work out whether living together peacefully is possible or not <sup>[19]</sup>.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

We have seen that marriage is a sacred contract in Islam, Hinduism and Christianity. Regarding divorce, it appears that from these religions, only Islam gives the option to conclude a marriage, and that Islamic law, unlike the Surinam Civil Code, has no limitations regarding the grounds for divorce.

We have also seen that the regulations regarding divorce are recorded in the *Muslim Marriage Decree* and that the omission of similar regulations for Hindus and Christians is due to the fact that

their religions do not permit divorce. However, Hindus and Christians have the option to divorce according to the Surinam Civil Code.

The call for an integration of regulations regarding divorce for marriages performed according to Hindu and Christian religious laws will not be easy to respond to. What regulations will have to be set up for these religions? The impractical and obsolete regulations recorded in the Surinam Civil Code? The regulations set out in the *Muslim Marriage Decree*? Or, will new regulations have to be drawn up? If yes, on what authority?

The need for these questions will vanish by accepting and following the last revelation, the revelation which came as a completion of all earlier revelations and which contains a complete code of life and solutions for almost all situations in life – Islam.

### **Footnotes (Q. = Qur'an):**

[1] Q. 24:32, 25:54; [2] Q. 4:23; [3] Q. 2:221; [4] Q. 24:3; [5] Q. 5:5; [6] Q. 35:24; [7] Q. 32:3, 36:6; [8] art. 1, lid 1; [9] Q. 2:229; [10] Q. 4:35; [11] Q. 65:4; [12] Q. 65:1, 65:4; [13] Q. 2:229; [14] Q. 2:230; [15] Q. 65:2; [16] Book 1, art. 252; [17] Book 1, art. 262; [18]. Also, the Dutch Civil Code (Book 1, art. 151) recently recognises as ground for divorce every reason which makes it impossible for husband and wife to live together; [19] art. 6 and 10 of the *Muslim Marriage Decree*.

### **Sources:**

- *The Religion of Islam* (Muhammad Ali MA LL.B)
- The Holy Qur'an
- *Muslim Marriage Decree* (1940)
- *Hindu Marriage Decree* (1940)
- Surinam Civil Code
- Dutch Civil Code
- Interview with Basharat Ahmadali B.A. LL.B, former Civil Servant in charge of observing the practise of the *Asian Marriage Decree* in Suriname.

*This article was published before in the Surinam daily newspaper 'De Ware Tijd', May 17, 2002.*

# RADICAL *IMAMS* VERSUS THE QUR'AN

Recently, a small group of *imams* gained publicity in a negative way in Holland by preaching certain theories which, according to their opinion, are based on Islamic teachings. It is a pity to see that even among scholars, who should be examples for their followers, there are people who interpret the Qur'an in a way that serves certain (political) goals, which results in presenting a distorted view on Islam to the world.

To give an informed opinion of what the Qur'an teaches about a certain subject, all relevant verses regarding that subject should be taken into consideration. The Qur'an is not arranged by subject, and guidelines about certain subjects are, therefore, reported in different chapters. It should also be taken into consideration in which period, and on what occasion, verses were revealed.

## **'Take not the disbelievers for friends'**

In some verses, Muslims are commanded not to take the disbelievers for friends, for example in verses 3:27, 4:144, 5:51, etc. The reasons for revelation are very important; 3:27 for example was revealed when the Muslims were in a state of war with the disbelievers. The order not to take the disbelievers for friends, therefore, does not apply to all disbelievers, but only to those who persecute Muslims because of religion, drive them forth from their homes and help others in doing so (60:7-9). Furthermore, these verses mention that there is no harm in being kind and righteous to those who did not display such behaviour.

Other verses, too, permit Muslims to associate with people who hold opinions contrary to theirs. In this regard, 9:7 of the Holy Qur'an says that Muslims should be faithful to pacts with the disbelievers, as long as the disbelievers, too, are faithful to the pacts. Moreover, 9:5-6 mention that the disbelievers should even be granted protection, if they request such from the Muslims.

## **'Destroy our enemies'**

In some segments, shown on Dutch television, the aforementioned *imams* ask Allah to kill Bush and Sharon and to make the life of the enemies of Is-

lam an unbearable hell. In this respect, it can be mentioned that the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) once prayed for the destruction of his enemies, whereupon Allah revealed: *Thou has no concern in the matter whether He turns to them (mercifully) or chastises them; surely they are wrongdoers* (3:128). In the following verse (3:129), Allah says that He forgives and chastises whom He pleases. Again in another verse (21:107) Allah revealed to the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) that he was sent as a mercy to all nations, and this is clearly illustrated in, for example, 22:39-40 of the Holy Qur'an, which commands the Muslims not only to protect their own houses of prayer, but also those of other religions. Therefore, it is not the responsibility of Muslims to pray for destruction of others, even if they are unjust. The main responsibility of Muslims is to believe and do well and to exhort one another to truth and patience, and not in the hysterical, screaming voice of some *imams*, but with wisdom, goodly exhortation and in the best manner, as the Qur'an states in 16:125.

## **Women**

The popular theory about women, as was put forward by the *imams*, is that they have a position inferior to that of men, and that it is, therefore, not allowed for them to work outside their homes. The truth is different. The Qur'an states explicitly in 4:32 that both men and women may have the benefit of what they earn. And it should be noted the main aim in the regulations regarding clothing is to allow women to take part in the society in a sound manner. It is true that Islam advises job allocation, namely that the husband is responsible for the income and the wife for the household, but this does not prevent the woman from taking part in social life. In this respect, it should be remembered that Khadidja, the first wife of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), was a merchant and that she kept managing this business even after the mission of the Prophet Muhammad had started.

The Qur'an cannot be blamed for the

fact that these teachings are not being practised by many Islamic countries.

## **Chastising women**

Chapter 4, verse 34 of the Holy Qur'an gives three guidelines regarding marriage problems:

1. Admonish them
2. Leave them alone
3. *Idribu hunna*

The first guideline recommends giving the partner a warning, the second recommends a cooling-off period and the third is often translated as 'chastise her'. The original form of *idribu hunna*, being *daraba*, however, can have different meanings; the dictionary gives about fifty other meanings, among which is 'hold back'. The word *daraba*, or derivations of this word, could be found in the Holy Qur'an more than forty times, of which in only a few cases it can be interpreted as 'chastise'.

If we consider the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his companions, we cannot find even one tradition which states that they chastised their wives. In 48:29, the Holy Qur'an advises believers that they should be compassionate among themselves, hence contradicting the chastising of women, and this is emphasised by a well-known tradition of the Holy Prophet Muhammad: "The best among you is he who treats his wife best." We, therefore, conclude that the word *daraba* in 4:34 of the Holy Qur'an cannot stand for 'chastise', but for 'hold back'. So, after giving a partner a warning, if a cooling-off period has no result and the risk is there that the wife will leave the house, she should be held back from doing so.

## **Closing remarks**

The foregoing illustrates that many of the theories preached by the so-called 'radical *imams*' are not in accordance with the teachings of Islam. We, therefore, advise those *imams* to present Islam to the world in a proper way, with wisdom, goodly exhortation and in the best manner as Islam is a peaceful and tolerant religion which strives for a peaceful society, where there is no place for hatred.

***And not alike are the good and the evil. Repel (evil) with what is best, when lo! he between whom and thee is enmity would be as if he were a warm friend*** (Qur'an 41:34).

## Earth Day 2002

# TAKE CARE OF YOUR ENVIRONMENT!

On April 22<sup>nd</sup> the world again commemorated Earth Day. It was a time to dwell on our earth and, in particular, on the continued existence of this planet when it comes to our environment.

The Holy Qur'an teaches that man should pray for good in this world and in the Hereafter [1]. Besides praying, however, we should *work* to attain this good, as the Qur'an states that God will not change the condition of people until they change their own condition [2]. Furthermore, we read that the whole of creation has been made for the

aggression. At this rapid pace, within fifty years, oil, coal, bauxite, zinc, phosphate and chromium will be completely used up. In the past thirty years, half of the existing forests were destroyed, and the immense water reservoirs, built up by nature over millions of years, were almost consumed in just one century.

The consequences of this behaviour of man find expression in several newspaper headlines, such as: "Less ice in sea around North Pole," "Spectacular growth of waste," "Noticeable warming up of earth," "Hole in ozone layer as big as North America," etc. *Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea on account of that which men's hands have wrought!* [5]

As stated before, taking care of the earth has been entrusted to man, who has to maintain it in good condition, even if only in appreciation of the

Creator. However, there are other reasons why it is important to take care of the environment, such as to leave behind something worthy for coming generations. This necessity for long-term planning is stated in a tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in which he has said: "There is none amongst the Muslims who plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it, but is regarded as a charitable gift for him" (*Bukhari*).

Not only is giving someone food regarded as a charitable deed, but every deed, which contributes to safe and healthy food for later generations, can be considered as such. And as safe and healthy food starts with a healthy environment (sea and land), taking care of our environment and our earth will undoubtedly result in the blessings of the Almighty.

benefit of mankind [3] and that taking care of this creation has been entrusted to man [4]. This results in the obligation of man to maintain, in good condition, all that has been entrusted to him.

In the aforementioned verse (33:72), the Holy Qur'an states that people are very unjust to and ignorant of that which has been granted to them and that they turned out to be disloyal to that which has been entrusted to them. Verse 41 of chapter 30, for example, points to previous nations which did not conduct themselves as required by the Creator and were, therefore, destroyed.

The truth of this is evident in our times as we see the destruction that man causes because of his selfishness and greed, without considering the present or future generations. If this trend continues, within thirty years the earth will no longer be able sustain itself as a result of this

Furthermore, Islam teaches *sadaqa zaria* (permanent charity), which means that man will be rewarded for his good deeds, as long as the results of these deeds are noticeable, even after his death. Therefore, if we make efforts to maintain the environment in a good state and later generations benefit from this, we will surely be rewarded.

Below are some examples showing ways in which we can help in maintaining our environment.

### Home and garden

- Use electricity-saving lamps instead of light bulbs. This saves about 80% of energy.
- Use dishwasher and tumble dryer only when necessary. A dishwasher consumes almost double the amount of energy as compared with a television.

### Work and school

- Copy on both, instead of one side, of paper. This simple adjustment will save 50% of paper.
- Switch printer to 'economy' mode. This will save on ink (and the quality is not noticeably less).
- Reducing the margins in large documents will save on paper.

### Car

- Use car air-conditioning only when necessary. Using air-conditioning increases fuel consumption by more than 10 %.
- Avoid picking up speed and slowing down too fast. Anticipating the traffic will save on fuel.

Let us work together to conserve our environment, not only for ourselves, but also for our offspring. We will surely receive the blessings of the Almighty God by doing this.

Always remember: **We have the earth on loan for our posterity.**

### **Notes:**

- [1] Qur'an 2:201; [2] Qur'an 13:11; [3] Qur'an 14:32-34; [4] Qur'an 33:72; [5] Qur'an 30:41.

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**We have the earth on loan for our posterity**

# RETHINKING ISLAM

By **Ziauddin Sardar** *Professor of Postcolonial Studies, London*

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 suggesting for well over a century that we need to make a serious attempt at *Ijtihad*, at reasoned struggle and rethinking, to reform Islam. At the beginning of the last century, Jamaluddin Afghani and Mohammad Abduh led the call for a new *Ijtihad*; and along the way many notable intellectuals, academics and sages have added to this plea - not least Mohammad Iqbal, Malik bin Nabbi and Abdul Qadir Audah. Yet, *Ijtihad* is one thing Muslim societies have singularly failed to undertake. Why?

The why has now acquired an added urgency. Just look around the Muslim world and see how far we have traveled away from the ideals and spirit of Islam. Far from being a liberating force, a kinetic social, cultural and intellectual dynamics for equality, justice and humane values, Islam seems to have acquired a pathological strain. Indeed, it seems to me that we have internalised all those historic and contemporary western representations of Islam and Muslims that have been demonising us for centuries. We now actually wear the garb, I have to confess, of the very demons that the West has been projecting on our collective personality.

But to blame the West, or a notion of instrumental modernity that is all but alien to us, would be a lazy option. True, the West, and particularly America, has a great deal to answer for. And Muslims are quick to point a finger at the injustices committed by American and European foreign policies and hegemonic tendencies. However, that is only a part, and in my opinion not an insurmountable part, of the malaise. Hegemony is not always imposed; sometimes, it is invited. The internal situation within Islam is an open invitation.

We have failed to respond to the summons to *Ijtihad* for some very profound reasons. Prime amongst these is the fact that the context of our sacred texts - the Qur'an and the examples 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 interpretations constantly drag us back to history, to frozen and ossified context of long ago; worse, to perceived and romanticised contexts that have not even existed in history. This is why while Muslims have a strong emotional attachment to Islam, Islam per se, as a worldview and system of ethics, has little or no direct relevance to their daily lives apart from the obvious concerns of

rituals and worship. *Ijtihad* and fresh thinking have not been possible because there is no context 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 consequent removal of agency from the believers, and the equation of Islam with the State. Let me elaborate.

Most Muslims consider the *Shari'ah*, commonly translated as 'Islamic law', to be divine. Yet, there is nothing divine about the *Shari'ah*. The only thing that can legitimately be described as divine in Islam is the Qur'an. The *Shari'ah* is a human construction; 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 jurisprudence, which is nothing more than legal opinion of classical jurists. The very term *fiqh* was not in vogue before the Abbasid period when it was actually formulated and codified. But when *fiqh* assumed its systematic legal form, it incorporated three vital aspects of Muslim society of the Abbasid period. At that juncture, Muslim history was in its expansionist phase, and *fiqh* incorporated the logic of Muslim imperialism of that time. The *fiqh* rulings on apostasy, for example, derive not from the Qur'an but from this logic. Moreover, the world was simple and could easily be divided into black and white: hence, 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 bygone *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 wherever 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 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 altar 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 debunks 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 fixated 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.

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 Khuldun. 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 *ijihad* were closed during the Abbasid era, *ilm* was increasingly reduced to religious knowledge and the *'ulama* came to constitute only religious scholars.

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 reigns 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 *jihad* on anyone, 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. *Isiislah*, 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.

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 *hadiths* are quoted to justify the most extremes of behaviour. And the Prophet's own appearance, his beard and cloths, 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 tenants 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.

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 people 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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