



The Light — U.K. edition

January 2008

The Lahore Ahmadiyya monthly magazine from U.K.

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Assalamu alaikum: Our next meeting —

Date: **Sunday 6th January 2008**
Time: **3.00 p.m.**
Speaker: **Miss Habiba Anwar, LL.M.**
Topic: **Serious thoughts about our future**

Regular activities:

Darus-i Quran and Hadith:

Every Friday at 2.30 p.m.

Meetings of the Executive:

First Sunday of every month at 2.00 p.m.

Meeting of the Jama‘at:

First Sunday of every month at 3.00 p.m.

Meanings of common terms

*Words in general use among Muslims
and their meanings in the Quran*

Talk at Darus Salaam, London, 2 December

by Zahid Aziz

We will look here at some commonly used terms of Islam and compare their generally understood meanings with their usage by the Holy Quran.

In the first place there are the words *Islam* and *Muslim*. Their common usage, as well as in the Quran of course, is to refer to the religion of Islam

that we know, with its structure of beliefs and practices, and to refer to its followers. But these words are also applied in three other senses: (1) the Islam of the natural world, (2) the Islam of previous prophets, and (3) the Islam or being Muslim of a child at birth.

As to the first sense, we read in the Quran:

“Seek they, then, other than Allah’s religion? And to Him submits whoever [or whatever] is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly, and to Him they will be returned.” — 3:83

This tells us that everything that exists submits (*aslama*) to Allah, the word for ‘submit’ here being

the same as is applied to the act of being a Muslim. Elsewhere (22:18) it is said more specifically that the sun and the moon and the stars, and the mountains and the trees, and the animals, all bow down to Allah. The meaning is clearly that everything in nature obeys and follows implicitly the laws made for it by God. The sun and the moon do not function by their will or choice. An earthquake is not an evil deed committed by the earth to kill people, for which the earth can be held to account.

We are also taught by the Quran that the forces of nature are not controlled by competing, rival gods. It is not the case, for example, that there is a god who brings out sunshine and he is fighting against another god who obscures the sun by bringing clouds forward and causing rain. The whole of nature constitutes one system and framework, whose parts work with and complement each other.

‘Islam’ of previous prophets

It is a common Muslim belief that prophets who appeared before the Holy Prophet Muhammad also taught and followed ‘Islam’, and were all thus ‘Muslims’. A little thought shows that these prophets could **not** have followed or acted on the structure of Islam as we know it today, because even the Holy Prophet Muhammad and his earliest companions only followed the present-day practices of Islam after these were revealed by God during the Holy Prophet’s mission. Prophets of the past could not have prayed *fajr*, *zuhr*, *asr*, *maghrib* and *‘isha* in the present-day form and manner, nor fasted for 30 days in Ramadan, when even the earliest Muslims themselves did not do so until Allah so commanded through the Holy Prophet. When it is said that previous prophets were ‘Muslims’ and ‘Islam’ was their religion, what is meant are the four points below.

1. They all taught submission and obedience to the One God. They did not teach worship of other beings and things. None of them claimed to be God or a part of Godhead, unlike what the followers of some of them later came to believe.
2. They did not violate any command from God or commit acts of wrongdoing, unlike some of the deeds ascribed to them, surprisingly, by their own later followers.
3. They attained the high moral qualities and closeness to God that a Muslim has as his goal.
4. They followed the same *principles* for spiritual purification and advancement that Islam teaches, for example, prayer, charity,

fasting. The details of the ways in which they put these principles into practice were no doubt different from the forms that were established through the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

‘Islam’ of a child at birth

It is said that according to Hadith every child that is born is born in the “true nature” or the “nature of Islam”, but later its parents give it their own religion, making him a Jew, a Christian etc. What is meant by the ‘Islam’ of a child at birth is that it follows its natural, God-given instincts without conscious effort. It is not capable of holding some wrong belief or deviating from the path which God has placed in its nature to follow. It is not sinful by nature; on the contrary, its natural inclination is to do good. A child at birth does not hold the defining beliefs of any religion. A child who dies in infancy is, in God’s judgment, innocent of holding some wrong belief or having acted upon it. The fact that the hadith referred to above occurs in Bukhari in the book relating to funerals shows that it relates to the children of non-Muslims who die in infancy.

This hadith is taken by many, especially in recent years, to mean that when adult non-Muslims embrace Islam they “revert” to the religion they had at birth. Hence in the past twenty years or so the practice or fashion has developed of calling such people, not as converts to Islam, but as “reverts”. This hadith does not say that if someone embraces Islam after reaching adulthood he reverts to his spiritual state at birth. The Islam followed *unconsciously* by an infant, as also by the whole of nature, which do *not* have the capacity to disobey God, is not the same as the Islam acted upon by adults through their thinking and understanding, and making a conscious, hard effort to submit to God.

Regarding the description “revert” for one who embraces Islam, there seems to be no basis for it in the Quran or Hadith. The Quran tells people to believe, to submit to God, to follow the revelation and the Holy Prophet, etc. Nowhere does it use any term for embracing Islam which can be translated as “reverting”. In Hadith, there are reports of the Holy Prophet inviting people to Islam, and reports by his companions on how they came to be Muslims, but in none do we find any mention of anyone being asked to “revert” to Islam or anyone speaking of himself as having “reverted” to Islam. In histories of the early spread of Islam, people such as Khadija, Abu Bakr, Umar and Ali are not spoken of as reverting to Islam but as accepting Islam.

We also find that in the Quran and Hadith if any word can be represented in English as “reverting” it

is usually applied to reverting to *unbelief after accepting Islam*. In Mohsin Khan's English translation of Bukhari there are hadith reports such as one stating that a believer "hates to revert to disbelief" and another in which the Holy Prophet tells Muslims: "Do not revert to disbelief after me..."

This wrong impression that a person accepting Islam is reverting to his true birth religion leads to two untenable and patently false conclusions. Firstly, it means that a non-Muslim who embraces Islam has become one who submits to God perfectly in each and every respect, instinctively and intuitively, without even the slightest thought occurring to him of disobeying God, for this is the Islam of the new born child! Secondly, it means that those who were born to Muslim parents remain in the same state of Islam in which they were born, even after becoming adults, since the hadith report says that it is when the parents are non-Muslim that they go on to make the child depart from its natural religion of birth. This is obviously absurd. There are, no doubt, Muslim parents who set a bad example to their children, as a result of which the children grow up to be delinquents following an immoral or even criminal path. It would be the height of stupidity to say that, just because these parents did not turn their children into non-Muslims, therefore the children remained adhering to the state of Islam in which they were born!

On the question of the religion of birth, it may be added that according to Islamic law a child born to non-Muslim parents, however recently born it may be, is not a Muslim in terms of the practical law of Islam but belongs to its parents' religious community. Thus if it dies in infancy, Muslims do not hold the Islamic funeral service for it. And if it grows up and follows its parents' religion, it is not regarded as an apostate from its Islam of birth.

Term *umma*

In popular usage the word *umma*, with which non-Muslims are also familiar, seems to be applied to the Muslim community. Some people may know that followers of any prophet may be called his *umma*. But in the Quran the word *umma* is used to mean a group, in the broadest sense. We read:

"And there is no animal in the earth, nor a bird that flies on its two wings, but they are communities (*umam-un*) like yourselves."
— 6:38

Within Muslims too there can be groups, and such a group can be called an *umma*, as in:

"And from among you there should be a party (*umma*) who invite to good and enjoin the right and forbid the wrong." — 3:104

In another verse the whole of mankind is called one *umma*:

"Mankind is a single nation (*umma*). So Allah raised prophets as bearers of good news and as warners, and He revealed with them the Book with truth..." — 2:213

It is interesting to note that in *all* of the 18 or so English translations of the Quran, old and new, that I have checked, the first sentence in the above verse is translated in the *past tense*. For example:

- "Mankind was one single nation" — Abdullah Yusuf Ali
- "Mankind were one community" — Pickthall
- "All mankind were once one single community" — Asad
- "Mankind was [once] one nation" — Irving
- "Mankind was a single community" — Abdel Haleem's recent 2004 translation
- The same is the case in the Qadiani *Jama'at* translations, both English and Urdu.

It seems to be only Maulana Muhammad Ali who has translated it in the *present tense*, having done so in both the 1917 and the revised 1951 editions of his English translation as well as in the Urdu translation *Bayan-ul-Quran*. (Of course, the so-called Shakir translation also renders these words in the same way as the Maulana, as it is a plagiarized work.)

The reason for translating it in the past tense is due to the occurrence of the word *kanā* at the beginning of the verse. But as Maulana Muhammad Ali has fully explained in his first footnote on that verse, the word *kanā* "does not necessarily refer to the past, but is often used in the Holy Quran to convey the idea of a general truth". Those translators who also provide some commentary say that this verse conveys that mankind was, in the very beginning, one community in religious views, but then they began to differ and so Allah raised prophets among them to settle these differences. Some of these translators claim that the words *then they began to differ* are implied after "All mankind were once one single community".

Maulana Muhammad Ali's explanation is not only in tune with modern world conditions, when mankind is more and more becoming a single nation from many aspects, but it is also much simpler and does not require the assumption of any implied

extra words. As he writes so pithily in his second footnote on this verse:

“A universal law of Divine Revelation has been disclosed in these words. As all people are a single nation, God, too, has been revealing Himself to all. This Law of Divine Revelation has, we are told, found expression through prophets, to every one of whom a revealed Book was given to show them the right way.”

This simple, clear interpretation also does not require trying to contrive explanations of how and in what way mankind was “once”, in the distant past, a single community, as other commentators need to do. It is, and always has been, a single nation in that the laws of God, His favours and punishments, apply equally to all mankind. Just this one interpretation by Maulana Muhammad Ali, out of all the translators of the Quran, old and new, Muslim and non-Muslim, shows the truth of the prophecy made by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad to the effect that no person would produce a translation and commentary of the Quran like one produced by him or by a follower of his who would be his “branch”.

Term *harām*

In common usage this is applied to something which is so bad that it is forbidden. Yet the same term is applied in the Quran in the sense of sacred, holy and inviolable, to the great mosque at Makka known as *al-masjid al-harām*. Even when used in the sense of something forbidden, we read the following two verses in the Quran, each of which begins with the same words “forbidden to you” (*hurrimat ‘alaikum*):

“Forbidden to you are your mothers, and your daughters, and your sisters...” — 4:23

“Forbidden to you is that which dies of itself, and blood, and flesh of swine, and that on which any other name than that of Allah has been invoked...” — 5:3

Everyone knows that what is forbidden about your mothers, daughters and sisters is marriage with them. It is most certainly not meant, nor has any Muslim ever taken it to mean, that there is something so bad and harmful about mothers, daughters, sisters etc. that they should be avoided in every way possible! It is a certain act with them that is forbidden. Similarly, in the second verse it is the eating or drinking of those things that is forbidden. Blood, for example, cannot be considered as bad or harmful in itself. I need hardly say that not only does it support our lives, it also supports the lives of the

very animals whose meat we eat. Without blood those animals would not survive and there would be no meat for us to eat! So what is obviously meant here by “forbidden” is that it is forbidden for us to consume blood as a food or drink.

It is universally known that Islam does not allow the drinking of alcohol. In recent years, the same alcohol has been used as fuel for cars, on its own or mixed with the traditional gasoline, Brazil being particularly known for this use of alcohol as fuel for vehicles. Should Muslims consider such a use of alcohol as forbidden for them which does not in any way involve any human being drinking it?

Term *hadith*

In common use the word *hadith* refers to a saying of the Holy Prophet Muhammad found in certain well-known compilations such as Bukhari. Everyone knows that the Quran and Hadith are two entirely separate sources, clearly distinguishable from one another. Yet we find in the Quran that the word *hadith* is used in a broad sense as meaning any announcement, story, or narration, as in:

“And has the story (*hadith*) of Moses come to you?” — 20:9

The Quran itself is called *hadith*, as in the following verses:

“Then maybe you will kill yourself with grief, sorrowing after them, if they believe not in this announcement (*hadith*).” — 18:6

“Allah has revealed the best announcement (*hadith*), a Book ...” — 39:23

“So leave Me alone with him who rejects this announcement (*hadith*).” — 68:44

Conclusion

We draw two conclusions from this discussion. Firstly, terms that we commonly use in Islam can have a different, broader meaning when they occur in the Quran. For example, the words ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslim’ in the Quran are often used for the general concept of submitting to God, rather than referring to the religion of Islam with its detail and structure as established through the Holy Prophet Muhammad. Ignorance of this point leads people to misunderstand the Quran. Secondly, many of the Islamic terms we commonly use in their well-known senses (for example, *hadith* or *sharia*) only came to be so used after the times of the early Muslim generations. It is, therefore, permissible for Muslims, long after the time of early Islam, to coin and use terms to express Islamic concepts which were not used before in Islam. Take, for example,

the terms *zill* and *buruz* ('reflection' or 'image') devised by the Sufi scholars of Islam to express how a true follower of the Holy Prophet Muhammad reflects his master's qualities. These terms, no doubt, are not in the Quran or in Hadith. But nor is the term *sharia* used in the Quran or Hadith to mean the body of Islamic law. Nonetheless these terms express Islamic concepts and are therefore, in both cases, useful and allowable.

Publication of *Islam, Peace and Tolerance*

The book *Islam, Peace and Tolerance*, written by your Editor (Zahid Aziz), has been printed in the U.K. at the end of November. It is published by 'Ahmadiyya Anjuman Lahore Publications, U.K.', which was earlier registered as a publisher with its own set of ISBNs, after consultation with the central Ahmadiyya Anjuman Lahore. This 94-page book is now being presented by the U.K. *Jama'at* to

public figures who have interest in or some involvement with Islamic matters, including relevant Government ministers, Members of Parliament, leaders of different religions, newspaper columnists and media writers and commentators.

On 9th December, I (Zahid Aziz) presented two copies of the book to **Dr Nick Palmer, Member of the U.K. Parliament for Broxtowe (Nottinghamshire)**, the constituency where I reside. Mr Ross Mahmud was also present at the occasion. I, along with Mr Ross Mahmud and my wife Mrs Fauqia Aziz, also held an informal discussion with Dr Palmer for almost one and a half hours on matters relating to Islam, Muslims and Pakistan.

A question had been raised prior to our meeting, that as our organisation is not considered as being among mainstream Muslims, how could our views and teachings on tolerance in Islam possibly influence other Muslims? In response I presented the following four points to Dr Palmer in our discussion. **Firstly**, the literature of our *Jama'at* has already been influencing Muslims for the past



Dr Nick Palmer (centre), Dr Zahid Aziz (right) and Mr Ross Mahmud (left)

ninety years. As we were the first Muslim organisation to produce literature on Islam in English, our books influenced the English literature subsequently produced by other Muslims, many of our ideas penetrating into it. **Secondly**, in the U.K. we have been in the position of leadership of Muslims because the Woking Muslim Mission was recognised as the main centre of Islam in this country, supported by Muslims of various sects. To illustrate the work of the Woking Mission I showed Dr Palmer two copies of *The Islamic Review*, one from the first World War and one from the second World War. I also played before him one of the newsreel film clips made at Woking by the British Pathe company, this one covering the *Id-ul-Fitr* of 1954.

The above two points relate to the past. The other two points relate to the present and future. My **third** point was that those Muslims today who are seeking to find a peaceful, rational, non-fanatical picture of Islam need exactly the kind of material that we have produced, as in this book. They are unable to accept extremist interpretations and are searching for a picture of Islam that is both sensible and can be derived and justified from the original sources of their religion. The arguments and evidences that they need are none other than those which we have produced.

Fourthly and lastly, our literature helps to improve the image of Islam in the eyes of non-Muslims. If non-Muslims have before them only the image of Islam presented by the advocates of intolerance and violence, naturally they will feel revulsion against Islam. If our perspective is also made known to them, they will at the least realise that the opposite kind of interpretations also exist.

I should add that Dr Palmer insisted on paying for the two copies that I presented to him, and I was happy to accept his kind gesture.

Report from Berlin

by Muhammad Ali, Imam Berlin Mosque

In the month of October we have had two important activities which were organized in Berlin mosque.

1. October 3rd is the Reunification day of Germany and a national holiday. Since 1997 this day is also celebrated as a day on which the mosques which are interested take part in the initiative to be open for all people. So like last year we also took part in this. I gave in total 3 lectures about Islam with questions and answers at the end. Some people also bought our books and Quran.

2. *Berliner Volkshochschule* means Berlin Public High School. This school is a government institution which offers a wide range of courses including nearly every aspect of life like culture, politics, religion, music, etc. We are offering a course for this school in the area of religion. The contents of course were a visit to the mosque including a brief introduction to Islam, attendance and taking part in a Friday prayer. The end was with a question-answer session. So on 5th October the course was conducted in the mosque. The course was meant to last 3 hours from 11:30 to 14:30. But it was so interesting and full of participation from those who attended that the last person was sitting with us till 15:30.

I would also like to express my gratitude to our brother Manfred Yahya. To hold these two activities alone was not an easy task for me. So I requested Manfred Yahya to come to Berlin and to help me for these activities. He accepted my request spontaneously and was the silent force who worked behind the scenes to hold these two things so well.

The name ‘Ahmadiyya’ and its necessity -2

by Maulana Murtaza Khan

(This is a booklet published by the Lahore Ahmadiyya Anjuman in 1945. We reproduced a section from the beginning of this writing in our November 2007 issue. We reproduce below a further extract.)

Is it against God’s commandments to label a community in Islam?

Some people say that as the Holy Prophet did not himself name any community after his own name, therefore it is an innovation on the part of anyone else to label a community after his name. So far as the question of naming a religion by reference to the personality of its founder is concerned, we find its sanction in the Holy Quran itself. The Holy Book has repeatedly used the phrase *millat-i Ibrahim* or “the faith of Abraham”:

“Say: As for me, my Lord has guided me to the right path — a right religion, the faith of Abraham, the upright one...” — 6:161

Now if it is permissible to call a creed after the name of its founder, why should it become a sin for Hazrat Mirza Sahib to label his followers after a name of the Holy Prophet? During the Holy Prophet’s time there were different groups of his followers who were named separately according to

their respective distinctive characteristics. Muslims who fled from their homes to take shelter in Madina were collectively called *Muhajireen*, while in contrast the disciples who gave them shelter in Madina were designated as *Ansar*. And both these names have been mentioned in the Holy Quran. So it is proved that naming different groups of Muslims on account of their respective distinguishing characteristics is a principle recognised by the Quran itself. Also the Holy Book allows the naming of a creed after the name of a person. How baseless then the objection that as the Holy Prophet did not label any group after his own name, why should another person call his followers after the Holy Prophet's name?

During the Holy Prophet's blessed time, among his followers there were no marked and distinctive schools of thought and hence there were no different groups based upon differential doctrinal view-points. But there were then different groups of followers of Islam on account of their different methods and ways of strengthening and aiding the cause of the faith and hence they were duly and safely given different names. Today the house of Islam has already within its fold different schools of thought. Hazrat Mirza Sahib has been ordered under Divine Commandment to serve Islam through the method of disseminating the light of the faith and to organize a society from among the Muslims to carry out this Divine purpose. Why should it be forbidden to name a group of the faithful who stand in a particular age to espouse the cause of the faith in order to distinguish them from the already existing numerous schools of thought?

The Ahmadiyya school of thought is not a rival faith which seeks to supplant or replace the religion of Islam. It is decidedly and purely a new school of thought within the fold of Islam which has been called into being to revive and serve the original faith in all its pristine purity. From other schools of thought existing within the nation, the Ahmadiyya school of thought differs not so much in doctrinal principles as in its practical way of advancing the cause of Islam in the world. If during the Holy Prophet's lifetime different groups of Muslims were named differently because of their different ways and methods of helping the faith, there is no reason why in our own age it should be a sin to name a group from amongst the faithful who stand to serve the faith in a manner different from the rest as a mark of distinction.

In this connection it is worthwhile to note that this call to serve the faith on particular lines has not originated in the mind of a man. It is a call from the Almighty Himself, Who is the real Protector of His

faith in all ages and at all times. It is through Divine call that Hazrat Mirza Sahib has stood up to serve the faith and the exact method for victory is the way pointed out to him through Divine revelation. Even man-made movements within Islam may be named according to their different ways and methods of serving the faith or according to their different view-points. How painful is it then that a Divine ordained movement should be made the target of adverse criticism simply on account of its having been named after the Holy Prophet's name? Ignorance and perversity of mind could hardly go any further.

In the Holy Quran the general principle that different groups among Muslims may be given different names on the basis of their family connections in order to distinguish one from the other, has been recognized:

“And We have made you into different tribes and families in order that the one may get distinguished from the other.” — 49:13

Now, is there any person who would condemn the formation of different families and tribes among the Muslim nation or their being differently named for the sake of distinguishing one from the other, notwithstanding the fact that such a division undoubtedly leads to differences among them?

At the death of the Holy Prophet of Islam, his companions had become divided into three definite parties in respect of the successorship — the Banu Hashim with Hazrat Ali at their head, the Ansar with Sa'd bin Ibadah as their chief and the *Muhajireen* with Hazrat Abu Bakr as their leader. The greatest and the most acute difference that could possibly arise, and which might have developed into a schism splitting up the nation into three entirely rival groups, became evident, all due to the difference of various groups and their having been differently recognised as such during the very lifetime of the Holy Prophet. But did any body condemn the very fact of the companions having been differently grouped into three divisions or their being separately recognised as such by three different names? It is merely an hollow idealism which ignores the hard facts of life to desire that there should be no different schools of thought among a nation or that if there are different groups and parties, they should not be named separately. What is undesirable is the present-day pernicious habit of the *Ulama* to condemn one group or school of thought as *kafir* and outside the pale of Islam on account of its minor differences or to unnecessarily exaggerate and accentuate such differences instead of settling them by reference to the authority of the Quran and the Sunnah.

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Forward Planner 2008

January <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sunday 6th: Monthly meeting	February <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sunday 3rd: Monthly meeting	March <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sunday 2nd: Monthly meeting• Friday 21st: Friday prayers on Good Friday holiday
April <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sunday 6th: Monthly meeting	May <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sunday 4th: Monthly meeting	June <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sunday 1st: Monthly meeting
July <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sunday 6th: Monthly meeting	August <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sunday 3rd: Monthly meeting: Family Day	September <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Monday 1st: <i>Ramadan begins</i>• Saturday 6th: <i>Communal Iftar</i>• Saturday 13th: <i>Communal Iftar</i>• Saturday 20th: <i>Communal Iftar</i>• Saturday 27th: <i>Communal Iftar</i>
October <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wednesday 1st: <i>Id-ul-Fitr</i>• Sunday 5th: Monthly meeting	November <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sunday 2nd: Monthly meeting	December <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sunday 7th: Monthly meeting• Monday 8th: <i>Id-ul-Adha</i>

Jumu‘a prayers are held regularly every Friday, with the first *Azan* at the following times:

From start of year to Friday 28th March: 12.30 p.m.

From Friday 4th April to 24th October: 1.00 p.m.

From Friday 31st October to end of year: 12.30 p.m.

Every *Jumu‘a* is followed by *Dars*, a talk explaining some topic on the basis of the Holy Quran and Hadith.