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The Fragrance of East

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Wisdom of Qur'an

He created the heavens and the earth in truth. Exalted is He above that they associate (with Him)

Commentary : That is, everything in the universe attests to the great Truth that it has a single Originator and Sustainer and that there is no room for false gods as proposed by the polytheists. Had there been more than one God, an ordered universe could not have come into existence. If it had been an accidental creation, chaotic fragments would have been flying about. (Au)

He created man from a sperm-drop. And lo, (there) he is, an open disputer.

Commentary : Most commentators understand the verse as translated above. Nonetheless, Ibn Jarir understands the textual word 'mubin' as meaning someone capable of expressing himself skillfully and rationally. Zamakhshari also sees the possibility. Asad has worded it : "... after having been a (mere) drop of sperm, a particle of matter without consciousness or motion, man becomes highly articulate (mintiq), able to argue on his own (for or against a proposition), courageously facing disputes, and clearly formulating his arguments: (and herein lies) an indication of God's creative power."

Another meaning is also obvious: Although man has such a lowly origin, he grows so arrogant with time that he challenges his every Creator. With this meaning in view, Shabbir quotes another verse (36:77-78): "Has man not considered that We create him from a sperm-drop and then, lo, he is an open disputer. He strikes examples for Us, forgetting his creation, he says, 'Who will quicken the bones when they are dust?'"

Pearls from the Prophet Muhammad(S)

Abu Huraira narrates that the Prophet of Allah blessings and peace be upon him - said, "There are two sentences that are easy to utter but are very weighty in the scale of deeds and very dear to the Lord. These are Subhanallahi wa bihamdihi subhanallahil azim.

Commentary: one can easily understand why these two sentences are easy to utter and why they are also so dear to Allah, but some people may have difficulty in comprehending the implication of their being so heavy in the scale of deeds. The truth is that like material objects, non-material things are also light or heavy in weight which is indicated by instruments specially designed for the purpose. Heat and cold, for example, are states of things and their degree is measured by a thermometer. Similarly, Names of Allah, words of God-remembrance, recitation of the Quran, Prayers (Salat), fear and love for Allah and other virtuous deeds each will have a weight on the Day of Judgement. It will be evident on that day how some very brief stated in another Tradition that the Prophet of Allah - blessings and peace be upon him - said, "Nothing weighs as heavy as the Name of Allah."

The general meaning of Subhanallahi wa bihamdihi Subhanallahi azim is, "I glorify the perfection and purity of Allah and sing His praise. I glorify the perfection and purity of Allah Who is Magnificent."

Editor's Note:

THE MESSAGE OF HUMANITY

Having been impressed with diabolical jun-cture of the country and deprivation of human qualities and norms Late Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi's restless soul felt an urgent need to launch a movement in the name of "Payam-e-Insaniyat (Message of Humanity) to foster love and amity between different sections of the society. The idea of Payam-e-Insaniyat originated at Siwan (Bihar), where Maulana Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi had gone to address a large congregation, subsequent to a holocaust which took heavy toll of Muslims lives. An abominable image of Muslims aggravated by media had been formed in the minds of the majority. Maulana's speech elicited following comments from a Hindu senior citizen in the audience: "Maulana, I have listened only to two speeches, one by CR Das (Deshbandhu) and the other is yours. Muslims and non-Muslims alike have a right over you. I urge you to visit this city once again."

The initiation of this auspicious and noble mission was set in Allahabad. The reason of which in Maulana's own words: "We have started this humble work from Allahabad because the city is associated with "Allah".

The main purpose of "Payam-e-Insaniyat" Forum is to create mutual goodwill, an atmosphere of affection and kindness and to put an end to violence, lawlessness, anarchy, moral degradation and create fellow feelings towards each other. To achieve our aim public meetings and seminars for promoting and spreading the sense of sharing sorrows and sufferings of human-beings be organised.

Syed Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi (RAH) says, "Sharing others suffering are man's highest virtue. If man loses the ability of sharing other's sufferings, he will become bankrupt. Even if a nation is blessed with the wealth of America, administration of Russia, and petrol wells of Saudi Arabia, even if rivers of gold and silver flow in it, and even if wealth showers over its land like rain, it will still pauper if its stream of love is dried. The blessings of Allah will not descend on it. It is a matter of satisfaction that man's eyes can still shed tears and that his heart can still suffer with the pain of others. The heart which loses this quality is not a heart. It is just a piece of stone. Such a heart has no value in the sight of Allah, no matter whether it is the heart of a Muslim, or a Hindu or a Christian. The value of the human heart, in fact, lies in its

quality to long, shiver, cry, and love. The human heart should be greener than the land, broader than universe, more affluent than the waterfall, and more bountiful than the heavy clouds ready to stream down. The eye which does not become wet is not a human eye: It is the eye of a dafodil. The heart which does not feel pain of others is not a human heart, it is a heart of lion. The forehead which does not become wet with the perspiration of penitence is not a human forehead; it is a piece of rock. The hand which does not move forward to serve humanity is virtually paralysed and lifeless. The claw of a lion is better than that hand of a person which cuts the throat of another human-being."

Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee condoling the demise of Ali Mian had said. "Ali Mian, as he was respectfully known, was also a great humanitarian. In his last message he strongly condemned the hijacking of the Indian Airlines Plane, stating, "Nobody, having respect and love for human beings can ever approve of such action."

Needless to add that for the fulfilment of his mission, Maulana did not dither from speaking the truth on the face; be it Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, V.P. Singh, Narsimha Rao or Atal Bihari Vajpase. His sole purpose was to convey what, in his opinion, was good for all classes is good for the country as a whole.

Maulana is no more today with us but his message and teachings are here to guide us. We should do our best to spread it in every corner of the country so that an atmosphere of brotherhood, fraternity and love may perpetuate amongst us.

Keeping in view the present unrest prevailing around us we must strive hard to restore confidence and help in rejuvenating the society. By holding seminars and gatherings of people of different faiths, misgivings and hatred against each other be removed. As envisaged by Ali Mian (RAH) his mission of "Payam-e-Insaniyat" can play a constructive role in this direction. ■ ORN

We solicit articles for publication in The Fragrance of East. Suitable remuneration will be paid to writers.

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MESSAGE FOR PRESENT DAY MUSLIMS FROM THE LIFE OF MUHAMMAD (SAW)

S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

Every one knows that the world was not a desolate land or a cemetery. The life was as vibrant, may be with a little difference, as it is today. All dealings were as they are today. The trade, the farming, and the suitable persons for running the government machinery were there. The people of that time were well satisfied and contented with their life style and never felt any change in it.

Allah, somehow did not like that condition of the world. As mentioned in hadith, "He had a glance of the world and disliked all the people, the Arabs or the non Arabs and was dejected with them, except a few people of the book." Under that condition he chose Muhammad (SAW) and with him organized the people for the purpose which apparently could not be done by others. The work which people were doing with interest and full satisfaction did not require a fresh guidance. There was no need of a storm in the tranquil ocean of humanity, created by emergence of Muslims which shook whole of the world. When Allah created Adam the angels said, "We are a plenty to sing your praise and offer prayer, the need for creation of this earthly creature is not clear." Allah replied "I know what ye know not" giving indication (and later made it clear) that Adam, was not created only for the tasks which angels were performing but Allah had to take some other work from him.

If Muslims were prepared only for trade then the traders of Mecca who travelled to Syria and Yemen for business and those Jews having big business establishments at Medina had right to ask, "what did they lack that a new generation is being brought up for this purpose?" If it was for crop growing, the farmers of Medina, Khaiber, Taif, Najd, Syria, Yemen and Iraq had right to ask, What is missing in their efforts and methods of cultivation that new farmers are being raised? If it was only to fit in and run the administration then the bureaucrats of Rome and Iran had right to question that they were qualified enough to run the affair efficiently and most of our

folk are unemployed what then is the need to bring in new candidates?

Actually muslims were being evolved for a task which no one was doing in the world nor was capable of doing it, raising of a new people was therefore essential for whom the Holy Quran says, 'ye are the best of people, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah.'

For this purpose they left their homes, bore losses in their trades, lost the earnings of whole life, dumped established business, abandoned their gardens and farms, said adieu to their comfort and ease, closed their eyes from all success and good life, lost golden chances in life, sacrificed which Muslims look contended today, there were no need to raise all this commotion. The achievement of this was easy and with out any risk. There was no conflict or confrontation in the world. The world offered the same way of life and luxury repeatedly (which is now the goal of common Muslims) but the preacher (SAW) of Islam rejected it every time, rebuffed the offer of wealth and leadership, luxury, gaiety, easy, happy, social life.

If Muslims have to revert back to that level of life style of non believers which they were enjoying at the time of annunciation of the Holy prophet and today on which all the population of the world of non believers is, and it was to get engrossed in the same routine in which the Arabs, the Iranians and the Greeks were busy and make their standard of success as the goal of own life and which their beloved prophet (SAW) had rejected at the best of time, then it is like negating the early history of Islam and is declaration that priceless blood which was sacrificed at Badr, Hunain, Ahzab, Qadsia and Yarmuk was sacrificed in vain.

Today if those leaders of Quraish could speak they would tell the Muslims, "the things which you are running after today and which you have made the goal of your life, we offered the same things to your prophet (SAW) and those all things could have been achieved with out sacrificing even a drop of blood, and now the outcome of all strive and price of all the sacrifice is this life style which you have adopted and this is the standard you have set for your living and your demeanor and on which you are satisfied?" If any of those leaders of Quraish who were staunch enemy of Islam get a chance to question this life style, our wisest advocate will not be able to answer and Muslim Ummah (Community) will have no way to escape embarrassment. Rasoolallah was unconvinced with Muslims, lest falling in material life they

forget their goal and slide back to the level of rest of the people of the world. He (SAW) addressed Muslims close to his demise in which he said :

“For you I do not fear poverty and destitution but I dread the day when you also get the ease and luxury of life as was achieved by people before you and you also start vain competition and greed as they did and you are also perished as they were.”

When Ansar of Medina thought to take some respite from the busy schedule of Islamic activities and strive (Jihad) and look after and refurbish their farming and gardens, and take short permission to manage their business. They could not have even thought for a moment of excusing themselves from the basic tenets of Islam (Salat, Zakat, Sawm and Haj) to look after their affairs. Even this respite from the active service of Islam and it's strive was thought to be a suicide and abandoning the cause and the goal. And following Ayah of Suratul Baqarah was revealed which was explained by Hazrat Abu Ayub Ansari (Raz) as under :

"And spend in the cause of Allah (i.e. Jihad of all kinds etc) and do not throw yourselves into destruction (by not spending in the cause of Allah) and do good. Truly, Allah loves Muhsinoon (the good-doers)" (II-195)

The true picture of a Muslim is, that either he is engaged in inviting to Islam or in active strive for Islam or he is sponsor, ally and helper to those who are doing this work and has determination, and like to work with those who are struggling for cause of Islam. A contended civil life or pure professionalism is not an Islamic life and by no means is the object of a Muslim's life. Acceptable engagements and acceptable means of living are not prohibited, but with correct intention and with expectation of divine reward it is a means of worship and the right goal and not for self-aggrandizement.

This is a big message of the life of Muhammad (SAW) which is addressed to Muslims only. Not to pay attention and ignore its purpose is to close eyes from a big reality which the life of Muhammad (SAW) presents to Muslims. ■

(Translated by Mohsin J. Shamsi)

AIMPLB against codification of uniform personal law

New Delhi : The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) has asked the Government to reject any proposal to codify uniform personal law for all Muslims irrespective of their sect and school of Islamic jurisprudence.

The executive committee of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board is totally opposed to codification of uniform Shariah law as it will empower the state to alter, change, amend, add and delete rules of Shariat, the AIMPLB said in a release here.

Any such proposals are “ill motivated, ill-advised and these measures have been suggested to pave the way for enactment of Uniform Civil Code and to deprive the Muslims of their fundamental right to get family disputes settled according to the rules of Shariat”, it said. The Board asked the Union Law Ministry and the Law Commission to outrightly reject such proposals and publicly declared that there is no move and that the Commission and the Government have no intension to effect any changes in the Muslim Personal Law.

(The Pioneer-8-7-2008)

RELEVANCE OF MADRASAS IN PRESENT DAY CONTEXT

S.M. Rabey Hasani Nadwi

Education has always remained a means to organize the humanity on suitable lines. Allah has associated it with the man as a symbol to distinguish from other creatures. And through education alone a man achieves his objectives and developments in the society. The educational system of Muslims is based on 'oneness' of Almighty Allah with a unique blend of spiritual and worldly knowledge. The western colonialists during their regime aligned it exclusively with the worldly affairs and imposed on the subjects, resulting into alienation of mankind from the God-gifted way of life.

Following this policy, rulers from Europe introduced their own way of life where ever they went as occupying forces, including in the Muslim dominated nations. It means the humanity was made to adopt anti-religion sentiments as a base in the society. Thus an attempt was made to banish religion from the day to day life. The Islamic scholars blessed with spiritual enlightenment resisted these moves. They preached the Islamic sciences through their own organized chain of Islamic institutions called 'Madrasas' with limited resources they had to restrict their efforts towards defending the rebellious attitude towards God and its spread among the faithful.. This resulted in prevalence of two parallel systems of education viz; One, the religious; sponsored and organized by Muslim scholars and the other worldly; started by the state. This vertical division was bound to harm the interests of the Ummah in long run. Some of the enlightened scholars did try to bring down the gap between the two line of teaching. Such endeavors drew prompt dividends.

CAPABILITIES IN QURAN, FIQH RELATED SCIENCES NEED IMPROVEMENT:

Today, the anti Islamic forces are targeting Islam and its teachings with an intention to plant discard, confuse the faithful and weaken their belief. Shariah Laws are designed to ensure a peaceful, cohesive family set-up and solve all family and finance related problems in the society, The Divine Quranic belief verses revealed directly from the Creator strengthen the belief of faithful in Almighty Allah and

strengthen the bond with him. Those associated with the service of religion should prepare themselves and their students; develop desired capabilities to successfully face such attacks.

CONSPIRACY TO MAKE MADRASAS INEFFECTIVE:

The western imperialists believed Islam possesses threat to their designs. After the elimination of communism from world stage their leaders have openly declared that Islam alone remains as a rival force for them. Worrisome, they have planned to finish the Madrasas. They have not kept their intentions a secret any more. Various plan and programs being announced at political, diplomatic and administrative levels by various government in the name of reforms, financial help, modernization are directed to eliminate them at any cost. As a coercive step they are being branded with titles like 'dangerous for peace', 'terrorist centers' etc. These forces want to enforce the law of free society world over. The world has seen, planned elimination of religious institutions from the place they adopted this strategy, resulting into banishing of Islam from that society. Take Turkey for example which I have visited. Many prominent scholars and writers of Islam whose contributions are source of knowledge world over even today, had lived there. After passing through the days of Russian rulers for two generations, the standard of religious knowledge had fallen to such a level that people forgot to know what Salat and Saum, (The two main pillars of Islam) mean. But in a few areas where teachings were being secretly arranged, a vast majority of Muslim inhabitants had absolutely no knowledge of simple Islamic beliefs and principles. Though they knew they are descendents of Muslim parents, they lacked the source of Islamic knowledge. Their attachment with Islam remained to the extent of the names they carried. With the liberation they have attained recently, the scenario has totally changed.

MADRASAS ARE MARK OF IDENTITY FOR MUSLIMS :

Unfortunately we find in India today, certain which do not have Madrasas or even Mosques. Muslims living there have lost their identity and forgotten they are believers in 'oneness' of Allah. It is learnt some of the Muslim families of these places keep idols in the house and pay their obeisance. The irony is they have no feeling for what they are doing. The tragedy is they have no knowledge about Islam, its principles, its prayers. According to eyewitnesses, it is prevalent in eastern parts

of Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab even in certain parts of Uttar Pradesh. The reason for this situation is; in the absence of knowledge about the concept of their own religion Islam and its principles, they have adopted the practices found in the neighbourhood. They don't know their activities are quite contrary to the belief they are carrying. There is none to tell them where they are heading to. It is for man to emulate whatever he learns through the company, neighbourhood he maintains. The situation has reached such an alarming stage that Christian Missionaries, Qadiyanies have step up their activities to convert them into their beliefs. It is imperative that we understand importance of Madrasas, strengthen them and spread their services to include such areas also which are hitherto not covered. A Muslim cannot save his faith and Islam in the absence of these institutions.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MODERN SCHOOLS AND MADRASAS:

Some of our intellectual brothers, graduated in modern education in an anti-religion environment, feel the Madrasas are undersirable for the Ummah. The religious education in their opinion is not that important to be given special attention. According to them it has little scope and can be learnt without much efforts. It is sad that having lived in a western environment ignorant of the religion and its spirit, they miserably lack understanding of issues involved. We know Medical Colleges are inevitable for man to take care of health requirements of the society. Similarly Engineering colleges are a must to chart out developmental programs for a good future. None can deny the important role Law Colleges play in bringing out experts in Legal matters. For a Muslim; one who believes in God, the religious knowledge that helps him understand God, the purpose of his certain need. Madrasas are the place which are engaged in imparting exactly this type of education which covers all aspects of life.

IMPORTANCE OF MADRASAS AS UNDERSTOOD BY DR. IQBAL:

The renowned Scholar, Thinker, Philosopher, Poet of Urdu Dr. Iqbal had summed up the significant role assigned for Madrasas in a Muslim society way back eighty years ago. He had quipped thus :

"Let these Madrasas, Maktabs prosper; let these Maulavis the children of poor Muslim masses. Can you imagine the society without these institutions? Ask me have witnessed the situation in Spain , where Muslims ruled for 800 years. What remains today to tell their past glory is nothing except the ruins of great monuments like palace of Al-hamra, Cordoba, Granada. so in India too, the Taj Mahal of Agra and

Red Fort of Delhi alone will be left as a symbol of Muslim culture, who ruled for 800 years”.

WHAT PROMPTS TO CRITICISE THE MADRASAS, ITS GRADUATES:

It is totally unacceptable for Muslims that their lives are separated from the religion as was done with the people of other religions living in Europe and America. Their lives are confined to materialistic world. They have been passing through lives like highly decomposed bodies devour of any sense and feeling of culture. (It is a Vulture- culture all around.). The entire world is witnessing helplessly.

Our centers of religious learning stated and being managed by prominent scholars of Islam are doing tremendous towards establishing, protecting human values in the world. These are unique factories which are turning out ‘human –beings’, The protectors of Islam. These are simultaneously guarding Islam in its original form. The enemies of Islam and Muslims are challenging them repeatedly. If we fail to understand these threats concealed in different forms coming out now and then, it is certain we will perish as Muslims. We will be confined to live a life subjugated at the hands of western powers. We must revere and strengthen these institutions which are working ‘power-houses’ of faith. This way alone we can ensure Ummah lives a honourable life.

The critiques object that those associated with Madrasas abandon other aspects of worldly life. They confine their activities within the four-walls of the institution and are incapable to earn sufficient amount to meet basic needs of their families. They live a life unconcerned with the happenings in the world. By passing such comments these people are exposing their ignorance of ground realities. They have never tried to ascertain the capabilities are founded for the teaching of Islamic sciences, various subjects of interest desired in the society are simultaneously taught there.

Today, Muslims as a Ummah are under constant threat and pressure. Unfounded and baseless charges are being leveled and propagated. Efforts are afoot to weaken and finish them. People and Powers are conspiring to sever their links with the religion they believe. Their Teachings and customs are being targeted with prejudiced comments. Their History and Culture are being subjected to tampering acts. New onslaughts on political and social stages are being launched by every passing day through various means. If we fail to train up and prepare defenders to face these challenges History will not forget us. To ensure security of the Ummah we have to prepare scholars in all these fields who can fight back the enemy successfully. ■

(Translated by Syed Ilyas Basha)

ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI

A.F.M Khalid Hossain*

Introduction:

In the current century Abdullah Yusuf Ali is one of the most eminent personalities among the connoisseurs of excellence throughout the Muslim world for his scholarly translation and sagacious commentary of the Holy Qur'an. He has earned the acclaim and gratitude of millions of Muslims for his extraordinary mastery of the English language, decorative expressions, scientific and rational analysis of the events mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, depth of genius in the discovery of links with the information and quotation contained therein and an intellect of exceptional quality. Many non-Muslims have corroborated to the tenet of Islam after reading his 1854-page long 'English Translation and Commentary of the Holy Qur'an. Scores of publishers from various countries have benefited immensely through publishing many edition of his work, especially the translation and Commentary of the Holy Qur'an, but the tragic circumstances in which this noble devotee of knowledge and scholar par excellence breathed his last will remain a matter of shame for the entire Muslim Ummah for ever! No Muslim was with him when he died in London in 1953 in a helpless and penniless condition. This tragic episode of the death of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, this heart rending of sorrow, was revealed in a letter written by the then High Commissioner for Pakistan in Britain to the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

Academic and Administrative career:

Abdullah Yusuf Ali was born in India 130 years ago. The colourful academic life of this rare genius started at Wilson College, Mumbai, India. From there he went to Cambridge University where he got the degrees of Master of Arts and Master of Laws. Then he got his Barrister-at-Law degree from Lincoln's Inn, London. He learnt the Arabic language from his father and with singular attention devoted all his life to the study of the commentary of the Holy Qur'an written by the renowned commentators of both past and present.

After completion of the most competitive examination of I.C.S.C., B. E, he joined the Indian Civil Service 1895 CE and was posted too many places as District of Finance of the Indian Government. He was also given the responsibility of Joint

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Secretary in the Central Government of India. He retired from the Indian Civil Service 1914 CE.. The Encyclopedia of Islam (vol.i) gives us the following details of his eventful and chequered career:

He presided over all- India Muslim Educational Conferences held in Nagpur in 1910 and in Calcutta in 1932. In 1916 he was a member of the Committee for Indian Affairs at the imperial Institute and was the chairman of some special committees. In 1917 he was the Professor of Hindi, Indian Society and Religion under the School of Oriental Studies of London university. In 1921 he held the post of Ministry of Exchequer in the State of Hyderabad. In 1925 he was the Principal of Islamia College, Lahore and a Fellow of the Punjab University. During this time, he discharged with great efficiency, the significant responsibility as a member in the Court of Aligarh University. He was one of the representatives of India who attended the Nith General Assembly meeting of the League of Nations in 1928. To establish peace through religion, he made valuable contribution in many international conferences held in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Holland, United States and Canada from 1981 to 1930.'

Research Works:

A great number of his research works and religious dissertations on Islamic history, 'Da' wah' and Tabligh.' Education reform, literature, archaeology, sculpture, fine arts and social justice were published in many newspapers and journals of the Indian sub-continent and Europe. In addition to all that, according to the Encyclopedia of Islam, he wrote 12 books in the English language, which earned him the attention and praise of research scholars and readers in the international arena. Most notably however, he has secured for himself a very high position in the hearts of intellectuals all over the world for his English Translation and Commentary of the Holy Qur 'an. The names of his books are appended below:

- 1 The Indian Mohammedans(1907)
- 2 Mestrovic and Serbian Sculpture(1916)
- 3 Muslim Educational Ideals (1923)
- 4 Islam as a World Force(1926)
- 5 India and Europe (1926)
- 6 Personality of Muhammad, the Prophet (1929)
- 7 Medieval India (1932)
- 8 Translation and Commentary of the Holy Qur'an (1934)
- 9 Life and Literature (1936)
- 10 Religion and Scope and (Content 1936)
- 11 Islamic History, its Scope and (Content 1936)
- 12 The Message of Islam (1940)2

Comments on the exegeses of Muslims and Muslim antagonists:

Varying degrees of other of faults are evident in the translation, exegesis and commentary of other research scholars. A. Ross. George Sale, Rev. J.M. Rodwell, Prof. E.H. Palmer and Professor E.M. Wherry are among the non-Muslim translators of the Holy Quran in English. To say the non-Muslim translators of the Holy Quran in English. To say the truth, these works are the English renderings of the translations and exegesis of Du Ryer of France and Maracci of Italy. The main purpose of these works was to discredit and vilify Islam in the eyes of Europeans. Christian Church mentality towards Islam is abundantly clear in these commentaries. They have failed miserably to realize and appreciate the inner beauty, grandeur and wisdom of the Holy Quran. In one phrase, the translations and commentaries of the non-Muslims and the Muslim antagonists are slipshod, haphazard and full of malice.

Thus, a need was felt among the Muslim intelligentsia to combat the vituperative attack of the non-Muslim scholars on the Holy Quran and to enlighten the readers in the English language with its teachings and pristine beauty on the other. From the beginning of the twentieth century, a number of Muslim scholars came forward to take up this challenging task of the Holy Quran in English language. Notable among them are Dr. Muhammad Abdul Hakim Khan of Patiala, Mirza Hairat of Delhi, Nawab Imdadul Mulk Sayyid Hussain Bilgrami of Hyderabad, Deccan, Maulana Mohammad Ali of Panjab, Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar, a retired Judge of Singapore and Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall of England.

Dr. Hakim's Translation did not come out in the printed form. Nawab Bilgrami did not live long to complete his work. About Maulana Muhammad Ali's translation, Abdullah Yusuf Ali remarks: "It is equipped with adequate explanatory matter in the notes and the preface and a fairly full index. But the English of the text is decidedly weak and is not likely to appeal to those who know no Arabic."³ Moreover, being a staunch follower of the Qadiani faith, He could not rise above the general consciousness of his community.

About Hafiz Ghulam Sarwar's work published in 1930, Abdullah Yusuf Ali says, "His translation deserves to be better known than it is. He has provided fairly full summaries of the Suras, section by section, but he has practically no notes to his text. I think such notes are necessary for a full understanding of the text. In many cases the Arabic words and phrases are so pregnant of meaning that a Translator would be in despair unless he were allowed to explain all that he understands by them."⁴ Being an Englishman, Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall's command of the language is beyond question. Moreover, his scholarship in the Arabic language is well accepted but he

has added few notes to elucidate his Text. His rendering is 'almost literal' and therefore a step away from the understanding of the uninitiated. It can hardly be expected that it can give an adequate idea of a book which (in his won words) can be described as "That imitable symphony the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy."⁵

About "Tafsir Haqqani" he says, it "is quite modern in tone", and 'I have derived much instruction from it and have used it constantly.' About Tafsir Jauhari he opines, it "finds the jewels" of the Quran and of the sciences mutually illuminative, and suggests many new lines of thought." His remark about the commentary of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan deserves serious attention. He says, it "has not met the approval of the Ulama."⁶

Features of Yusuf Ali's Commentary :

It can be asserted that the English Translation and Commentary on the Holy Quran composed by Abdullah Yusuf Ali is free from the faults and failings of other writers and scholars and is a more complete translation with a brief commentary. The meaning of classical Arabic words is so pregnant and comprehensive that it is difficult for the translators to interpret in a modern analytical language word for word. European translators have often failed in this respect, as they do not look at them in the best example of Oriental style. Many people have taken recourse to imagination and 'fairy tales' when dealing with Arabic words idioms and phrases, but Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation and exegesis is very appropriate and in concord with the fundamental principles and ideals of the Holy Quran. He presented English interpretation, side by side with Arabic text. The rhythm and exalted tone of the original have been reflected in his English Interpretation. Where the Suras are short, he has given one or two paragraphs of his rhythmic Commentary to prepare the readers for the Text. Where the Suras are long, he has introduced the subject matter in short, appropriate paragraphs of the commentary from time to time, each indicating the particular verses to which it refers. In order to coin an English word for an Arabic word he necessarily exercised his own judgements. Though he has explained the literal meaning of the word in the Notes, he, in many places, departed from the literal translation with a view to expressing the spirit of the original better in English. His views and explanatory notes are terse and concise consistently with the object and he has not allowed it to absorb a disproportionate amount of space. He carefully discarded to discuss theological controversies or enter into polemical arguments. The essential features of this aried no views of his own, but followed the received Commentators. Where they differ amongst themselves, he has had to choose what appeared to him to be the most reasonable opinion from all points of view.

To write this translation and the short commentary Abdullah Yusuf Ali labored diligently for 40 years. He traveled for an wide in search of facts and evidence. He visited many contemporary Ulama of international repute in the quest for satisfactory answers to various complex issues. He studied extensively the most renowned commentaries from the ancient times right up to his own time. But he did not adopt all the views of all these commentators verbatim. He was very careful in the use of information and facts that he gathered. In this connection he says clearly-

“Let me set out the names of the most important Tafsirs, especially those to which I have from time to time referred. They are not, however, in any sense my authorities. They belong to widely different schools of thought, and some of them express extreme views with which I do not agree. I only adopt the general sense of accepted commentaries.”⁷

Abdullah Yusuf Ali thoroughly studied the most important Tafsirs written in Arabic, Urdu, Persian, English and Latin Languages by the renowned scholars belong to widely different schools of thought and he added reference of their works frequently. These are (1) Jame' al Bayan by Abu J'afar Muhammad Ibn Jarir Tabari, d. 310 H. (2) Kashshaf by Abul Qasim Mahmud Zamakhshari, D. 538 H. (3) Tafsirul Quran by Abul Fida Ismail Ibn Kathir, d. 774 H. (5) Tafsir Jalalain by Jalaluddin Sayuthi and Jalaluddin Mahalli. (5) Majma'ul Bahrain by Jalaluddin Sayuti, d. 911 H. (6) Itqan fi ulum il Quran Jalaluddin Sayuti, d. 911H. (7) Anwar ut Tanzil by Qadi Nasiruddin Abu Said Baidawi, d. 685 H. (8) Mufradat by Abul Qasim Husain Raghil Ispahani, d. H/1432 A.D (10) Tafsir by Allama Shamsuddin of Daulatabad, India (11) Tafsir by Shah Waliullah Dehlawi (12) Tafsir by Shah Abdul Aziz Dehlawi, d. 1824 A.D. (13) Tafsir by Shah Abdul Qadir Dehlawi, d. 1826 A.D. (14) Tafsir by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan of Aligarh, d. 1898 (15) Tafsir by Shaikh Muhammad Abdulllah and Muhammad Rashid Rida (17) Tafsir by Maulana Nazir Ahmad. D. 1912 and (18) Bayanul Quran by Allama Ashraf Ali Thanawi, d. 1943. These meritorious commentaries are the perfect mines of socio-cultural and historical informations. The interpretations expressed by the notable scholars are strong from ethical and spiritual point of view. On these Tafsirs again a number of commentaries have been written.⁸

In order to elucidate the various words, points, chronology, and concordance to the Holy Quran Abdullah Yusuf Ali consulted with great care and minute attention to details the encyclopedias, dictionaries and general works of reference that have practically become acceptable to the European scholarship on the subject. These are as follow : 1. Qamus (Arabic Dictionary), 2. Lisan ul Arab (Arabic Dictionary), 3. Surah (Arabic-Persian Dictionary), 4. Dictionary and glossary of the Quran by J.

Penrice, 5. English –Arabic lexicon by E.W. Lane, 6. Dictionary of Islam by Hughes, 7. Geschichte des Qorans by Noldeke Schwally, 8. Sirat un Nabi by Allama Shibli Numani, 10. Fath ur Rahman by Faidh ullah, 11. Sirat ur Rasul by Ibn Hisham, 12. Encyclopedia of Islam and 13. Encyclopedia Britannica.⁹

In transliterating the Arabic words and names he avoided the European forms and used the Arabic forms. For the correct pronunciation of the letters of the Arabic Alphabet he furnished a table of consonantal sound, long vowel, short vowel diphthong in the introductory chapter of his Commentary. For the intelligent reading of the Text, he used three kinds of marks that is an elaborate system in the Quranic punctuation.

King Fahd Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia in 1400 Hijra had ventured to produce a reliable translation and exegesis of the Holy Quran in English language free from personal bias and prejudices and entrusted the General Presidency of the Department of Islamic Researches, Ifta, Call and Guidance to undertake the responsibility of revising a particular translation. Four high level committee were formed in order to accomplish this enormous task comprising well-qualified scholars both in Islamic Shariyah and English language.

Finally, Abdullah Yusuf Ali's scholarly translation and commentary was selected because of its authority for reprinting by King Fahd Holy Quran Printing Complex of the Saudi Arabian government in 1405 Hijra, according to Royal Decree No. 12412. This Translation was finally published by the Ministry of Hajj and Auqaf of Saudi Arabia in 1410 Hijra and was distributed world-wide free of cost. The General Presidency of the Departments of Islamic Researches, Ifta, Call and Guidance gave the following reasons for selecting the Translation of Abdullah Yusuf "Ali, "The translation by the late Ustadh Abdullah Yusuf Ali was consequently chosen for its distinguishing characteristics, such as a highly elegant style, a choice of word close to the meaning of the original text, accompanied by scholarly notes and commentaries." The committees gradually finalized this translation in assistance with other best translations available, by adopting the most appropriate fresh expression where needed in accordance with the sound Islamic point of view. The reader will find at the end of the text a comprehensive list containing references to proper names of people, places and important topics, dealt with either in the text or in the accompanying notes.

'Allama Abdullah Yusuf "Ali dedicated his scholarly Translation and commentary of the Holy Quran in the following words:

"To all who love and reverence the book,
And earnestly strive to find in it,
Not a reflection of their own fancies,

But a clue to Unity, Discipline,
And the Call to higher matters of the spirit,
I dedicate this humble effort at Interpretation,
The fruit of my life, Thought, and Study.”
'Abdullah Yusuf Ali'
(servant of Islam)¹¹

Last days on the streets :

Multi-faceted talent, exceptional intelligence, scholarly translation of the Holy Quran and an extraordinary command of the English language and literature brought Abdullah Yusuf Ali international fame and dignity. This noble soul spent his last days literally on the streets, in England. In the final moments of his life he was helpless, shelter less and penniless. We do not know why this happened to him. Why didn't the members of the Muslim community of London pick up the greatest servant of Islam of this century from the streets, show him a little affection and nurse him with touch of kindness ? May be he disliked publicity! May be he had lost his mental balance ! May be he was forced to take to the streets because some unfortunate calamity befell him! But where were the Muslims of the world? Where were the followers of the Holy Quran? There is no language to express this pain! This sadness is choking! There is no way of hiding this shame!

In 1953, the then High Commissioner for Pakistan to Britain, Mr. M. A. Sharif wrote to the then Priminister of Pakistan, Mr. Mohammad Ali giving some description of the circumstances of his death. It transpires from his letter that this octogenarian was totally confounded with some crippling financial hardship. He was seen begging for a morsel of food in Trafalgar Square. His clothes were tattered. He had suitcase beside him, which had no money in it. Later he was taken to the Centre for the Homeless, run by the County Council of London. Winter in Britain was exceptionally severe that year. On Wednesday the 9th of December, a mentally deranged old man was found sitting on the stairs outside a house in the West Minister area. Police took him to West Minister Hospital, but he was released from there the same day. This homeless old man was then given shelter in the 'Dove Home' by the London Council Home for the Elderly. The next Day, 10th December, he suffered a stroke and was admitted to ST. Stephen Hospital. Three hours after admission he blurted out all the accumulated pain in his soul, and in a sea of grievance and hatred towards the followers of his religion he breathed his last. (Inna Lillahi Wa Inna Ilayhe Raje'oon). His family and folks could not be found to take his body for the funeral and burial, which in itself is shrouded in mystery and is a very painful episode. The Pakistan High

Commission in London knew this person. After the coroner of the London County Council completed his investigating, he was buried by the local Muslim in Brook Wood Cemetery, Surrey.¹²

Conclusion :

Thus, at the age of 81, in the most bewildering of circumstances, came to a tragic end the colourful life of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, one of the greatest sons of the Muslim Ummah. This powerful writer, selfless Muballigh of Islam and a polyglottic genius remains buried forever in European soil. The First edition of his "Translation and commentary of the Holy Quran was published in 1934. In the preface of that edition he wrote, 'It is the duty of every Muslim, man, woman or child, to read the Quran and understand it according to his own capacity. If any one of us attains to some knowledge or understanding of it by study, contemplation, and the test of life, both outward and inward, it is his duty, according to his capacity, to instruct others, and share with them the joy of peace, which result from contact with the spiritual world. The Quran indeed every religious book-has to be read, not only with the tongue and voice and eyes, but with the best light which our heart and conscience can give us. It is in this spirit that I would have my readers approach to Quran. One final word to my readers is read, study, and digest the Holy Book, read slowly and let it sink into your heart and soul. Such study will, like virtue, be its own reward."¹³

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4. Ibid.
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10. The Holy Quran English translation of the meanings and commentary King Fahd Holy Quran Printing Complex Madinah, 1410 H,pp. vi-vii.
11. The Holy Quran, Text, Translation and Commentary by Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore, 1983, p.i.
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ZAKAT – A DIVINE BOUNTY

Obaidur Rahman Nadwi

Out of five tenets of Islam, *Zakat* is such an important pillar of Islam which finds mention at 82 places together with Salat in the Holy Q^uran. It says : “And be steadfast in prayer and give *Zakat*: and whatever good ye send forth for your souls before you, you shall find it with Allah : for Allah sees well that ye do” (Al-Quran – 2:110).

“The word *Zakat* is derived from the word *Zaka* which means “it (a plant) grew.” The second derivative of this word carries the sense of purification, e.g. *qad aflaha man zakkaha* (He is indeed successful who purified himself). The other word used for *Zakat* both in the Quran and the Hadith is *Sadaqa* which is derived from *Sidq* (the truth). Both these words are highly significant. The spending of wealth for the sake of Allah purifies the heart of man of the love of material wealth of this world.” (Sirat-un-Nabi)

Generally it is said that *Zakat* is a tax (poor-due) but the fact is that it is a form of worship and above all an effective source to improve the economic condition of the poor and needy Muslims. Such sublime system is rarely found in other religions of the world. If this system is fully implemented, the economic condition of Muslims will comprehensively improve. We may recall the phase of Caliph Umar ibn Abdul Aziz as to how he beautifully levied the *Zakat* system in the society and brought about an extraordinary change within a short span of time. In his book “Saviours of Islamic Spirit”, S. Abdul Hasan Ali Nadwi writes: “The financial reforms embarked upon by Umar ibn Abdul Aziz viz remission of numerous taxes and tithes disallowed by Sharia, did not result in pecuniary difficulties or deficits in the State income. On the contrary, people became so much well-off that it became difficult to find destitutes and beggars who would accept the poor-due (*Zakat*).”

Imam Al-Gazzali wrote in *Yahya Ulumiddin*: “He (Allah) has made *Zakat* a foundation and a basis of religion and He purifies who so ever He pleases by enabling him to pay *Zakah*.”

Noted Islamic scholar Dr. Yusuf Al-Qaradavi has written: "Of the pillars of Islam, *Zakah* is its social – economic pillar. *Zaka* is declared a part of worship. Al-Quran mentions *Zakah* together with *Salah*. But *Zakah* is an inseparable part of the economic system designed for the community: So much importance is attached to discussion on *Zakat* in contemporary literature on political, constitutional and economic system."

No doubt, *Zakat* is a Divine bounty given to Muslims so that the economic condition of the have-nots may improve and they may lead a prosperous and happy life in this universe.

We may easily comprehend its significance and importance through strict admonition of first Caliph Hazrat Abu Bakr about those people who refused to pay *Zakat*. The Caliph vehemently said, "By God, I would definitely wage war against those persons who refuse to pay *Zakat*."

Dreadful chastisement is there in the Holy Quran for those who do not pay *Zakat*. It says: "And there are those who bury gold and silver and spend it not in the way of Allah; announce unto them a most grievous penalty on the Day when heat will be produced out of it will be branded on their foreheads, their flanks and their backs. This is the (treasure) which you buried for yourselves. Taste ye the (treasure) ye buried" (Al-Quran-IX : 34-35).

The Holy Prophet says : "He who possesses gold or silver (ie. Wealth) but does not fulfil the obligations that are attached to the possession of wealth (i.e. does not pay *Zakat* etc), plates of fire will be prepared for him on the Day of Judgement. These plates will be heated further in the Fire of Hell and then his forehead and his sides and back will be branded with them. The plates will be heated up again and again to brand him and this will continue throughout the Day of Judgement which will be equal to fifty thousand years in this world."

It should be kept in mind that *Zakat* becomes mandatory when one attains Nisab (The quantity of money). It is not obligatory if the amount is less than the Nisab. It should also be kept in mind that the amount of Nisab may pass one year in the possession of its owner. If the amount does not last one year in its owner, the *Zakat* is not obligatory. We may easily understand the rate of *Zakat* through the following statement of S. Sulaiman Nadwi. "*Zakat* is paid on the surplus of wealth which is left over the passage of a year. Leaving aside merchandise, animals and agricultural yield, *Zakat* is paid at almost uniform rate of 2 ½ percent. The minimum standard of

surplus wealth over which *Zakat* is charged is known as Nisab. It differs with different kinds of wealth the most important being 200 dirham or 52 ½ totals (Nearly 21 oz) in case of silver, and 20 mithqals or 7½ totals (nearly 3 oz) in case of gold. The nisab of cash is the same as that of gold and silver” (Sirat-un-Nabi)

The Holy Quran defined those persons to whom the amount of *Zakat* should be given. It says : “The alms are only for the poor and the needy, and those who collect them, and those whose hearts are to be reconciled, and to free the captives and the debtors, and for the cause of Allah, and (for) the way fares, a duty imposed by Allah. Allah is knower, wise.” (The Holy Quran : 9:60)

In this context it would be apt to mention that *Zakat-ul-Fitr* is quite different from the obligatory *Zakat*. It is paid as a token of thankfulness to Allah for having enabled him or her to observe fasts in the month of Ramadhan. It should be paid at the end of the month of Ramadhan before going out for prayer of Id-ul-Fitr. If one pays it after Id, it would be Sadqa (Charity) not *Zakat-Ul-Fitr*. Abdullah b. Umar said : “The messenger of Allah imposed *Zakat ul-Fitr* of Ramadhan as a Saa of dates or a Saa’ of barley, on every Muslim, slave and free, male or female, young or old” (Bukhari and Muslim).

Needless to add that the recipients of *Zakat-ul-Fitr* are the same as the recipients of the obligatory *Zakat*.

Noted scholar S. Ghouse has rightly mentioned that Allah, the exalted, has instituted *Zakat-ul-Fitr* to purify one’s fast from the negative consequences of vain talk and of vain actions which one might have made during the fasting month of Ramadhan. It was also institutionalized, with the objective of helping the poor and needy and to, thus, save them the embarrassment of asking for assistance on the Day of Eid. The poor may, thus celebrate the joy of Eid along with the rich.”

Hence it became clear that obligatory *Zakat* and *Zakat-ul-Fitr* are not alike. *Zakat* becomes obligatory when one possesses Nisab but *Zakat-ul-Fitr* becomes *Wajib* (Necessary) on every Muslim who has a meal of a day and night.

It is unfortunate that scant attention is being paid towards paying the *Zakat* by us while it is obligatory like that of other four tenets of Islam. It is imperative that we must pay *Zakat* and *Zakat-ul-Fitr* and motivate others also to perform it otherwise our wealth would be nuisance and visitation for us on the Day of Judgement. May Allah give us strength to pay it and save us all from the chastisement of the Hereafter. ■

The Seven Who will be under Allah's Shelter of Mercy

Abu-Hurayrah related that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said :

"Seven types of people will be under the shelter of Mercy on the Day when there will be no shade other than that of Allah's Mercy : 1) a just ruler, 2) a young person who kept busy in Allah's worship, 3) a person whose heart was attached to the mosque, 4) two persons who loved each other for Allah's sake, they met for His sake and partook for His sake and left each other for His sake, 5) a man who was invited by a beautiful and charming woman but declined her offer saying, I fear Allah, 6) a person who gave charity so secretly that his left hand did not know what was given by his right hand and 7) a person who remembered Allah private, so that his eyes brimmed over with tears." (Bukhari and Muslim)

PROPHET MUHAMMAD, LAST MESSENGER OF ALLAH

Zeeshan Ahmad

The life of the Holy Prophet of Islam, Hazrat Muhammad Mustafa (SAW) is a role model. The high accolades paid to his personality by Allah through the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah or Islamic practices reminds us of his exalted personality. Five times in a day, the adhan or call to prayer reminds Muslims that the Holy Prophet is the Messenger of Allah. In addition, the namaz recited emphasises the unity of Allah and the messengership of the Holy Prophet in the same breath, thereby underscoring the significance of the persona of the Prophet.

Islam teaches that Allah chose to introduce Himself through His words revealed to His choicest servants. For the guidance of mankind, Allah sent 124,000 prophets, the first of them being Adam and the last being Hazrat Muhammad Mustafa. It was the Holy Prophet of Islam upon whom Allah chose to end His message and complete the chain of prophethood and messengership. "This day, I have perfected the religion (Islam) for you; completed My proof upon you and am satisfied with Islam as a religion (Maidah, verse 5).

Allah emphasises the finality of the prophethood and messengership of Hazrat Muhammad with the words, "Muhammad is not the father of any of the men among you, but he is the Messenger of Allah and the seal of the Prophets" (Ahzab, verse 40). Such is the respect accorded to the Holy Prophet that Allah chose to end His communication and message with the Holy Qur'an revealed to His last prophet and messenger.

The Qur'an itself, along with the code of laws, pays rich tribute to the Prophet. At one place while the Holy Prophet is called "Uswatul Hasanah", the ideal model to emulate, at another place, he is called the "bearer of good news", paradise, and a "warner" for divine chastisement and retribution.

The compliments paid to the Holy Prophet by Allah are not out of place. The period before the arrival of the Holy Prophet in Arabia was one of darkness and ignorance. Wars were fought over petty matters, superstitions were rife and women were hardly respected. The social fabric of the Arabs veered more towards vice and de-

bauchery than religion. Principles which we take for granted in our lives like justice were thrown to the winds.

It was in such trying circumstances that the Holy Prophet announced his message that would change the face and social fabric of the Arabs and others forever. Within a period of 23 years, with extreme patience, with the odds of success stacked against him, the Holy Prophet attracted people towards the message of Allah.

Centuries-old customs were disbanded enmity replaced by brotherhood and superstitions replaced with firm beliefs and reliance upon Allah. Through the love showered upon his only daughter, Fatemah, the Holy Prophet reiterated his commitment to the respect and uplift of women and abolished the shameful practice of burial of female infants.

This brings to the fore the primary mode adopted by the Prophet for dissemination his message : his exemplary character and morals. So whether it was dealing with his family members, his friends or his enemies, he set standards of ethics which remain unsurpassed. It is for this reason that despite the advance of 1,400 years since his demise, the Prophet lives amongst us today through his teachings and words. ■

(T.O.I. - 20-3-08)

It is related by Ali that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said to him, "There are three things which you should not defer (i.e. put off till a later time): (i) Salah, when the time for it comes; (ii) Funeral, when it is ready; and (iii) Woman without a husband, when a suitable match is found for her." (Tirmidhi)

HOW CRUEL OF US TO BACKBITE...!

A. Naseeb Khan*

In this push button age, everybody is busy seeking material prosperity, flavour and luxuries of life with a burning desire to thrill the world by an outstanding success in the race. In the process, many of us realize, sooner or later, the fact that materialist concept of life leads man to grow wayward and irresponsible. It not only allows man to enjoy freedom from the loyalty to ethical values and codes of conduct but also establishes superiority of man over man. Thus, it demolishes the foundation on which rests the structure of the society.

Man, the supreme creation of Allah, has been endowed with remarkable faculties, which help him infuse the nations and individuals with meritorious qualities, religious and scrupulous social virtues. Thus, he preaches love, furthers peace, and leads his fellow creatures to the fountain head of ever flowing love and sympathy. By virtue of the earnest exercise of his faculties and other gifts of Allah, man elevates himself higher than angels.

It is violently opposed to reason to hold a belief that man is powerless like a straw which can be carried away by the gust of wind or by the current of water. He has been created free and gifted with free will, which is limited for his good. Since he is endowed with an insight into good and evil, he will have to present his true account to his Lord on the Day of Judgement when each grade of good and evil will be sorted out.

Needless to say, man should not mix good with evil, power with tyranny and arrogance, and knowledge with ignorance. He should not nurse the lust for power and seeming worldly success and get caught in the disruptive maze, the cobweb, because this insatiable lust not only leads us to erosion of values, but also aggravates our frustration, restlessness and mental tension, giving way to other maladies.

Man has always been able not only to distinguish between noble and ignoble

deeds but also choose the noble and shun the ignoble. So, he owes it as a duty to practice what is virtuous and shun what is evil. By practicing virtuous deeds and preaching the same, man curbs the corruption perpetuated by evil in the society.

The teachings of Islam aim at reclaiming human beings from evil and restoring them to the pristine purity and original nature in which he has been created. The Qur'an says, "Then He showed him / What is wrong and what is right for him. (Surah: Shams; Verse : 8)

Since Islam establishes Allah's Will as the basis of moral order, its moral system encompasses the development of collective human life. And its values remain eternally valid, beyond time and space. It is not the case here that something held good earlier will be taken as bad later, or vice versa. It fosters the sense of universal brotherhood and broadens the vision of humanity.

If one acts upon the teaching of the Qur'an and Hadith, one will not only discipline the moral aspects of one's life but also become the harbinger of peace and love on this earth. Man, rightly called microcosm as well as social animal, can't afford to live alone. It is the society wherein one learns the lessons of systems of social culture, citizenship and other aspects of social life. One also needs it for mental as well as intellectual development. Through mutual interactions in society people receive other's influence, and bring them under their influence. In view of these things, Islam lays much emphasis on the moral aspects of human beings. It enjoins good and forbids evil. It demands us to build a society free from ills and corruptions that stunt the growth of human beings and impede the progress of the spirituality.

Backbiting is such an abominable act that prophet (pbuh) branded it worse and deadlier than adultery. It is vehemently condemned by the Qur'an. "Do not speak ill of each other / Behind their backs / Would any one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? No, you would hate it." (Surah: Hujurat; Verse: 12)

This is such a hateful act that it is compared to eating the flesh of one's brother. Just think about dead brother and the carrion flesh. 'Abomination is added to abomination here'. We are, therefore, strictly commanded to avoid the acts that hurt other's feelings. Allah's curse visits the scandal-mongers and backbiters. He says: Woe to

every (kind of) scandal-monger and backbiter. (Surah: Al Humzah; Verse: 1). It is a condemnable act to speak or suggest ill of others by word or behaviour, or mimicry, no matter if things suggested are true. According to prophet (pbuh) if the things suggested are true, it is backbiting. But if the things suggested are not true, it is an accusation.

The prophet (pbuh) said: Backbiting means one's act of exposing such a part of someone's character that he does not like to be exposed. It may range from some deformity in his body, weak point in his ancestry, lapses in his acts or motives. He further said: One who eats one's brother's flesh in the world will be offered the same on the Day of Judgement. Backbiters will be commanded: Eat the dead whom you ate while they were alive.

We all know that backbiting means an unfair, mean and cowardly attack at others' character when they are absent. Still, this evil is rampant in every society. The stab of jealousy, egotism and a propensity or habitual disposition to entertain our friends by slanderous conversation abet us indulge in backbiting. Sometimes we use it to sweeten our idle gossip or conversation. Sometimes we use it as a means to vent our feelings.

Satan, our arch enemy, is ceaselessly active to deface our pure nature. We should not be his adherents, for he leads his companions to evil to make them the fuel of the Blazing Fire, that is hell. He abets us to be heedless of Allah's commands; to be impervious to the truth, hardened in mind and heart. As slaves of the Lord, we must wage perpetual war against Satan and baser desires. Our good consists in earning Allah's favour by virtue of humility and submission before his Greatness.

Every one will bear his burden alone. He will be accountable for deeds. The Qur'an declares, "No bearer of burdens / Can bear the burden of another: (Surah :Bani Israels; Verse: 15). This repulsive act not only blackens others' characters, breeds evil and immoral acts but also devoids our hearts of tender feelings, and worsens the health of the society. It imposes irreparable loss, causes rift among people. Islam hates it so much that it does not allow us to indulge into it even by way of gestures of hands or eyes. We are not allowed to call a short statured man as 'shorty'. It amounts to backbiting Hadrat Aisha said: There came a woman to the prophet (pbuh). She was

short statured. I said that the woman was very short. The prophet (pbuh) told me that I had committed backbiting.

The prophet (pbuh) is reported to have said: At the night of my celestial ascension, I passed by such members of a community as were scratching their faces with their nails and eating carrion flesh. Jibreel Ameen told me: These are the people who ate man's flesh, in other words they indulged in backbiting.

According to Imam Ghazali - Listening to backbiting attentively is as much an act of backbiting as to committing it, for listening to it pleases and abets the backbiter. In other words, any thing that hurts the feeling of the person referred is backbiting.

Once Hadrat Isa was going somewhere with his companions. They came to see a dead dog. His companions frowned at it and said that the carcass gave out a foul smell. Then, Isa said: Look at its glittering teeth. Evidently enough, we are not allowed to speak ill of any one.

Another worst part of backbiting is that Allah credits the backbiter with the sins of the victim. Once a person backbit someone. The victim went to Hasan Basari who suggested him to put some dates in a plate very tastefully and send it to the backbiter with the following message: I learnt that you earned me some rewards. In return of your noble deed, I express my gratitude to you with a token gift. I am unable to repay your kindness. I hope you will not mind.

Our life on this earth is but probation, a preparation for another world. Let's purge ourselves of lapses and walk on the right path; arm ourselves with lofty virtues and sublime morals and make this probationary world significantly habitable and useful for us. Our redemption depends upon Allah's grace, for which we have to constantly and whole heartedly strive by means of right conduct. No sooner do we start to strive with our might and main, heart and soul than the light and mercy of Allah come to help us come off with flying colours and be the source of ever flowing love and affection for one another. We had better light a lamp than complain of darkness. Let's make sincere efforts to earn the good pleasure of our Lord. ■

IGNORANCE OR MALICE

Greg Noakes

Islam and Muslims have become American media mainstays in the decade and a half since the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

Hardly a week goes by without news of some breaking event in the Muslim world, and with it reams of explanations of Islam and Muslim for Americans. In spite of the air time and column-inches devoted to Islam and Islamic themes, however, the performance of the mainstream American press in the coverage of Islam, Muslims, and events in the Muslim world has been little short of dismal.

In order to understand why, it is important to answer several questions. How do the media cover Islam? What factors shape this coverage? If the performance to date has been lackluster, how can media coverage of Muslims be improved, and are these improvements likely to be made ?.....

Nevertheless, the number of sources for reporting on the Middle East and the Muslim world is limited, and there is a great deal of overlap among media outlets. The three major broadcast networks (ABC, CBS and NBC), in addition to the Cable News Network (CNN), maintain their own Media East correspondents and special assignment foreign correspondents. The American "Newspapers of record", the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times, and the Christian Science Monitor, in addition to news weeklies like Time and Newsweek, also have Middle Eastern correspondents. Most other outlets, however, rely on either one or more of the above sources or on wire services like the Associated Press, United Press International, or Reuters, who in turn often rely upon local stringers to report news.

For the most part, American media coverage of Muslims and events in the Muslim world concentrates on the sensational. Standard media fare includes coverage of political upheavals, acts of violence carried out by extremist groups claiming to act in the name of Islam, perceived threats to American national interests, poor treatment of women, and outrageous human-rights abuses. Admittedly, there are more than enough of these in the Muslim world, but they are extremes, and it is only these extremes that seem to attract the attention of reporters and editors.

Hunt for the sensational

In the hunt for the sensational, the media pass over the exciting variety of interpretation and expression among Muslims who often profess very different ideas and attitudes while still remaining within the Islamic community. Constructive grassroot attempts to build up Muslim communities and the original, ground breaking intellectual work being done across Islam are ignored, since they are neither photogenic nor particularly good for ratings or circulation numbers. The larger Muslim Political, economic, and social context is largely ignored as well. One notable example that will be familiar to most Americans is the Iranian revolution of 1979. Very little mention was made in the American press of past American involvement in Iranian political and economic life, particularly the role of the Central Intelligence Agency in the 1953 overthrow of Iranian Prime Minister Muhammad Mossadegh and the restoration to the throne of Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlevi, or the impact of the American oil and arms industries on the shah's ultimately disastrous domestic and foreign policies. Stripped of this background information, anti-American manifestations following the revolution seemed to most Americans to be irrational at best, fanatic at worst.

Media coverage can be characterized as sensationalist not just in the topics it addresses, but also in the imagery and language utilized in reporting those topics.

Most egregious are recurring photographic or videotaped images that tend to dehumanized and depersonalize Muslims, such as pictures of hundred or thousands of anonymous Muslims at prayer or the ubiquitous photos of a disembodied, up-raised hand clutching a Quran high over the heads of protesting crowd.

Prejudice :

Other group shots which might show a different, less angry, and more human side of Muslims are hard to find. Funerals for Israeli dead, with crowd of sobbing mourners, are staple of network newscast coverage of the Middle East, yet similar ceremonies for the more numerous Lebanese Muslim (and Christian) victims are almost never filmed, and the pain and suffering of their loved ones do not make the evening news.

When individual Muslims are shown, they are typically radicals. Few Americans could fail to identify a photo of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini or Shaikh 'Umar' Abd Al-Rahman, whose images come to represent all Muslims for the uninformed reader and viewer.

The media's use of terminology is similarly reductive, relying on certain ill-defined words both to convey certain concepts to an audience and to avoid closer scrutiny or definition of groups, individuals, and events. The most obvious example is, of course, "Islamic Fundamentalism". The term "fundamentalism" was first applied to a strain of nineteenth century evangelical protestant Christian thought which upholds the inerrancy of the Bible. The term is meaningless when applied in its strictest sense to Islam (since all Muslims believe, as an article of faith, that the Qur'an is the Word of God revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and yet it has assumed great currency.. "Fundamentalist" is a loaded term, pregnant with sinister overtones and imbued with fanaticism and radicalism, which again obscures more than it reveals. But loaded terms such as these are of little use when trying to pick out small details, one of the main tasks of a good journalist.

One recent example demonstrates how quickly and easily such nonsensical buzzwords come into being, and how they can shape and at times dominate public debate. "Ethnic cleansing" is a term that grew out of the war in Bosnia Herzegovina, and it is used constantly in reference to the tragic events in that nation. The media picked up on the term and have used it to describe the Bosnian conflict without having to dig too deeply into messy details (such as who is doing the "cleansing" and to whom). It enables journalists to gloss over subtle trends and breaking events, jumping one horrible atrocity in with all of the others. The question remains unasked and unanswered by the media: is there any difference between "genocide" and "Ethnic Cleansing"? The latter, like "fundamentalism," is reductive, ultimately non-descriptive and, alas, used constantly.

UNHEALTHY RELIANCE:

There is also an unhealthy reliance by the American media on editorial pieces to convey information about Islam and Muslims. The topped page too often is the only place to find in-depth analysis of the Islamic world. By definition, persuasive writing is designed to convey only one side of an argument; seldom is it the Muslim perspective that graces the editorial pages of the Times or Post. The debate on Islam and the Muslims viewed in light of the American media tends to be somewhat lopsided.

Given this kind of coverage, it is apparent that the media are presenting only one part of the story when it comes to Islam-and a small part at that. The media often hit only the highest of the high points, without any discussion of one event's relation-

ship to another or the ties which bind (of the issues which divide) one organization or personality from the next. The reader or listener is left to make sense of such a situation; like an archipelago, above the water the myriad islands seem to be scattered haphazardly across the surface, but seen from below they form part of a single geological body, and are clearly interrelated.

The average news consumer is presented with an image of Muslims as irrational and confused, and vaguely threatening in their unpredictability. Iran enforces the Shari'ah. And Sudan enforces Shari'ah. Why then is Sudan so different from Saudi Arabia, and why are the fundamentalist governments in Riyadh and Tehran so often at one another's throats? Why does the United States count one of these countries as a close ally and brand the other two as international pariahs? There are justifications for these seeming inconsistencies, but they are complicated and thus judged to be beyond the scope of straight journalism. It is not the media's job, it is thought, to chart the archipelago.

Simplistic View :

The media present Americans with a simplistic view of Islam and then leave them to press that fifth of humanity which is Muslim into this oversimplified mould. It is no doubt unrealistic to expect the mainstream media to convey the Muslim world in all of its rich diversity, yet their present performance falls well short of even reasonable and achievable expectations of accuracy and fairness.

The reasons for this substandard coverage can be broken into subjective factors, which are relatively easy to overcome, and objective factors, which have grown up over time, are much less susceptible to change, and in a sense realistically can be expected from the media in terms of improved reporting on Islam and the Muslim community in the future. The first of these subjective factors is the political sensitivity of the Muslim world. The Arab-Israeli conflicts, while easily the most sensitive topic for the American media, is only one of several contentious issues: Bosnia, Kashmir and Cyprus are all subject to vigorous debate among sectors of the American public as are the larger topics of north-south economic relations and the so-called clash of civilizations between Muslim and non-Muslim societies, cultures, and economics. Because so much of the Muslim world is so politically sensitive, coverage of Islam can be a manifold into which reporters and editors venture with caution-some would say timidly.

In extreme cases, "Impolitic" coverage of events in the Muslim world can re-

sult in economic (and in directed against media outlets or personnel). The most intense pressure is exerted by well organized special interest who can mobilize important groups of consumers or advertisers. Since newspapers depend on advertising revenue for their survival, and much of any daily paper's advertising business comes from a few select customers, such as local car dealerships, grocery chains, and department stores, decisions by a few of them to pull their ads can be devastating to a paper. Venteran journalist Charles Arnot, for example, wrote that he once asked his boss, press mogul William Randolph Hearts, why his reports from Cario never received the same favourable treatment as those from his colleague in Tel Aviv. "Well, Charlie, look at it this way," Hearst replied, "just how many Arabs own big department stores that spend money advertising in our papers?"

Financial Interests :

Under such circumstances a kind of selfcensorship quickly develops. An editor who receives a toughly worded opinion piece packed with solid, factual information must decide whether to run it knowing it will offend important people in the community who could inflict economic losses on the newspaper or station in question. The editor's decision probably depends on the subject at issue, the financial state of her/his business, her/her relations with the owners, the power of the special interest group and the editor's past experience in similar situations. A little controversy sells papers and attracts an audience, but too much can sink one, or at least its editor.

A second and even more common problem is the subtle manipulation of media outlets by interested parties. The problem is compounded by the narrowly restricted pool of "experts" who turn up time and again on both the television screen and the editorial pages. Fouad Ajami, for instance, writes regularly for Newsweek, The News Republic and Foreign Affairs; he is the in-house Middle East expert of CBS News, and he appears often on the "Mac Neil/L. chrer News Hour." One talking head who has drawn considerable criticism for his comments about Muslims is self-styled terrorism expert Steven Emerson, who traffics in innuendo and unprovable accusations, yet continues to enjoy ready access to both the airwaves and he newspapers. Emerson's broadcast commentary in the two days following the April 19, 1995, bombing of the federal building in Oklaoma City, when he relentlessly (and incorrectly) pounded away at the presumed involvement of "Muslim terrorists", was particularly egregious and drew criticism from Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Emerson's replies to his

critics was uncontrite. Another good example of an often used but biased commentator is former Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, who once served as United States Ambassador to Yugoslavia and has long-standing professional, financial and personal ties with Serbian strongman Slobdan Milosevic. Despite these links to the Serbian president, Eagleburger regularly offered his views on events in the former Yugoslavia in the American media (on the "Mc Neil/Lehrer News Hour," for instance) with no mention or disclaimer of his personal interests and involvement.

No Background :

Most journalists assigned to the Middle East beat have no particular background or training in the area; have no personal contacts in the region; and do not speak Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, Turkish, or Hebrew. Thus they must spend their first twelve to eighteen months on the job simply getting their bearings and painstakingly building up a network of reliable sources. By the time this is in place, they often are reassigned to other beats, since media outlets also want to move fresh faces into sensitive postings periodically

Put unprepared journalists in touch with sources with axes to grind or interests to protect and the product is substandard journalism. Reporters expect their sources to put some kind of spin on the information they provide; a "high-ranking State Department official," for example, is supposed to give the State department's official line, even if it is not his or her own opinion or if it fails to jibe with reality....

The net result of these factors -- self censorship and outside pressures, a small number of "experts and commentators, and a heightened susceptibility to disinformation -- is what is regarded as "conventional wisdom". Inexperienced reporters who are able to draw only a few recognized sources for information about a topic where the ideological stakes are high -- and the potential professional and personal costs to be paid for rocking the board are similarly high are unlikely to stray very far from this conventional view of people and events. Thus the parameters of the debate on Islam, Muslims, and the Muslim world are very narrow, and very difficult for most individuals and organizations within the mainstream American media to transgress without fear. ■

राष्ट्रीय सौहार्द हेतु निबन्ध प्रतियोगिता

पयामे इंसानियत फोरम द्वारा आयोजित इस प्रतियोगिता का उद्देश्य आपकी प्रतिभाओं को खोजने, उनको सम्मानित तथा पुरस्कृत करने तथा आपकी क्षमताओं को इस ओर लगाने के लिए प्रोत्साहित करना है कि हम समस्त धर्मों के बारे में अपने पारम्परिक धारणाओं को छोड़कर ज्ञान के आधार पर उनका अध्ययन कर एक दूसरे के करीब आयें और अपने विचार रखें। जिससे कि ऐसे समाज की स्थापना की जा सके जो इस देश की एकता और अखण्डता को बनाये रख सके और प्रेम की इस धरती को प्रेम की खुशबू से महकाये रखे तथा धर्म के बारे में फैलाई जा रही भ्रन्तियों और गुलतफहमियों को रोका जा सके। प्रत्येक शान्ति प्रिय नागरिक की जिम्मेदारी है कि वह समस्त धर्मों के एकता के सूत्रों व शिक्षाओं को परिचित करा कर विभिन्न धर्मावलम्बियों के मध्य पारस्परिक प्रेम, विश्वास व समझ को आगे बढ़ाये और आपसी नफरत और भेद भाव पैदा न होने दें।

इस सिलसिले में फोरम ने सर्वप्रथम "इस्लाम-शान्ति व मानवता का सन्देश" शीर्षक के द्वारा एक "निबन्ध प्रतियोगिता" कराने का निर्णय लिया है।

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