



THE FRAGRANCE OF EAST

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Value of Love

S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

The excellence of man lies in his love and mercy for others: one person is pricked with a thorn but another person feels the pain. Man is gifted with tears which fall from his eyes when he sees a widow's head uncovered in helplessness, a poor man's kitchen unlit, and a sick man in distress. If such a drop of tear is put in a sea of transgression, it will cleanse it. If it falls on a forest of sins, it will burn it and fill the space again with the effulgence of virtue. The angels can bring forward anything, but they cannot present this drop of tear. The angels do not sleep due to their cognizance of Allah's being and attributes, but their vigil does not have the excellence of man's inability to sleep due to the sufferings of others.

The quality of love permeating through the human heart is a very precious gift of God. When something stirs it, it assumes a strange power. It rises above the considerations of religion, community, nation, and motherland. It then only sees another man's heart and feels its suffering and is drawn to it by nature as is pulled an iron chip toward a magnet. ■

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Wisdom of Qur'an

“Surely those who stand in awe for fear of their Lord, who have full faith in the Signs of their Lord, who associate none with their Lord in their Divinity, who give, whatever they give in charity, with their hearts trembling at the thought that they are destined to return to their Lord: it is those who hasten to do good work and vie in it with one another.”

(Al-Qur'ân – 23:57-61)

Believers are never devoid of fear of God, nor are they heedless of Him. Nor do they act according to the dictates of their whims, disregarding Him above them Who is ever vigilant and Who seizes those who engage in wrong-doing and transgression. The hearts of believers are filled with fear of God, and it is this which prevents them from committing evil.

The word 'Signs' means the signs which are brought forward by the Prophets on God's behalf. It also includes the signs found within man as well as those scattered around the universe. To believe in the signs of the Book amounts to confirming their truth. As for belief in the signs in the universe and man's own being, this suggests having faith in the truths to which these signs testify.

Believing in God's signs requires one to believe in the Oneness of God. This characterisation of the believers as those who do not engage in *shirk* after they are identified as believing in His signs is significant. This is because believers ought to consecrate their service, obedience and worship exclusively for the One True God in a manner that leaves not even an iota of doubt about it. ■

Pearls From the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH)

Anas relates that the Holy Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be to him) said: “A person, who wants that there may be abundance in his provision, and that his age be lengthened, then he should do favour to his blood relations.”

(*Bukhari, Muslim*)

Islam enjoins the believers to do kindness to the blood relations in particular, and to all human beings in general. In this *hadith* the Holy Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be to him) has highlighted the benefits of doing kindness and benevolence to the near and dear ones.

It is but natural that man wants his provision to be in plenty. It is equally natural that he wants to live longer. The Holy Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be to him), who had a keen perception of human psychology, says that one who wants increase in his provision and to live longer, should do favour to his blood relations. Doing favour to blood relations means that he should spend on his blood relations, help them whenever they stand in need of his help, advise them properly whenever they seek his advice, etc. Blood relations include mother, father, sons, daughters, grand and great grand children, maternal and paternal relations, etc.

But, in doing favour to his relations, he should exercise some caution. This *hadith* does not mean to do favour to his relations even when they are in the wrong. In another *hadith* the Holy Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be to him) has prohibited the believer to support his relations in matters wrong. ■

Our Aim

It is encouraging to note that our decision to take out 'The Fragrance', an English quarterly magazine, has been well received. Even before its formal publication hundreds of subscribers have got themselves registered and a good number of suggestions have also been made to make the magazine more attractive, objective and effective. We plan to incorporate these ideas so as to satisfy our readers. Our message is to observe nothing more than adherence to the minimum obligations of our faith; a way of life reflecting a deep love of God as well as observing the tenets of a system established for worshipping the Almighty. With His blessings we hope to march ahead and be productive.

Even though we launched the Fragrance more than two decades back, writers and intellectuals have yet to show an interest to help us in fulfilling the task. This cold shouldering by the intelligentsia of the community is depressing. We do not want to be reduced to mere copyholder of other magazines and journals by lifting articles from there. We wish to be pioneer in publishing and propagating the ideals of a pious, evil-free society in context of the present day developments. It is, therefore, earnestly requested that intellectuals and writers should favour us in building up a regular source of publication material. Howsoever, efficient and aesthetic an architect may be but he can give only attractive structural designs; the execution of his plan depends on skilled masons and good material. By the grace of God we have launched the magazine but its effectiveness rests on the active co-operation of our writers, scholars, intellectuals and academicians. We also seek co-operation from those who can help us in translating the existing Urdu, Persian and Arabic material into English. Nadwatul Ulema true to Its traditions of effecting healthy reforms in educational and social behaviour of Muslims, has come

out again to help reach the message of righteousness to all and sundry. Now it is our duty to carry out the mission further.

A biased media always remains watchful to pick-up issues through which it can malign those ideologies which are not palatable to it. For instance, the enforcement of Shariah in certain Muslim countries is a burning issue these days. A report from Karachi, recently making rounds in the Press says that a young woman, who went to a shopping complex wearing a sleeveless dress, was attacked in day light by two men. They brushed past her bare arm with a razor to get the message home. Similarly sometime back a strong acid was sprinkled on the body of a girl student, who was not properly dressed. New York Times News Service in its international release has spread another canard that in Afghanistan according to Taliban interpretation of the Qur'an, an adult male is obliged not only to grow a beard but also to leave the hairy underbrush unmolested by scissors. Scruffiness is required by law.

Sometimes frolicsome elements themselves engineer such incidents and attribute them to their dissentients. Similarly fallacious interpretation of "HUDUD" is put forward to create doubts about their implementation, violation of human rights is attributed to the punishment of guilty. In absence of the proper projection of the positive aspects of the Shariah laws reprehensible stories get currency. We therefore invite articles on Shariah laws and their implementation to counter misgivings and present the correct picture in proper perspective. ■

S.A.

We solicit articles for publication in The Fragrance of East. Suitable remuneration will be paid to writers. We prefer receipt of articles on:
e-mail: shariq_alavi@yahoo.com
along with a hard copy, duly signed, by post.

The Collective Mindset and the Spirit of Sacrifice

- S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

Do not throw yourselves into destruction.

(al-Baqarah 2:195)

We Muslims should develop a collective mindset. We should never think of our personal interests at the expense of our faith and community. An approach based on selfishness is highly destructive. In the verse above the Qur'an warns us against this. An instance in point is the partial reading of the verse which tells us not to approach prayer when we are drunk. Were one to misread this only partially, one might maintain that the Qur'an asks us not to offer prayer.

Some misinterpret the Qur'anic directive: "*Do not throw yourselves into destruction*" in the sense of avoiding any danger or loss in the cause of faith. If they are asked to go out to preach their faith, while risking their business and trade, they cite this verse in order to evade their duty. This is a total misreading of the verse, for rather, its stance runs counter to such claims.

Once Abu Ayyub al-Ansari came across some discussion along the above lines. He clarified that the verse under discussion was sent down regarding the Ansar. He then explained its circumstantial setting. When Islam reached Madinah the Muslims were weak. The believing Madinans, however, reinforced Islam with their lives and belongings, disregarding altogether their

personal loss and suffering. They pledged their lives to the cause of Islam. They were ever ready to go out for its cause whether it be in a battle context or visiting places outside Madinah to preach Islam. Likewise, they generously spent all that they possessed in the cause of Islam. They turned blind to all else besides Islam. For the sake of Islam they neglected their agricultural fields, orchards and shops. After a few years however Islam had gained much strength; it could no longer be considered as weak. Yet in the meantime the Ansar were aware that their businesses, trades, fields, shops and property had all suffered losses. They therefore sought leave for a short period of time, thinking that they were entitled to this. It is common knowledge that soldiers, teachers and students get leave on a regular basis. While the Ansar so thought of taking such leave, the verse under study was sent down, asking them not to incur self-destruction. They were thus told to devote themselves, as in the past, to the cause of faith. No leave was granted them. Rather, they were warned that such leave would lead them to self-destruction. They were thus asked to spend in Allah's way and not to indulge in self-destruction. For Allah loves those who do good. This places the verse in its proper historical context.

At a point in time it was very difficult for Indians to perform Hajj. This was further

compounded by Bedouin Arabs who were given to robbing pilgrims. In view of this menace some 'Ulama' decreed that Indian Muslims need not go on pilgrimage, citing the above verse in support of their ruling. May Allah reward and confer exalted rank upon Shah 'Abd al- 'Aziz and his disciples who rose against this ruling. They issued an altogether different decree. Some of Shah 'Abd al- 'Aziz's disciples and family members themselves performed Hajj so setting the general anxiety at rest. This was necessary in order to persuade Indian Muslims as to their safety, otherwise they would have mistakenly thought they need not perform pilgrimage. This, in turn, would gradually have led to the abandoning of other religious duties such as *zakah*, fasting and prayer. For one may even cite the above verse saying that in extremely cold weather one cannot perform *wudu*. Nor is one able to offer prayers in summer when the nights are short. If one misinterprets this verse in the sense of sustaining any discomfort, this puts an end to the performance of all religious duties, for there is often some slight inconvenience in discharging these. Muslims then should be characterised by a collective spirit, ensuring the welfare of the whole *Ummah*. If everyone behaves selfishly, the cause of faith cannot be well served.

It is our collective duty to take care of the religious needs of our locality and town. We should maintain our mosques and *Madrasahs* and impart religious education and training to the young. We should be equally concerned about the

conduct of our fellow Muslims. Allah's mercy is after all withheld on account of Muslims' misdeeds and it is they who fail to reap any benefit because of their own weaknesses. It is common knowledge that today Muslims are guilty of many unjust acts. If we fail to realise our role as a faith community, our survival in a non-Muslim majority country such as India will become very difficult.

Without collective thinking we cannot achieve much. For then everyone would be engrossed in meeting their own personal needs, in bringing up their children only with a view to getting a good job for them, and this would spell disaster for the community as a whole. This is a pernicious mentality which should be checked. For it kills community spirit. If such a mentality flourishes, no effort for social reform or community welfare can be successful. It is regrettable that such a mentality is on the rise in our country. We have become a highly selfish people, concerned only with our own petty interests, our own prosperity, our own success in trade and industry and with our own material well-being. Prompted by such individual interests we act and do nothing beyond this.

This mindset must change. We should feel a genuine concern for the issues confronting our faith and community. This is an important need. Without this realisation no organisation no preacher or writer can lead us to the path of success and glory. I pray to Allah that Muslims grasp this truth at the very earliest. ■

Life After Death

- M. Manzoor Nomani

This much is known to everyone that whoever is born into the world has got to die one day or the other. But nobody knows on his own what happens or will happen after death. This is known only to God. God vouchsafes the knowledge of it to His Prophets and through the Prophets men like you and me also come to know about it. Every Prophet of God, in his time, had revealed clearly to his people through what stages they would have to pass after death and how at each stage they would be recompensed for their deeds - good as well as bad - during the earthly sojourn. Since the Prophet Mohammad (Peace and Blessings of God be upon whom) is the last of the Divine Apostles and Messengers, and no Prophet is going to be raised up after him, the different stages through which a man has to pass after death have been explained by him in greatest detail and with utmost clarity. If all that the Prophet has revealed in this connection is brought together it would make a volume by itself. We will, therefore, give a very brief summary of it over here.

There are three stages to follow after death. The first stage runs from death to Resurrection. It is called Barzakh. Whether a person is buried when he dies or is cremated or cast into a river his soul does not perish with him.

It is immortal; it lives. It only migrates from the material world of ours to another world. In this other world the angels question him about his spiritual state. If he is a truthful Believer, he gives correct answers whereupon the angels impart to him the glad tidings that he is going to live in peace and happiness till the Last Day. And, if it is otherwise, that is, he turns out to be an Unbeliever, an infidel or a sham he is given or punishment which is not to cease before the Day of Reckoning.

The next stage comprises of the Last Day and the Resurrection. The Last Day means that there will come a time when the entire material world will be destroyed by the command of God. Annihilation will descend suddenly on everything that exists around us. The whole world will be thrown topsy turvy. Then, after a long time, when God will wish, all men will be raised up again. Every person born into the world will be re-created and called upon to render a full account of his doings on earth. In the Great Reckoning, those who will be found worthy of deliverance will be awarded a place in Paradise and those who will turn out to be guilty and deserving of Divine chastisement will be consigned to Hell.

After this, there will commence the last stage. The dwellers of Paradise will

live in a state of eternal bliss supremely immune from every kind of pain, anxiety and suffering, and exulting in the bounties of their Lord the like of which they would not have dreamt of in the world while those that will be condemned to Hell will have to live permanently in a condition of unmitigated misery and distress. There will be for them nothing but horrible agony and fearful castigation. This will be the ultimate stage after death.

The above was the aim and substance of what the Prophets, especially the last of them, the Prophet Mohammad (Peace and Blessings of God be upon whom), have taught mankind about the Hereafter and what is indicated about it in Quran and the Traditions. We will now examine some of the relevant verses of Quran:

Every soul shall have a taste of death: in the end to Us shall ye be brought back.

(XXIX:57)

Every soul shall have a taste of death: and only on the Day of Judgement shall you be paid your full recompense.

(111:185)

The last day will be a frightful, horrible day.

O mankind! fear your Lord! for the convulsion of the Hour (of Judgement) will be a thing terrible! the Day ye shall see it: every mother giving suck shall forget her sucking babe, and every

pregnant female shall drop her load unformed! thou shall see mankind as in a drunken riot, yet not drunk! but dreadful shall be the wrath of God.

(XXII:1-2)

One day the earth and the mountains will be in violent commotion and the mountains will be as a heap of sand poured out and flowing down.

(LXXIII: 14)

A day that will make children hoary-headed.

(LXXIII: 17)

At length, when there comes the deafening noise, - that day shall a man flee from his own brothers, and from his mother and his father, and from his wife and children. Each one of them, that day, will have enough concern (of his own) to make him indifferent to others. Some faces that day will be beaming, laughing, rejoicing. And other faces that day will be dust-stained; blackness will cover them.

(LXXX: 33-41)

On the Day of Recompense:

That Day shall ye be brought to Judgement! not an act of yours that ye hide will be hidden. (LXIX:18)

One day we shall remove the mountains, and thou will see the earth as a level stretch, and We shall gather them, all together, nor shall leave out any of them. And they will be marshalled before the Lord in ranks, with the announcement,

“Now have ye come to Us (bare) as We created ye first! Aye, ye thought We shall not fulfill the appointment made to you to meet Us? “And the Book (of Deeds) will be placed before you; and thou wilt see the sinful in great terror because of what is recorded therein; they will say “Ah! Woe to us! What a Book is this! it leaves nothing small or great, but takes account thereof!” They will find all that they did placed before them; and not one will thy Lord treat with injustice.

(XVIII: 47-49)

A man’s own limbs will depose against him before God on the Day of Reckoning.

That day shall be set a seal on their mouths. But their hands will speak to Us, - and their feet will bear witness to all that they did.

(XXXVI:65)

The Quran, in fine has portrayed most graphically and vividly the happenings of the Last Day: the terrific explosions and the dreadful tremors, the total annihilation of the world. Even the mountains will be wiped out of existence- the rising again of men, the gathering together of them for the judgement, the presentation of the Book of Deeds the deposing of one’s own limbs against oneself, the judgement, and finally, the execution of the Divine verdict and the allotment of Heaven or Hell. All these events have been described so candidly in some of the

chapters of the Quran that one can obtain a full picture of the happenings of the Last Day by reading them. The Prophet, is reported to have observed, “anyone who wishes to know about the Last Day as if the scene of it was drawn before his eyes should read these chapters of the Quran: Takvir, Infitar and Inshiqaq.

We will now see a few Traditions of the Prophet pertaining to Barzakh and the Last Day. Says he:

“When anyone of you dies the place that is going to be his abode in Heaven or in Hell (on the basis of his conduct in the world) is brought before his eyes every morning and evening, and it is said to him, ‘Behold, this is your destination, and, surely, you will reach it’.”

“When the Trumpet will first be sounded on the Last Day by the command of God everyone will faint and drop dead on the ground. When it will be sounded next all men will rise again. They will then be commanded to proceed and make their presence before the Lord. The angels, thereafter, will be told to collect them together and here the investigation into their conduct on earth will begin.”

It is related that a Companion once enquired from the Prophet, “O Messenger of God, how will God raise up His creatures from the dead? Is there anything like it here in this world which

may be cited as an example?" The Prophet replied, "Has it never occurred to you that you passed by a stretch of land in your country and found it dry and bereft of all vegetation, and, then, coming upon it again, and after sometime, discovered that it was covered lavishly with fresh, green grass?" The Companion replied, "Yes, my master. It has." The Prophet remarked, "This typifies Resurrection. God will raise from the dead in the same manner."

The Prophet is reported to have asked, after reciting the Quranic verse, On the Day (the earth) will declare her tidings, "Do you know what it means?" The Companions are said to have replied, "God and His apostle know best." The Prophet, the Tradition goes on to tell, then, said, "On the Day of Judgement the earth will bear witness to all deeds performed by men on it (i.e., at the bidding of God the earth will tell that such-and-such a person had done such-and-such a thing on it on such-on-such a day)."

Speaking of the Day of Recompense the Prophet, further, is reported to have said, "on that Day God will call upon everyone to come forward and be his own witness. He will say to him, 'To-day you are your own witness: Our recording angels are present; this much of evidence is enough.' Then by the command of God the lips of the person will become sealed and he will

not be able to utter a word. His limbs (arms, legs etc.) will then be commanded to speak and they will relate the whole story of his doings in the world."

It is reported that once a person went to the Prophet and said, "O Messenger of God, I have some slaves who, sometimes, disobey me, or they steal or tell me a lie. I sometimes, scold them, and, sometimes, I also punish them. How is it going to turn out for me on the Day of Requital?" The Prophet observed, "God will dispense justice correctly on the Day of Judgement. If the punishment you mete out to them is proportionate to their faults you will neither get nor have to give anything; you will be quits. If the punishment turns out to be of lesser degree than what they merited, you will be recompensed for it. If the punishment proves to be excessive you will have to recompense the slaves." On hearing the Prophet's reply the enquirer began to cry. He said, "Then, O Prophet of God, the best thing for me is to send them away. I declare before you that I have set them free." The Prophet is also reported to have recited the following verse of the Quran to him:

We shall set up scales of justice for the Day of Judgement, so that not a soul will be dealt with unjustly in the least. And if there be (no more than) the weight of a musturd seed we will bring it (to account) and enough are We to take account. ■ (XXI:47)

Call Towards Morality and Message of Humanity

- S. M. Rabey Hasani Nadwi*

Apart from calling the people towards purification of creeds, the Prophet (SAW) called them with all his might and main towards having good morals. He said to them: 'Do evolve in your elves the humanitarian characteristics. Do adorn yourselves with virtues of being compassionate towards the humanity, having mutual commiseration and feeling of fraternity. Do refrain from hurting others and shun all such acts as lead to depravation. Be kind and polite to everyone.' He told them how it is that Allah Almighty comports Himself:

(Those who are merciful are dealt with by the most merciful the superb and the sublime. Be merciful to those who are on earth, you would be dealt with mercy by one who is in the heaven.)

He brought the moral teachings and instructions contained in the holy Quran as well as those conveyed to him directly to the people's notice. The injunctions which the previous peoples were given through their respective Prophets were accorded recognition, simply by getting mentioned in the holy Quran, as ways practicable for all times to come. They, too, were conveyed to the people by the Prophet (SAW). The

first and foremost message and teaching among the moral injunctions given in these (Quranic) verses is that of 'Tauheed' and of worshipping the One and the Only Allah. Alongside it, instructions are also there to acquire morals that are good, righteous and indicative of humanitarian compassion. By way of instance, verses of the Sura 'Isra' are reproduced hereunder:

(And thy Lord has decreed that you should worship none but Him and show kindness to parents; and if either of them or both of them attain old age with thee, say not unto them: pooh! And browbeat them not, and speak to them a respectful speech, And lower unto them the wing of meekness out of mercy, and say: Lord! Have mercy on the twain as they brought me up when young. Your Lord is the best knower of what is in your souls; if you have been righteous, then he is unto thee penitent, forgiving. And give thou to the kinsman his due, and also to the needy and wayfarer; and squander not in squandering. Truly the squanders are the brethren of the devils. and the Devil is ever ungrateful to his Lord. And thou turnest away from them awaiting a mercy from thy Lord which thou hippest, then speak to them a gentle word. Let not .your hand chained to

* Rector, Nadwatul-Ulama, Lucknow.

your neck, nor stretch it forth to its extremity, lest you sit down reproached, improvised. Verily thy Lord extends the provision for whom He will, and measure it out, He is in respect of His creatures Aware, Beholder. Kill not your offspring for fear your want. We provide for them and for yourselves; their killing is great crime. And do not approach adultery; it is ever a abomination and vile as a pathway. And do not kill anyone whom Allah has forbidden except by right, and whoever is killed wrongfully, We have surely given his of-kin authority; so let him not exceed in killing; verily he is succoured. And do not approach the substance of an orphan save with what is best, until he reaches the age of strength. And fulfil the covenant; verily the covenant shall be questioned about. And give full measures when you measure, and weight with an even balance, that is good, and the best interpretation. And do not thou go after that of which thou hast no knowledge verily the hearing and the sight and the hearts, each of them shall be questioned about. And do not thou walk on the earth struttingly, verily thou will not by any means rend the earth, nor canst thou attain the mountain in stature. Each of these! Their vice is to thy Lord ever detestable. That is part of that wisdom which thy Lord has Revealed to thee. and set not up thou along with

Allah another God, lest thou be cast into Hell reproved,damned.)

(Al-Israa : 23-39)

These were the matters conveyed, under the religion of Islam, by the holy Prophet, Mohammad (SAW), to the inhabitants of Makkah. Thereafter, the attention of the Arab, in general, was drawn towards them. And, then, they were assigned the responsibility of having them conveyed to the peoples upcoming in tuture up till the Doomsday.

They were told that Islam comprises the creed and the practice both. Detail of the creed have been mentioned above. In respect of practice, subject to this creed, four kinds of practices have been specified. Taken all together they make the five pillars that Islam stands on. The first one is the creed that comprises Faith in Tuheed (unity of Allah), Risalat (Prophecy or the mission of the Prophet), Akhirat (The Hereafter), Divine Books, Angels and the Fate. This is the first pillar of Islam. The rest four pillars that pertain to practice consist of: Namaz (prayer), Roza (fasting), Zakat (almsgiving), and Hajj (pilgrimage). These five pillars have been described in the Prophet (SAW)'s tradition thus:

(Islam is founded on five basics:
1: To bear witness that there is no God but Allah, and that Muhammad (SAW) is His Prophet. 2: To establish Namaz. 3: To pay Zakat. 4: To perform Hajj of

Allah's house. And 5: To observe fast during the month of Ramadan.

It was clarified that these were merely the essential deeds of worship and obedience. After having them performed, the life should be adorned with good morals and virtues. Tyranny, iniquity and vices should be refrained from.

It is this message of Islam that was consigned to the Prophet (SAW) in culminated and perpetual from and the success was made restricted, up till the Doomsday, within only the sphere of injunctions and instructions imparted by him (SAW). It was proclaimed that:

(The religion that has Allah' consent is Islam. (Aal-e-Imran:19) Furthermore, it was also proclaimed that:

(And whoso ever seeks a religion other than Islam, it hall not be accepted of him and in the Hereafter he shall be of the lost.)

(Aal-e-Imran : 85)

Thus, it has been made explicitly evident that the recourse to salvation rests only with the pursuance of teachings and instructions imparted by Islam. If anyone wanted, abandoning them and taking to any other course of action, to achieve success and salvation in the Hereafter, he would not be able to achieve that objective. He would simply fail. All these instructions and injunctions

were conveyed by Prophet Mohammad (SAW), as best as he could, to all the people who came in contact with him. Whichever of them were possible to be demonstrated in practice were demonstrated practically, too, by him (SAW). Thus, this treasure of teachings and instruction and the Prophet's exemplification is spread over, and covers, all the aspects of human life. It is a bounty conferred on man by none other but the Creator and Master of man Himself Who is well conversant with man's need and dispositions. Hence, the articles, whether of Faith or Practice, prescribed by Him through His Prophet have fully taken into account the benefits and interests of human beings, particularly when the Entity of the Almighty Providence Himself is the One Who has created each and every one and He Himself only knows well the dispositions and requirements of each and every one. His wont is Mercy and Magnanimity and He has even defined Himself to be so. He says:

(Will not He Who has created knows?
He is subtle, the Aware) (Al-Mulk: 14)

These are the precepts and concepts holding which aloft, Islam made its outset and up-till the Doomsday follower of Islam and the believers are under command to keep complying with them.

At all events, the chain of the phenomena of sending the Prophet that

had been started for the purpose of conveying this message and the Divine call to man was culminated and taken to its climax with the advent of Prophet of Allah, Hazrat Muhammad (SAW). It is this very Prophet of the last phase (SAW) who had this religion of truth, the responsibility of whose propagation he was entrusted with, progressed and promulgated after having made strenuous struggles and strifes and having endured great agonies and afflictions. Ultimately he had himself acquitted of his obligation, after having got it reached to the point of perfection. In its process, his endurance, fortitude, compassion and pity for humanity, probity and wisdom got fully demonstrated. And whoever, and as and when, got in accord with his mission and message, gave, too, emulating the above mentioned virtues of the Prophet (SAW), the proof of his endurance and perseverance on the path of the truth.

It was decreed by Allah Almighty that this mission was to be fulfilled, and the Prophet and whoever happened to be following in his footsteps had to endure all sorts of torments and tortures in fulfillment of this mission. Moreover, it was not only the reform of the people of Makkah and its surroundings that they had to be content with. Instead, it was the reform of the entire world that was to be had in view as the main objective. They were assured by Allah Almighty of His Help in their efforts to have this

mission performed. The verdict was:

(If you succour Allah, He will succour you and make your feet firm.)

(Mohammad: 7)

Hence, he (SAW) and his followers had to endure at individual level, during his 13 years long missionary work in Makkah, all sorts of persecutions. And, then, for having the job carried out collectively, the nearby city, Madinah Tayyabah, known then as Yathrab, had to be adopted as a base. And, because of it getting adopted and after that its people had extended their full cooperation, this city was made by Allah Almighty, in view of various peculiarities it had, the hub of the missionary work. That is, the reinforcements for the expansion of the missionary work were to be dispatched constantly from here and the entire world was to be called towards accepting this order of life favoured and approved by Allah Almighty. And, when the tenure of his holy life, during which he had his responsibility fulfilled up to the extent of the fixed target, got close to its end, it was proclaimed that:

(This day I have perfected your religion for you and have completed My favour upon you, and have chosen for you ISLAM as religion.) ■

(Al-Maida: 3)

Fundamental Teachings of Islam

- Shah Ebadur Rahman Neshat

We should first try to check what Prophet Muhammad (SAW) taught people in the name of Islam, especially when he introduced the fundamentals of his message to them. This is crucial. As the religion of Islam is based on his teaching and practice, his word and precedent should reveal for sure whether Islam is a violent religion or not.

What Is Islam?

Bukhari, a collection of the most authentic Traditions of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), records a hadith (prophetic narration) in which he has explained what Islam is. He said:

Islam is based on five things: to bear witness that none deserves to be worshipped except Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger; to offer prayers (Salah); to pay alms (Zakah) to the poor; to perform Hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah); and to observe fast (Sawm) in the month of Ramadan." [Bukhari]

Thus if a person reposes faith in the above five tenets believes at heart that they are true and affirms by tongue their veracity, he is a Muslim by the Islamic Law (Shariah). If he is sincere in his faith and observance of the obligatory deeds mentioned in the above hadith, he, according to the

Islamic Law, qualifies for the ultimate grant of paradise. According to an authentic hadith, when a Bedouin, who was instructed by the Prophet about these five tenets as being the essentials of Islam, proclaimed in his presence that he would follow them closely but would do neither more nor less, the Prophet commented, "If he is true to his word [and sincerely follows the above-mentioned five tenets], he will enter paradise." This shows that in order to achieve entry to paradise, Islam calls a Muslim towards building up true faith in One God and practicing good deeds mentioned, above, not towards violence against non-Muslims. There is no mention of sword and arrow in the formula that qualifies a person as Muslim.

It would help if for further clarification we analyze each of the five fundamentals individually and look closely what they stand for in the context of the Islamic faith. The point of reference will remain the allegation of violence in Islam.

Faith in Allah and His Prophet, the first tenet of Islam, which accentuates a Muslim's inviolable relationship with Allah and the truth of reckoning, makes him duty-bound, pious and God-fearing. He understands that he is answerable

to God for his deeds and will be reckoned with on the Day of Judgment for all that he did. This creates in him a mindset that in order to achieve salvation he should never cross limits and ruin his chances of winning Allah's favors. He knows that he has to face the Lord who is All-Knowing.

Prayer (Salah), the second tenet, helps him put his faith into practice. He stands up in cleanliness of body, clothes, mind and heart five times a day to offer his prayers to his Lord which becomes a very intimate and rewarding experience for him. The observance of regular prayers inculcates in him readiness to perform virtues and shun vices to win God's pleasure. It also starts transforming his character, gradually raising him in spirituality and piety and enabling him to eschew evils. The Quran says: "Establish regular prayer [Salah]: for prayer restrains from shameful and evil deeds." (Quran 29: 45)

Likewise, by paying Zakah (2.5 percent on his annual savings to poor and needy Muslims), which is the third tenet of Islam, a Muslim learns to share his resources with the less fortunate members of the community, which reduces in him tendency to hoard wealth and increases in him philanthropic spirit for the deprived. By giving the poor a portion of his hard-earned savings, he grows into a compassionate and generous fellow selflessly extending a hand of help to the needy. The recipient

also develops appreciation and gratitude for his well-off co-religionist. And thus the bitterness between the haves and have-nots is transformed into mutual trust.

By fasting (Sawm) in the day from dawn to dusk continuously for a full month in which a Muslim stays away from food, drink, sex and all immoral acts, which is the fourth tenet of Islam, a Muslim gets the first-hand experience of the pain of hunger, learns to control his egoistic instincts, and develops determination to follow the path of virtue, even if it is as hard on him as virtually starving himself. Islam teaches specifically that a Muslim observing fast should never be in violence: he should never be the first to start a quarrel, and if somebody tries to drag him into one, he should tell him that he is fasting and is forbidden by his religion from getting into any kind of brawl (Hadith).

In the same way, in Hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah), the fifth pillar of Islam, a pilgrim leaves home and spends several days in an environment fully conducive to attaining moral and spiritual purity. Clad in two simple unstitched white sheets and a pair of ordinary slippers, he leads a life in full obedience to Allah by performing required rituals, where he shares hopes and aspirations with Muslims from all over the world. The Quran clearly instructs that a pilgrim should abstain from indulging in a quarrel during Hajj

as he should also stay away from all kinds of moral transgressions: "Let there be no obscenity, nor wickedness, nor wrangling in the Hajj. And whatever good ye do, (be sure) Allah knoweth it" (Quran 2: 197). It is to be noted that a pilgrim is not allowed to kill an animal, a bird or even an insect in the Hajj days and is also forbidden from plucking off leaves or branches from a tree or uprooting grass or a plant. Where is then the teaching of violence in these obligatory deeds that make a man Muslim? In fact, Islam, which is based on Faith, Salah, Zakah, Hajj and Fast, creates in a devotee a mindset which leads him to follow the path of virtue and piety.

What Is Iman?

Iman (Faith, Conviction) is another term in Islam which is interchangeably used with Islam and can be distinguished from Islam for being a more detailed description of its tenets; It also represents a deeper sense of commitment and a higher level of realization. We will see below what Iman means and what teachings are provided under it.

In a Hadith known in islamic literature as Hadith Jibrail, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) described Iman as follows:

(man is to bear witness in Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Prophets, the afterlife, and fate,

good and bad.

[Muslim, from Mish'ale Raah, No.2]

We will take a look now at the different components of Iman mentioned in the above Hadith and see if they create a tendency of violence in a Muslim.

1. Belief in Allah: Belief in the Oneness of Allah and His being the only one worthy of worship holds the greatest importance in Islam. It is true that Allah is known by His ninety-nine Majestic Names (Asmaaul Husna), which reflect His different Attributes, but His attribute of being Merciful dominates. All chapters of the Quran, except one, begin with the invocation, Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim, which means, "in the name of Allah, Most Beneficent, Most Merciful." Peace is another theme which is very much emphasized in Islam and is directly associated with Allah. The Prophet used to invoke Allah after each daily salah (obligatory prayer) with these words, "O Allah! You are peace, from You is peace, You are beautiful, a You the Honorable and the Dignified," (Allahumma antas salaam, wa minkas salaam, tabaarakta ya zal jalaali wal ikraam). While performing Hajj, he raised his hands to glorify Allah and said: "O Allah! You are peace and from You is peace. Grant us peace in life, O our Lord" (Allahumma antas salaam, wa minkas salaam, hayyena Rabbana bis

salaam). Thus, according to the teachings of Islam, Allah is most Merciful to his creatures Who loves to grant peace and security to all and is pleased with His bondmen who establish peace on earth: "And the servants of (Allah) Most Gracious are those who walk on the earth in humility, and when the ignorant [provokingly] address them, they [patiently] say, peace" (Quran 25: 63). Islam teaches that Allah has created this universe, is running it according to His will and plan, and will judge humans on the Day of Reckoning on the basis of their faith and deeds.

2. Belief in Angels: Believing in Angels is a necessary part of the Islamic Faith. As it was an angel, Jibrail (Gabriel), who used to bring divine revelations to Prophet Muhammad (SAW), this tenet of Iman is significantly relevant. It inculcates in a Muslim faith in the divine system operating in the universe, part of which is beyond the reach of his senses, and introduces him to the realities of the afterlife (Aakhirat) where angels will play an important part. It can be recalled that believing in angels does not by any means make a Muslim violent, bigot and intolerant.

3. Belief in the Books: Books here refer to those scriptures that were sent to the Messengers from God and contained divine instructions for the people. Four of them are mentioned in the Quran by name: the Zabaor, which

was given to Prophet Dawood (David), the Torayt, which was given to Prophet Musa (Moses), the Injeel, which was given to Prophet Isa (Jesus), and the Quran, which was given to Prophet Muhammad, may peace and blessings descend from God on all of them. Belief in all these books as divine revelations is incumbent on Muslims. If a Muslim acknowledges the Quran as word of God and rejects the other books, or anyone of them, as being God's word, he ceases to be a Muslim according to the Islamic Law (Shariah). It is important to not that although believers in other divine books do not acknowledge Muhammad () as Prophet, yet believing in those books as divine is a condition for a believer to qualify a Muslim. Should this stipulation be taken as an offense against the followers of other faiths symbolizing discrimination against them? Or is it an irrefutable proof of Islam's regard for religious magnanimity and pluralism?

4. Belief in the Prophets: Islam teaches that Prophet Muhammad was neither the first nor the only Messenger of God; he was the last and the final in the line. Islam informs that God sent His Messengers to mankind at all times and all places, ranging from Prophet Adam to Prophet Muhammad, peace be on all of them, to guide people to a virtuous code of conduct inspired by the divine will. It tells that all of them were truthful and sincere and that all fulfilled their

prophetic mission to the full satisfaction of God. Islam demands that Muslims must acknowledge all the true Prophets, especially the ones mentioned in the Quran by name, as sincere and truthful, but they have to follow the Shariah brought to mankind by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) as he is the guide and model for the present era. Here also we see Islam's magnanimity: although the followers of other Messengers (such as Prophets Moses and Jesus, peace be upon them) and Muslims are at loggerheads with one another, indulging sometimes in bloody war (as was the case also in the days of the Prophet), yet Muslims cannot be Muslim without acknowledging all true Messengers as God's chosen envoys. That is why Muslims hold all of them in honor and do not ever mention them without respectfully invoking a supplication for them. Can this teaching of Islam create a desire in Muslims to harm the followers of other Messengers and hope to please God by doing that?

5. Belief in Destiny: Islam teaches that certain things in this life, good and bad, are predestined - such as provision, life span, health, an accidental mishap or a windfall profit. People are controlled by divine will and wisdom especially in these matters which is in keeping with the fact that this life is a period of test for mankind. But God has also given man free will in other matters, and so for such things that

he does by using his free will, he will be held accountable on the Day of Judgment. However, his free will is not absolute and he can never overrule God's plans. For example, if a person decides to kill somebody, he may do so using his free will, in which case he will be reckoned with in the afterlife. But if God decides to save the victim, the offender will not be able to murder him, even though he is powerful enough to carry out his plan. Whatever happens, as Islam teaches, happens only after the approval of God. Thus a believer in Islam learns that if he achieves a goal, he should be grateful to God, but if he fails, he should keep patience and trust God's wisdom. In either case he is saved from breaking down.

This should be made clear here that faith in destiny does not make a Muslim fatalist in the modern sense of the term. Islam underscores sufficiently the importance of hard work needed to achieve a goal, but it teaches Muslims to remain patient if his efforts do not bear expected result. Results are in the hands of God that He brings into existence according to His wisdom and justice, but a Muslim is encouraged to strive, as God promises to reward him for his sincere efforts in whatever way He deems fit.

As we see in the light of the above discussion, by testifying to the authenticity of all true Prophets and divine Books, Muslims may hopefully

develop fraternal sentiments for the followers of other religions; they cannot become inimical to them. If we wish, we can see the impact of these teachings on Muslims in general: in spite of instances of provocative accusations by the followers of other religions against Islam its Prophet, Book and Shariah - Muslims never retaliate by insulting the Prophet or scripture of any other faith. They do not do so simply because Islam strictly forbids them from it. Had Islam taught Muslims religious discrimination, no Palestinian Muslim would have ever given the name of the Jewish Prophets to his children (which is so common there as well as in the other parts of the world), although Muslims there are suffering the worst kind of persecution at the hands of the Jewish state.

Other Relevant Teachings of Islam

This is true that Islam is not limited to just its tenets of belief and obligatory observances, such as Prayer, Alms-giving, Pilgrimage and Fasting. It, in fact, covers the whole life and gives divine laws for moral, social and political spheres as well which a Muslim has to follow. We should, therefore look into the Islamic instructions meant for these areas and see if there is any teaching of violence in them.

Moral Teaching:

Moral uprightness is held very high in Islam. He who is most pious is the best in the eyes of God. The Quran

proclaims that the person who adorns himself with good moral qualities attains success, and that he who lapses into immorality and corruption falls into disgrace: "Truly he succeeds that purifies it and he fails that corrupts it" (Quran 91: 9-10). The Prophet of Allah puts a final seal on the importance of moral values by saying "I've been sent to bring morals to perfection." Allah himself proclaims in the Quran that rectifying the morals of people is an essential part of the Prophet Muhammad's Prophetic mission (Quran 2:129), so that his followers may learn to overcome egoistic inclinations, relate to Allah with moral purity, and establish a society in which justice is the norm, virtue is the prevalent practice and benefiting others is life's objective.

Social Teaching:

Islam also attaches great importance to social relations, ranging from family to neighborhood to society, in the redefined wider sense of the terms. There are clear and concrete instructions in Islam about societal responsibilities of a Muslim which are comprehensive and are seen in Islam as religious obligation, not just as courtesy for smooth interaction. Islam defines both rights and duties of an individual in the social context, but it encourages a Muslim to be duty-oriented, willing to forgive and forego his rights if others fail to fulfill them. Whether it is man's duties to his parents, conjugal

obligations, duties to children, holding elders in respect, treating youngsters with affection, extending support to the poor, widows and orphans, treating neighbors with care and tenderness, extending help to non-Muslims, and defending justice in all spheres of life - Islam encourages a Muslim to play a positive role, reminding him that he will be questioned on the Day of Reckoning about them. They, tells Islam, are called 'the rights of individuals on each other' (huqooqul 'ibaad).

Islam has even set priorities in social relations, so that Muslims do not err due to individual preferences. It tells them that the mother's rights on her children are supreme, more than the rights of a father on his children, although the rights of the father are just next to those of the mother. Then there are rights of other relatives, determined in degree by one's closeness in relationship, which extends to social level at all dimensions. Details are available in relevant books.

Also, Islam has further extended the circle of "family" so that human relations may be strengthened in new ways. It acknowledges the rights of a foster mother (a woman other than mother who feeds a baby) to the extent that she is given a mother's right in many respects; the foster mother's own children become foster brothers and sisters to her foster child by the bond of milk. This relationship is fully

acknowledged by the Islamic Law: the foster child cannot marry a foster brother or sister as it cannot marry a brother or sister by blood.

Similarly, Islam redefined "neighbors." It included in the category all neighbors who live around, irrespective of their religious, racial, national or financial background, and made a Muslim responsible for relating to them with affinity. But it also extended the circle of "neighbors" to new spheres and acknowledged "temporary companions," such as co-travelers, classmates, co-workers, and the like, as neighbors and made Muslims responsible to do whatever was needed to make them feel comfortable. Islam introduced it as a religious obligation. It goes without saying that this category is not confined only to Muslims.

Islam has given a golden rule for maintaining social relations with fairness and justice in these words in a Quranic verse: "Support those who do good and observe piety and do not support those who do evil and do injustice" (Quran 5: 2). It encourages a Muslim to help his co-religionists at the time of need, but it clearly instructs him not to side with them if they transgress. The Prophet once told his companions that they should help a Muslim, whether he was oppressed or an oppressor. Surprised as the Prophet had always been teaching them to oppose an oppressor, the Companions immediately asked him how they could

help a Muslim who was an oppressor. The Prophet was also quick in his reply: "Stop him from committing an act of oppression." (Sun an Tirmidhi, 5167)

Political Teaching:

In the political structure inspired by the Islamic Law, both the ruler and the commoners are answerable to God for their intention and deeds. The Islamic Law sets responsibilities for the general Muslims as well as for the ruler and officials. The Law applies to all - rich and poor, Muslim and non-Muslim, black and white, man and woman -and all are equal in the sight of the Law. Laws are there for each situation and all are supposed to follow them. The Head of the state is chosen by the people who legitimize his appointment by offering a pledge of allegiance (bai'ah) to them. He works with the consultation (shoura) of the wise, experienced and God-fearing advisers, but he can be challenged by a commoner for a decision that he makes. The commoners are supposed to obey his commands as long as he is obeying God's commands. In case of a dispute, the word of Allah and the precedent of the Prophet provide a base for negotiation. Further details are provided later in this book under the title "The Islamic State."

. This is a brief description of Islam - covering the tenets of Faith as well as its moral, social and political teachings.

We tried to check if instigation for violence in any form exists in Islamic teachings at any level. As we saw, each tenet of Islam in fact, prepares Muslims to connect to God with a disciplining code of Faith and generates in them a desire to serve and benefit mankind as Allah likes those who are good to other and does not like those who practice mischief and tyranny on earth. Muslims are, on this very basis, declared by God in the Quran as a people created with a mission to promote virtue and discourage evil in the society (Quran 3: 110). ■

O, Muslim women; out of the evening create a dazzling morn to the true lovers of God Recite the Holy Qur'an and enthusiastically translate its spirit into action, Don't you know that the pathos of your recitation changed altogether Umar's fate.

- *Allama Iqbal*
(*Secrets of Self*)

I Planned to Destroy Islam, I Became Muslim

- Shariffa Carlos

The story of how I reverted to Islam is a story of plans. I made plans; the group I was with made plans, and Allah made plans. And Allah is the Best of Planners.

When I was a teenager, I came to the attention of a group of people with a very sinister agenda. They were and probably still are a loose association of individuals who work in government positions but have a special agenda – to destroy Islam. It is not a governmental group that I am aware of, they simply use their positions in the US government to advance their cause.

One member of this group approached me because he saw that I was articulate, motivated and very much the women's rights advocate. He told me that if I studied International Relations with an emphasis in the Middle East, he would guarantee me a job at the American Embassy in Egypt. He wanted me to eventually go there to use my position in the country to talk to Muslim women and encourage the fledgling women's rights movement.

I thought this was a great idea. I had seen the Muslim women on TV; I knew they were a poor oppressed group, and I wanted to lead them to the light of 20th century freedom.

With this intention, I went to

college and began my education. I studied the Qur'ân, hadîth and Islamic history. I also studied the ways I could use this information. I learned how to twist the words to say what I wanted them to say. It was a valuable tool.

Once I started learning, however, I began to be intrigued by this message. It made sense. That was very scary. Therefore, in order to counteract this effect, I began to take classes in Christianity. I chose to take classes with this one professor on campus because he had a good reputation and he had a Ph.D. in Theology from Harvard University. I felt I was in good hands. I was, but not for the reasons I thought. It turns out that this professor was a Unitarian Christian. He did not believe in the trinity or the divinity of Jesus. In actuality, he believed that Jesus was a prophet.

He proceeded to prove this by taking the Bible from its sources in Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic and show where they were changed. As he did this, he showed the historical events which shaped and followed these changes.

By the time I finished this class, my religion had been destroyed, but I was still not ready to accept Islam.

As time went on, I continued to

study, for myself and for my future career. This took about three years. In this time, I would question Muslims about their beliefs. One of the individuals I questioned was a Muslim brother with the MSA [Muslim Students' Association]. Alhamdulillah, he saw my interest in the Deen, and made it a personal effort to educate me about Islam. He would tell me about Islam at every opportunity which presented itself.

One day, this man contacts me, and he tells me about a group of Muslims who were visiting in town. He wanted me to meet them. I agreed. I went to meet with them after Isha [night] prayer. I was led to a room with at least 20 men in it. They all made space for me to sit, and I was placed face to face with an elderly gentleman.

MashaAllah, this brother was a very knowledgeable man in matters of Christianity. He and I discussed and argued the varying parts of the Bible and the Qur'ân until the fajr [dawn prayer]. At this point, after having listened to this wise man tell me what I already knew, based on the class I had taken in Christianity, he did what no other individual had ever done. He invited me to become a Muslim.

In the three years I had been searching and researching, no one had ever invited me. I had been taught, argued with and even insulted, but never invited.

So when he invited me, it clicked. I realised this was the time. I knew it was the truth, and I had to make a decision. Alhamdulillah [All praise be to Allah], Allah opened my heart, and I said, "Yes. I want to be a Muslim."

With that, the man led me in the Shahadah [the testimony of faith] – in English and in Arabic.

When I took the Shahadah, I felt the strangest sensation. I felt as if a huge, physical weight had just been lifted off my chest; I gasped for breath as if I were breathing for the first time in my life.

Alhamdulillah, Allah had given me a new life – a clean slate – a chance for Jannah [Paradise], and I pray that I live the rest of my days and die as a Muslim. Ameen. ■

[revert2islamtoday.blogspot.com]

**ISLAM A PERFECT AND
UNIVERSAL RELIGION**

"Islam had the power of peacefully conquering souls by the simplicity of its theology, the clearness of its dogma and principles, and the definite number of the practices which it demands. In contrast to Christianity which has been undergoing continual transformation since its origin, Islam has remained identical with itself."

*(Jean L'heureux, Elude sur
L'Islamisme p.35)*

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 editions of his works, 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 forever! 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 tale 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 about 130 years ago. The colorful 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 examinations of I.C.S.C., B.E, he joined the Indian Civil Service 1895 CE and was posted too many places as District Magistrate and District Judge. He was an under Secretary in the Ministry of Finance of the Indian Government. He was also given the responsibility of Joint Secretary in the Central Government of

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India. He retired from the Indian Civil Service 1914 CE. The Encyclopaedia 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 Ninth General Assembly meeting of the League of Nations in 1928. To establish peace through religion, he made valuable contributions in many international conferences held in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Holland, United States and Canada from 1921 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 Social Equality (1936)
11. Islamic History, its Scope and (Content 1936)
12. The Message of Islam (1940)

Comments on the exegeses of Muslims and Muslim antagonists:

Varying degrees 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 Qur'an 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 Qur'an. 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 Qur'an, 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 writing the translation, meaning, exegesis and

commentaries of the Holy Qur'an 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 Haydarabad, Deccan, Moulana 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 Moulana 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."? 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’.

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 own words) can be described as “that imitable symphony the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy.”

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 Qur’an 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’.

Features of Yusuf Ali’s Commentary:

It can be asserted that the English Translation and Commentary on the Holy Qur’an 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 Qur’an. 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 judgments. 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 Commentary are that in translating the Text, Abdullah Yusuf Ali has aired 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 far and 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.”

Allama 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 references 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) Tafsir Kabir by Fakhruddin Muhammad Razi, d. 606 H. (4) Tafsirul Quran by Abul Fida Ismail Ibn Kathir, d. 774 H. (5) Tafsir Jalalain by Jalaluddin Sayuti and Jalaluddin Mahalli. (5) Majma 'ul Bahrain by Jalaluddin Sayuti, d. 911 H. (6) Itqanfi ulum il Quran Jalaluddin Sayuti, d. 911 H. (7) Anwar ut Tanzil by Qadi Nasiruddin Abu Said Baidawi, d. 685 H. (8) Mufradat by Abul Qasim Husain Raghil Ispahani, d. 503 H. (9) Tafsir Rahmani by Shaikh Ali Ibn Ahmad Mahairni, d. 835 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 Abduh and Muhammad Rashid Rida of Egypt and (16) Tafsir Haqqani by Moulana Abdul Hoque Haqqani, (17) Tafsir by Moulana 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 information's. 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.

In order to elucidate the various words, points, chronology, and concordance to the Holy Quran Allama 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.

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 ibn Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia in 1400 Hijra had ventured to produce a reliable translation and exegesis of the Holy Qur'an 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 committees 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 authenticity for reprinting by King Fahd Holy Qur'an 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 words 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)

Last days on the streets:

Multi-faceted talent, exceptional intelligence, scholarly translation of the Holy Qur’an 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. We do not know where his relative, family and folks were at that time. 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 a 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 Qur’an? 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 Prime Minister 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 a suitcase beside him which had no money in it. Later he was taken to the Center 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 Westminster area. Police took him to Westminster 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 of 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 investigation, he was buried by the local Muslims in Brook Wood Cemetery, Surrey.

Conclusion:

Thus, at the age of 81, in the most bewildering of circumstances, came to a tragic end the colorful life of Abdullah Yusuf Ali, one of the greatest sons of the Muslim Ummah. This powerful writer, selfless Muballig of Islam and a polyglottic genius remains buried forever in European soil. The First edition of his 'Translation and Commentary of the Holy Qur'an' 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 won capacity. If anyone 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 Qur'an- indeed every religious book- has to be read, not only with the tongue and voice and eyes, but with the best light that our intellect can supply and even more, with truest and purest 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.' ■

The Role of the Muslim Community

- Obaidur Rahman Nadwi

The Muslim Community is the bearer of Allah's final message. Being adherents of the last prophet Muhammad (PBUH), a great responsibility lies on us. The Quran has emphatically proclaimed: "Ye are the best community that hath been raised up for mankind. Ye enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency and ye believe in Allah". (III: 110) and, again: "Thus we have appointed you a middle nation, that ye may be witness against mankind". (11:143)

Enjoining good and forbidding evil are a wide-ranging assignment allotted to the Muslim community by Almighty Allah. Accordingly we should gird up loins to discharge this duty. If we fail to perform this, we are liable to suffer huge losses. The prophet says: "If one sees an evil, one should change it by one's hands one dares not to do so, one should use tongue, if one has no courage to use tongue; one should realize in one's heart that it is bad and this is the lowest stage of Iman".

No doubt, if we keep this saying of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in view and act accordingly, a host of evil practices may come to an end. Unlike other religions, we have a definite purpose in life. Our main aim is to preserve a great deal of provisions for the Day of Judgment. Our stay in this world is transitory. The holy Prophet says: "My relation with this world is only this much that my likeness is of a rider who sat under the shade of a tree for a while and then got up and went away". It should be kept in mind that our real life will commence in the Hereafter. We have

full trust that what we sow and cultivate here, would be rewarded in the Hereafter. We should take it into consideration that this world is the firming of the Hereafter. As the Prophet said: "The world hath been created for thee and thou hath been created for the Hereafter".

With this object in view Islam does not regard the present world to be the highest goal of human beings and the pinnacle of their advancements.

The holy Quran vividly says: "The comfort of the life of the world is but little as against the Hereafter". (ix:38). This life of the world is but a pastime and a game. The home of the hereafter - that is life, if they but knew". (xxix:64). Know that the life of this world (as compared with the hereafter) is only play, and idle talk, and pageantry and boosting among you, and rivalry in respect of wealth and children; as the likeness of vegetation after rain, whereof the growth is pleasing to the husbandman, but afterward it drieth up and thou seest it turning yellow, then it become the straw. And in the hereafter there is grievous punishment, and (also) forgiveness from Allah and His good pleasure; where as the life of the world is but a matter of illusion". (vii:20) The hereafter is a better and more long-lasting reality. Naught is the life of the world save a pastime and a sport. Better for is the abode of the hereafter for those who keep their duty (to, Allah). Have ye then no sense?". (vi:32) And whatsoever ye have been given is a comfort of the life of the

world and an ornament thereof; and more lasting. Have ye they no sense?’

Noted Islamic scholar late S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi has rightly stated that “The Quran condemns those who prefer this perishable, transitory, and imperfect world to the eternal and everlasting, unbounded and faultless Hereafter which is free from every kind of evil and meanness, grief and distress, fear and loss and disease and ill-health”.

Now let us see the following verses of the Quran.

“Lo! Those who expect not the meeting us but desire the life of the world and feel secure therein, and those who are neglectful of our revelations, their home will be the fire because of what they used to earn”. (x:8-9) “Whose (only) desireth the life of the world and its pomp, We shall repay them their deeds herein, and there in they will not be wronged. “Those are they for whom there is naught in the hereafter save fire. (All) that they contrive here is vain and (all) that they ‘are want to do is fruitless.” (xi: 15-16)

And was unto the disbelievers from an awful doom; those who love the life of the world more than the hereafter, and (debar) men from the way of Allah and would have it crooked: such are for astray. (xiv:2-3)

They know only some appearance of the life of the world, and are heedless of the Hereafter.” (xxx:7)

“Then withdraw (O Muhammad) from him who fleeth from Our remembrance and desireth only the life of the world. Such is their sum of knowledge.

Lo! Thy Lord is best aware of him who strayeth and He is best aware of him who goesth right.” (Liii:29-30)

“Lo! These love fleeting life, and put behind them (the remembrance of) a grievous day”. (L xxvi:27)

“Then as for him who rebelled, and close the life of the world, Lo! Hell will be his home.” (Lxxix:37-39)

The above mentioned verses of the Quran precisely make it clear that our permanent abode will be in the Hereafter. Hence, we should devote ourselves to do good deeds and motivate others to do the same. Besides we should hoard more and more provisions for the Last Day instead of involving in obnoxious and unholy acts. Moreover we should mould our behaviour and conduct and carry ourselves in the hue of ethical value and moral virtues” Our deeds and actions may indicate that we are followers of Islam. Abu Hurairah reported that the holy Prophet (PBUH) said: Anybody who believes in Allah and the Last Day should not harm his neighbor, and anybody who believes in Allah and the Last Day should “entertain his guest generously and anybody who believes in Allah and the last day should talk what is good or keep quiet i.e. abstain from all kinds of evil and dirty talk”.

Jabir bin Abdullah relates that the holy messenger said: “Avoid cruelty and injustice, for on the Day of Judgment, the same win turn into, several darkness; and guard yourselves against miserliness; for this has ruined nations that lived before you. Miserliness led them to bloodshed and to treat the unlawful as lawful”. ■

It Feels Like Being on Death Row

- George Yancy*

After hearing about the two Sacramento police officers who tragically shot and killed 22-year-old unarmed Black male Stephon Clark because they thought that he had a gun when in fact he had a cell phone, I was seized yet again by that profoundly uncomfortable feeling of trying to make sense of what it means to be a Black male in contemporary white America, an America that has always spelled out in unambiguous and brutal terms that Black bodies are disposable, especially when compared to white bodies, white life.

There was that profound sense of grieving yet again for a Black body killed by the state or proxies of the state. There was that sudden flood of outrage and deep melancholia as I was inundated with recent memories.

After hearing the 911 audio tape of the killing of unarmed 17-year-old Black male Trayvon Martin, I wept.

After hearing the "I can't breathe" cries of 42-year-old Black male Eric Garner, who eventually died of what the coroner described as a chokehold from a white police officer, my body felt constricted. His cries were existential entreaties that fell on opaque ears and hearts.

After the racial profiling of 28-year-old Sandra Bland and the subsequent treatment of her (having been thrown to

the ground) by a white police officer as if she was a "criminal," I felt as if I should have been there to show her the respect and love that she deserved.

I feel that familiar anger that arises from knowing that Black women and women of color are deemed deprived of the female "fragility" of white women. I began to see past photos of lynched Black bodies as white men, women, and children looked with curious and excited white gazes. When I think about that mixed space of white terror and white desire, even a perverse sexual desire, there is that distinct feeling of disgust, physical and moral.

Stephon Clark's case reminded me of the tragedy of 23-year-old Amadou Diallo, who was a Black man from Guinea, and how he was shot at 41 times and hit with no less than 19 bullets on February 4, 1999. Like Clark, Diallo was said to have a gun in his hand. As we know, a police officer yelled out, "Gun!" Yet, there was no gun; only a wallet. He had reached and grabbed his wallet.

The urgent existential question is this: What is it about a Black man or Black teenager holding an innocuous object such that, generally speaking, white police officers see weapons? Even toy guns become real guns in the hands of young Black boys. Ask 12-year-old Tamir Rice. He was shot in roughly two seconds after white police officers arrived on the scene. There was no hesitation; there was no second thought.

* *George Yancy is professor of philosophy at Emory University.*

The white racist logic goes like this. He is Black and therefore guilty. To be Black in America, according to white racist logic, which is undergirded by white myth-making, is to be born guilty, violent, criminal, dangerous. According to such myth-making, Black bodies must be stopped dead before they contaminate the white body politic, before they unleash their “inherent violence.”

Truth be told, if you are Black, you might find yourself lost in a white neighborhood, searching for help and be shot dead because you were believed to be a “threat.” Recall that it was 19-year-old Renisha McBride who, while seeking help after being in a car accident, was shot dead by white male Theodore Wafer as she was heard by him “banging” on his front door.

Then again, Black bodies can literally find themselves on the ground with their hands raised, as in the case of 47-year-old Black male Charles Kinsey, and still be shot. On July 18, 2016, Kinsey clearly stated to police officers that his client, who had wandered away from a mental health facility, had a toy truck and that they should not shoot. Kinsey was concerned that his client would appear, by the police officers, as if he had a weapon. Yet, a police officer on the scene fired 3 shots, one of which hit Kinsey in the leg.

When Kinsey asked why he was shot, the police officer replied, “I don’t know.” James Baldwin writes, “But it is not permissible that the authors of devastation should be innocent.” In short, there is no innocence here.

“I don’t know” explains the deep and

indelible racist assumptions that many white Americans have of Black bodies, assumptions that are embedded in the form of embodied and psychic racist dispositions or habits that are etched into the white psyche, a psyche that interprets and “sees” guns where there are wallets or cell phones. This isn’t just a question about white police officers possessing false beliefs. Rather, within such contexts, it speaks powerfully to the ways in which many white police officers don’t see innocent Black bodies, unarmed Black bodies, or Black lives that matter.

It has to do with forms of embodied white racist rigidity that often operate beyond the radar of cognitive reflection, resulting in a reflexive “common sense” that leaves Black bodies dead. This is why wallets and cell phones in the hands of Black people become guns, toy guns become real guns, Black bodies on the ground with their hands raised become threatening bodies, and Black bodies in search of help become criminal bodies trying to break into a white man’s home, to steal from white spaces, and why two Black men (Donte Robinson and Rashon Nelson) innocently sitting in a Starbucks in Philadelphia, PA were deemed “suspicious.”

Stephon Clark’s tragic death had just come two weeks after I shared with my university students that I try never to pull out my cell phone when just casually walking down the street. My white students look with credulity. I let them know that the history of white America’s fear of the Black body forces me to abandon ordinary activities like reaching for my wallet in the presence of white

police officers, running down the street for a bus in the presence of white police officers, or holding my cell phone in the presence of white police officers.

In fact, I try not to do these things in the presence of white people, more generally, especially as they also see with distorted white gazes and where they can very easily function as proxies of the state and thereby enforce law and order. Perhaps, like George Zimmermann, they will police in advance my Black body as “suspicious.”

In fact, my fear is so great that neither white police officers nor white civilians need be immediately present. The historical madness of white gratuitous violence from white people experienced by Black people forces me, for my own survival, to monitor my own actions even in their absence, especially as they might appear suddenly. I don’t seem to get a break to be simply human or a person, to walk with effortless grace in white America. Again, my white students look with credulity, but they aren’t Black.

If I had the opportunity to speak with Stephon Clark before his death, I would have warned him of something that I would be at great pains to share. Theo Shaw, who in 2006 was a member of the “Jena Six,” in Jena, Louisiana, recently wrote to ask me a deeply moving and disturbing question: “Is to be Black and male in America like being on death row?” It was hard for me to answer the question, especially as Theo Shaw is now in law school and doing very well. Yet, I refused to lie as I would have refused to lie to Stephon Clark. Yes!

To be Black and male in white America, with its white state violence, and its history of white supremacy, is like being on death row, which means that to be Black is like waiting to die, waiting for one’s own death, in virtue of being Black in white America. After all, according to what we have witnessed, a white police officer will say that he/she “feared for his/her life” as you stand with your hands raised, or have a cell phone in your hands, or perhaps a wallet. Out of love, I would have said this to Clark. I would have reminded him that, for the most part, white America has never loved him, and that it was never meant for him to be human in white America.

As Toni Morrison tells readers in *Beloved*, I would have also said to Clark that he must love his body because the history of white America says that it is better that it swings from a tree, incarcerated or dead. Love in this case, Black love, is a radical act of existential and political resistance. Morrison writes, “In this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don’t love your eyes; they’d just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it.”

And I would have told him never to forget this. When we forget that Black bodies are deemed ontologically antithetical to white conceptions of “purity” and “safety,” it is then that our lives might be taken in less than a blink of an eye. As we are rarely ever granted innocence in white America, we are, in the main, a guilty people, Black, disposable, tragically stained from birth. ■

(YMD)

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