

“Call to the path of thy Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation,
and argue with people in the best manner.” (Holy Quran, 16:125)

The Light

AND

ISLAMIC REVIEW

Exponent of Islam and the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement
for over ninety years

July – December 2019

In the spirit of the above-cited verse, this periodical attempts to dispel
misunderstandings about the religion of Islam and endeavors to
facilitate inter-faith dialogue based on reason and rationality.

Vol. 96

CONTENTS

No. 2

A Trend of Decline in Religiosity

An Introduction to the Symposium 3

By Fazeel S. Khan, Esq.

Spirituality in Islam 4

By Dr. Noman Malik

Essence of Sufism 9

By Syed Ambar Chishty

Jesus, the Spirit of God 13

By Fazeel S. Khan, Esq.

Interpreting Scripture 16

By Dr. Ayesha Khan

The Lahore Ahmadiyya View 19

By Dr. Mohammed Ahmad

Spiritual Significance of Five Pillars of Islam 21

Exhibit Posters

احمدیہ انجمن اشاعت اسلام لاہور

◆ Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore Inc., U.S.A. ◆

www.muslim.org

The Light was founded in 1921 as the organ of the AHMADIYYA ANJUMAN ISHA'AT ISLAM (Ahmadiyya Association for the Propagation of Islam) of Lahore, Pakistan. **The Islamic Review** was published in England from 1913 for over 50 years, and in the U.S.A. from 1980 to 1991. The present periodical represents the beliefs of the worldwide branches of the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam, Lahore.

ISSN: 1060-4596

Editor: Fazeel S. Khan, Esq.

Circulation: Mrs. Samina Malik.

Contact information:

'The Light', P.O. Box 3370, Dublin, Ohio 43016, U.S.A.

Phone: 614 – 873 1030 • **Fax:** 614 – 873 1022

E-mails: aaiil@aol.com

Website: www.muslim.org

The main objective of the A.A.I.L. is to present the true, original message of Islam to the whole world — Islam as it is found in the Holy Quran and the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, obscured today by grave misconceptions and wrong popular notions.

Islam seeks to attract the **hearts and minds** of people towards the truth, by means of reasoning and the natural beauty of its principles.

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (d. 1908), our Founder, arose to remind the world that Islam is:

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

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

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

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

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

Non-sectarian: Every person professing Islam by the words **La ilaha ill-Allah, Muhammad-ur rasul-ullah** (There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah) is a Muslim. A Muslim cannot be expelled from Islam by anyone.

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad taught that **no** prophet, old or new, is to arise after the Holy Prophet Muhammad. However, **Mujaddids** will be raised by God to revive and rekindle the light of Islam.

About ourselves

Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore has branches in many countries including:

U.S.A.	Australia
U.K.	Canada
Holland	Fiji
Indonesia	Germany
Suriname	India
Trinidad	South Africa
Guyana	Philippines

Achievements:

The Anjuman has produced extensive literature on Islam, originally in English and Urdu, including translations of the Holy Quran with commentaries. These books are being translated into other languages, including French, German, Spanish, Dutch, Russian, Chinese, and Arabic. The Anjuman has run several Muslim missions around the world, including the first ever in Western Europe.

History:

1889: **Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad** founds the Ahmadiyya Movement.

1901: Movement given name **Ahmadiyya** after Holy Prophet Muhammad's other famous name **Ahmad**.

1905: Hazrat Mirza appoints central body (Anjuman) to manage the Movement.

1908: Death of Hazrat Mirza. Succeeded by Maulana Nur-ud-Din as Head.

1914: Death of Maulana Nur-ud-Din. Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam founded at Lahore as continuation of the original Anjuman. Maulana Muhammad Ali elected as Head.

1951: Death of Maulana Muhammad Ali after fifty years of glorious service to the cause of Islam. Maulana Sadr-ud-Din (d. 1981) becomes Head.

1981-1996: Dr Saeed Ahmad Khan, an eminent medical doctor and religious scholar, led the Movement, at a time of intense persecution.

1996-2002: Prof. Dr Asghar Hameed, a distinguished retired University Professor of Mathematics, and learned Islamic scholar, served as Head.

2002: Prof. Dr Abdul Karim Saeed Pasha elected Head.

A Trend of Decline in Religiosity

An Introduction to the Symposium

By Fazeel S. Khan, Esq.

[This article comprises the introductory remarks to the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society's annual convention – titled “Spiritual and Religious: Connecting Spirituality with Religion, from an Islamic Perspective” – held in Columbus, Ohio in August 2019. In this introduction, the Editor addresses the issue of the decline in religious affiliation in the West and explores common reasons offered for this phenomenon. He then argues, based on the prevalent sentiment “I am spiritual, not religious,” that what is in fact being rejected is not spirituality per se but rather what many people perceive religion as an institution entails. He concludes by questioning whether religion can promote and foster the ideals of spirituality that people want to incorporate in their lives, thereby laying the basis for the subsequent presentations. The video recording of the presentations from the symposium, which include powerpoint presentations, are available on the LAIS YouTube page at: [youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4IIVBGtc_2RXczCBywfZWEw8WQiSjNa](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4IIVBGtc_2RXczCBywfZWEw8WQiSjNa).]

Opening Remarks

The Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society, which is the US branch of the international Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement, works to educate people – those who are not Muslims and in some cases Muslims themselves – about the true, spiritual basis of the Islamic faith. This work is international in scope, but one way in which we do this locally is by hosting an annual symposium devoted to a topic about Islam that is relevant to some contemporary issue.

In the past, we devoted our symposium to demystifying Islamic concepts like “jihad” and “sharia”, words that had become commonly used by political pundits and laypersons alike, but oftentimes without regard for its true meaning. Similarly, with so much attention being drawn to the so-called “Islamic State” in Iraq and Syria, we hosted a symposium on dispelling misperceptions about the true significance of the concept of “Caliphate” in Islam. When a popular topic in public discourse revolved around the “science vs. religion” debate, we held a symposium titled “The Story of Adam: A Discussion on Evolution and Revelation”, and we addressed, from an Islamic perspective, whether science and religion are inherently incompatible. Last year, with the increasing rise of partisan politics and an expanding culture of divisiveness throughout the coun-

try, we thought it would be appropriate to focus the symposium on highlighting lessons on civility and religious harmony, and share insights on this topic from an Islamic perspective, and recognize persons who are engaged in inspirational works to help facilitate these goals. This year, with there being a lot of discussion about the sharp decline in traditional religious membership, and a corresponding rise in people identifying as “spiritual but not religious”, we will address the connection between spirituality and religion from an Islamic perspective.

Introduction to Symposium Theme

As a short introduction to the topic we will be addressing today, there has been a lot of discussion recently about polls that show people are increasingly turning away from organized religion. These studies show there is a consistent rate of decline in the percentage of people who affiliate with a particular faith tradition. And this growing culture of skepticism about religion is especially evident among young people in America. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center found that among millennials (that is, those born between 1981 and 1996) only 4 in 10 people say religion is important in their lives. And this is even higher for those who are younger. In all, there appears to be about a quarter of Americans (23%) who have given up following organized religion completely.

A variety of theories are presented to try to explain this phenomenon. Some view this trend as a natural result of the *scientific age* in which we live, where people call into question the need for religion, which is viewed as stories of miracles of the past, when they are living in a time when extraordinary technological advancements occur every day. Where a Wifi connection is deemed to have more utility than prayer, and faith in God is replaced with dependence on Google. Others attribute this decline to a perceived *political entanglement of religion*, where religion (or at least some traditional scriptural interpretation) is viewed as being at odds with certain social ideals people find important. Such as, having a passion for equal rights and fair treatment of all (where one does not have to maintain a belief in a chosen people or a preferred class of people). Or, having a conviction in an evidence-based belief system (whether it has to do with evolution and the origins of mankind, or even issues like climate change). And, still others argue this is simply a product of a culture of *consumer capitalism*, where, like almost everything else in their life, people get to choose what they want, including what faith means to them, rather than be bound by the established rules of an organized religion.

Noteworthy, is that although the number of people who have turned away from organized religion is

consistently increasing, that does not equate with a diminished sense of *spirituality* in their lives. The trend of not affiliating with a particular religious tradition seems more to do with how religion as an “institution” is viewed and understood. It is in fact the *lack of spirituality* that appears to be what is missing by those who turn away from religion. Religion, unfortunately, has become viewed by many as simply belonging to a particular group with distinctive beliefs and engaging in certain rituals.

The trend to disassociate from religion, therefore, seems to be more about a rejection of this type of understanding of what religion entails. It is not spirituality which is rejected, but the lack of spirituality people desire to experience in organized religion that they find missing. In spite of there being a decline in traditional religious membership, we see from various spiritual exercises that have become very popular in Western culture (whether it is meditation, yoga, etc.) there is in fact a yearning for spirituality, some spiritual component to balance the materialistic daily routines in which people live.

But what is the connection between spirituality and religion? Can religion in fact promote and foster the ideals of spirituality that people want to incorporate in their lives. As most of us can appreciate, spirituality is at the core of *every* religion. And what we will be discussing today, is what spirituality means from an Islamic perspective, and what the religion of Islam offers in terms of how to live a spiritual life. Which brings me to an end to my Introduction. I thank you for your attention. ■

CALL FOR PAPERS!

The Light AND ISLAMIC REVIEW

welcomes submissions of articles for publication. Preferably, articles should be between 5-10 pages long, single-spaced, in *Microsoft Word* format and submitted via e-mail. Authors from all faiths and denominations are welcome, the subject matter of the paper, though, must be substantively related to Islam. Please contact the Editorial Board for more information on Editorial Guidelines.

(See page 2 for contact information)

Spirituality in Islam

By Dr. Noman Malik

[This article comprises the keynote presentation at the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society’s annual convention – titled “*Spiritual and Religious: Connecting Spirituality with Religion, from an Islamic Perspective*” – held in Columbus, Ohio in August 2019. In this presentation, Dr. Malik provides insight into the connection between religion and spirituality from an Islamic perspective. He first explains how, according to Islam, each person has a soul, which the Quran states is the “spirit of God” blown into every human. He further explains that the “spirit of God” within each person means humans possess the divine attributes of God, in a potential state, and that life offers opportunities to develop these attributes to become more God-like in our deeds (i.e. “closer to God”). He then demonstrates how this process is the basis for spiritual development by expounding on the three stages of spiritual progression. He then concludes by reasoning that, according to this understanding of spirituality, salvation is attained by nurturing the divine attributes within and, therefore, is not limited to any exclusive faith tradition. The video recording of the presentations from the symposium, which include powerpoint presentations, are available on the LAIS YouTube page at: [youtube.com/playlist?list=PL41IVBGtc_2RX_czCBywJZWEw8WQI.SJfNa](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL41IVBGtc_2RX_czCBywJZWEw8WQI.SJfNa).]

Introduction

Spirituality is at the core of every religious tradition. And what I would like to do is provide some information about how the concept of “spirituality” is understood from the Islamic perspective.

There are several ways in which people have differentiated spirituality with religion.

- Some say religion is about following another’s spiritual experience, whereas spirituality is about having your own spiritual experience.
- Others say, religion is about obedience to rules (or dogma), and spirituality is about contemplation and rationality.
- Another distinction made is that religion is about faith, and spirituality is about inner peace and the way you live your life.
- And yet another characterization is that religion is about beliefs/practices of a particular group of people, whereas spirituality is universal and not confined to one path.

One way in which these differences have been summarized is by concluding that: in *spirituality* the focus

is on the Spirit, and in *religion* the focus is on God. Now, for those who are religiously observant, some of these distinctions may seem somewhat artificial or misplaced. The well-known author on religions, Huston Smith, described this discontent on the part of the religiously observant in an article titled “Spirituality vs. Religion”. He writes:

... I am concerned about the relationship between “spirituality” and “religion” and the way those terms are being used because it’s become increasingly common for spirituality to indirectly *denigrate* religion. People used to make a distinction between religion and religious institutions, and that is a valid distinction. But then spirituality came along, and everything spiritual was good and everything to do with religion was bad ... So religion has gotten tarred, and within the academy, where I’ve spent my life, it gets very roughly handled.

So, it seems, for the religiously observant, the issue is not an either-or (God vs. Spirit). Rather, it is understood as *spirituality* being about the *connection* between God and the Spirit, and *religion* being about how to foster that *connection*.

Significance of the word “Islam”

Turning to Islam, the very name of the religion emphasizes these two points. The word “Islam” is derived from the Arabic root word “silm”, which means “a state in which a person is at peace.” The word “Islam” also implies “submission” in the sense of following divine guidance. So, the word “Islam” provides both the *goal* (which is, attainment of a state of peaceful existence) and the *means* to achieve it (which is, following the guidance provided by the Creator). This state of “peace” – the ultimate point in spiritual progression – is understood as meaning peace within, peace with God and peace with humanity.

Connection between God and the Spirit

In order to understand the *connection* between God and the Spirit, one must first examine:

- What the nature of the Spirit (the human soul) is; and
- What the nature of God is.

Nature of the Spirit (Human Soul)

We are told in the Holy Quran that man has both a material and a spiritual existence. The material existence comprises our body, and the spiritual existence is what our soul entails. And the nature of the soul is described as God’s own spirit, which is breathed into each and every person. So, every person has the spirit of God

within them, regardless of ethnic origin, religious affiliation, gender or any other difference. As the Quran states:

So when I have made him (man) complete and breathed into him of My spirit ... (15:29).

What having the spirit of God within us means is that we all have the divine attributes (the qualities of God) within us. This means that all people have the same spiritual core or spiritual foundation, and, therefore, all people are spiritually equal. But just as a child is born in an infant state, not yet fully developed or reaching its potential of maturity, so too are the divine attributes within each person in an embryonic state needing to be developed in order to reach its potential. And this is understood (according to Islam) as what spiritual development entails – it is the developing of the divine attributes within.

The Holy Quran explains this process of developing the soul by using the analogy of a seed. It states:

- And the soul and its perfection!
- So He (God) reveals to it its way of evil and its way of good;
- He is indeed successful who causes it to grow,
- And he indeed fails who buries it. (91:7-10)

So, just as a seed has the potential within it to grow into a lush garden if cultivated and nourished properly, so too does the soul have the potential to develop into the spiritual garden of achieving the spiritual state of peace. And, just like a seed needs to be *cultivated* in order to flourish, so too do the seeds of divine attributes in the soul need to be *practiced* in order for them to develop. And this is done by being “God-like” in our actions. Life, therefore, is understood as providing opportunities to develop these attributes. Just as God is Loving, so too does life provide us with opportunities to be loving. Just as God is Forgiving, life provides us with opportunities to be forgiving. Just as God is Compassionate, Wise, Just, etc., life provides us opportunities to develop these qualities within us (and be more resembling of God’s attributes in our actions, in our character, and ultimately in our entire existence).

Nature of God

In order to be more God-like in our actions, we obviously need to understand the nature of God. And although God is not seen with the material eye (at least according to Islam), one can spiritually see the representation of God through His divine attributes. In the Holy Quran, 99 attributes of God (sometimes referred to as names of God) are presented describing the nature of God. And in the first chapter – titled *Al Fatihah* (The Opening),

which is regarded as a summary of the Quran or the quintessence of the Quran – the 4 primary attributes of God are revealed. It states:

Praise be to Allah (God), the **Lord** of the worlds,
The **Beneficent**, the **Merciful**,

Master of the day of Requital.

Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help.

Guide us on the right path,

The path of those upon whom Thou has bestowed favors,

Not those upon whom wrath is brought down, nor those who go astray.

The proper name of God, according to Islam, is “Allah”. The word “Allah” is defined as “That Being Who exists necessarily by Himself (meaning, He is One) and Who comprises all the attributes (or qualities) of perfection”. So, the name of God in Islam itself provides a description of the nature of God, and it expresses the need to further learn the “attributes (or qualities) of perfection” that it intimates. It should be noted that these attributes are mentioned in the Quran not because God needs our glorification (as He is “Self-Sufficient”), but rather to remind us that these are the qualities we are to emulate for our spiritual development. Out of His many attributes, the four mentioned in the first chapter of the Quran are repeated 32 times each day in the Muslim daily prayers. And these four attributes provide a summary of the nature of God.

First Attribute: *Rabb* (“Lord”)

The first attribute of God mentioned in Sura Fatihah is that of *Rabb*. The Arabic word *Rabb* is normally translated into English as “Lord”, but it has a much deeper meaning. As Maulana Muhammad Ali explains in his Quran Commentary:

The Arabic word *Rabb* conveys not only the idea of fostering, bringing up, or nourishing, but also that of regulating, completing and accomplishing of the evolution of things from the crudest state to that of the highest perfection ... [It] signifies the fostering of a thing in such a manner as to make it attain one condition after another until it reaches its goal of completion.

Maulana Muhammad Ali goes on to explain:

By the use of the word *Rabb* the Holy Quran thus hints at the law of evolution which is working in the universe ... *Rabb* or *Nourisher unto Perfection*, however, includes both the physical

and spiritual sides so far as man is concerned, His Word being the spiritual nourishment through which man is brought to perfection.

And we are told in the Sura Fatihah that God is the *Rabb ul alameen*, which means he is the *Nourisher unto Perfection* of all people, all nations, all worlds, and of all creation. Thus, the notion of the universality of God (meaning He is not limited to any particular group of people) and of the universality of the laws of nature (meaning everyone is subjected to the same principles) are reinforced.

Second and Third Attributes: *Rahman* (Beneficent) and *Raheem* (Merciful)

This “nourishment unto perfection” is brought about by God’s attribute of “Mercy”. The Arabic word for “Mercy” is *Rahma*, which means “to have so much love and tenderness for a thing that one is compelled to do good to it.” This attribute of “Mercy” is the greatest or most prominent characteristic of God (according to Islam). In the Quran, God states that He has made His Mercy (*Rahma*) “binding” on Himself (6:54). The Quran further states that God’s Mercy (*Rahma*) “encompasses all things” (7:156). And this Mercy of God is expressed in two ways – by way of *Rahman* and by way of *Raheem* – which are the second and third attributes of God mentioned in Sura Fatihah. They both are derived from the same root word *Rahma* but signify two types of “mercy”.

Rahman is normally translated as “Beneficent”, but actually means that: “God, out of His love for His creation, provides it with whatever it needs to attain its goal of perfection.” And this refers to both man’s physical and spiritual development. So, just as God provides the sun, the air, the soil, etc. equally to *all* mankind for man to be able to develop physically, so too does He provide for all people’s spiritual development, which entails the sending of prophets, messengers, saintly figures, and revealed scriptures to *all* people on earth.

And the attribute of *Raheem*, normally translated as “Merciful”, signifies that God rewards (and multiplies without measure the rewards) a person when he or she makes use of what God provides. So, as in the physical world, if one makes use of seeds, the sun, rainfall and the nutrients in the soil, and cultivates, he or she will be rewarded with crops which provide nourishment for one’s physical development. So too in the spiritual realm, if one makes use of the guidance provided by God by following His revealed scriptures and the example of His messengers, one is rewarded with the inner peace and contentment that results from spiritual development that satisfies the soul.

Fourth Attribute: *Malik* (Master)

The fourth attribute mentioned in Surah Fatihah is that God is *Malik i yaumideen* (Master of the day of judgment), which means that God is ultimately the best judge. Just as God rewards goodness to foster spiritual development, so too does He provide corrective measures in response to actions that are harmful to or that impede spiritual development. Again, this is in the context of God's Mercy. What may be viewed as punishment is actually an opportunity for reform for the betterment of the individual.

It is noteworthy that in the Quran, the attribute of Forgiveness (*Ghafoor*) occurs 300 times, while that of Retribution (*Zuntyqaam*) occurs only 4 times. This shows the overwhelming preponderance of forgiveness in the nature of the Divine Being (according to Islam) when it comes to God's judgment.

Spiritual Development = Exercising the Divine Attributes Within

These Divine attributes of *Rabb* (Nourisher unto Perfection), *Rahman* (Beneficent), *Raheem* (Merciful) and *Malik* (Master) in the Sura Fatihah serve as ideals for how man is to conduct him or herself in life in order to develop the soul and attain the goal of peace and contentment within. Just as God is the Fosterer and Nourisher unto perfection of all nations, so must man make the service of humanity, regardless of race and religion, the object of his life. Similarly, just as God is Beneficent, conferring benefits to man without man doing anything to deserve them, so must man do good to his fellow man from whom he has not received or expects to receive any good. Likewise, just as God is Merciful, rewarding man for his good deeds, so must man support and aid all those who strive in the way of goodness. And, just as God is Master in that He is the best judge, where His judgment is for purposes of reform, and His loving forgiveness predominates, so must man be just in his or her dealings with others and be forgiving for others' faults or mistakes.

Three Stages of Development of the Soul

In Islam, this spiritual journey of development of the soul is categorized in 3 stages. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, provides a brilliant exposition of what these stages entail in his famous book "The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam." He describes the 3 stages as follows:

- *Nafs ul Ammara* (the animal spirit)
- *Nafs ul Lawwamma* (the self-accusing spirit)
- *Nafs ul Mutmainna* (the soul at rest)

First Stage: *Nafs ul Ammara* (the Animal Spirit)

The first stage is that in which one's low or base desires run rampant. Where one indulges in all kinds of impulses and urges to satisfy one's inclinations without regard to the rights or welfare of others. As a result, this stage is also characterized as the "soul prone to evil". The Holy Quran describes this stage in the following way:

Surely (man's) self is wont to command (him to do) evil. (12:53)

And because in this stage there is no control over one's impulses, the Quran describes a person in this state as having taken his "low desires" for god (because he or she obeys these impulses in the way that one should actually submit to the divine guidance provided for by God). It states:

Hast thou seen him who takes his low desires for his god? (25:43)

This stage is referred to as that of the "animal spirit" because it refers to the base animalistic desires found in the animal kingdom. It signifies the instinctual driving forces inherent in us (due to the millions of years of evolution) that promote survival (similar to Darwin's notion of "survival of the fittest"). And it primarily refers to the instinctual desires for power, control and sex. In Freudian terms, it relates to the "*Id*" of one's psyche. So, these primal instincts are within each one of us. And when people live their lives blindly following these base instincts, being only selfishly concerned with satisfying their own desires, they are considered to be in this first stage of development of the soul.

Second Stage: *Nafs ul Lawwamma* (The Self-Accusing Spirit)

The second stage of the development of the soul is when the person distinguishes between good and bad actions. It is when one recognizes the value in helping others and in sacrificing to help their needs. It is this stage of the spiritual journey that the Holy Quran refers to as *Nafs ul Lawwamma* (or, the "self-accusing spirit"). It states:

Nay, I swear by the Self-Accusing Spirit! (75:2)

This stage can also be understood as when one develops a conscience. It is when one lives a life in a way that transforms the instinctual desires within each one of us into moral qualities. An analogy can be appreciated using that of "fire". The impulsive desires within us are like fire, in that it fuels and motivates us to progress. However, if not controlled, it can lead to it consuming our entire being by burning us to the ground. But if regulated properly, harnessing it for useful purposes, like in the case of a steam or internal combustion engine, it can

transform something that is dangerous into something that is beneficial. So, in this stage, the base desires of man are not extinguished. They are simply harnessed in a manner to produce the exercise of moral qualities.

For instance, it is not that one's desire for wealth is suppressed. Rather, it is the desire to earn in a certain way (in an honest manner) and with a certain intention (to help others, either by way of the work you do or by donating some of one's earnings) that is advanced. So the desire for wealth is then used to develop the moral attributes of integrity, generosity, compassion for others, etc. Similarly, the desire to excel in one's capacity (perhaps in one's profession), and thereby being in a position of authority over others, is not necessarily repressed. Rather, if done with humility and with the intention to treat people fairly, it exercises the moral attributes of humbleness, justice and equality. Likewise, if the sexual desire is confined to a committed relationship like marriage, it can lead to virtues of love, faithfulness, devotion and loyalty.

Obviously, suppressing one's base desires and sacrificing benefit to one's self by choosing to help others is not always an easy thing to do. It is a constant struggle. And this second stage embodies the trials and tribulations one experiences in this spiritual journey of the development of the soul. It is like when a child is learning how to walk, and sometimes stumbles and falls. So too is it acknowledged that in this stage, despite the resolve to do the right thing, one sometimes stumbles and falls short.

Third Stage: *Nafs ul Mutmainna* (The Soul at Rest)

Those who are able to perfect this process of controlling and regulating their lower desires, and exhibiting the divine attributes in all of their affairs, progress to the third stage of the development of the soul. This stage is the pinnacle of the spiritual journey. It is referred to in the mystical teachings of Islam as "Union with the Beloved". It is when one completely effaces the ego and does good effortlessly without any struggle. The person becomes one with God in a spiritual sense, by displaying the divine attributes of God in everything he or she does. And this is the stage that the prophets and messengers of God and saintly personalities reached.

The Holy Quran refers to this ultimate stage in spiritual progress as "the soul at rest". It states:

O soul that art at rest, return to thy Lord, well-pleased (with Him), well pleasing (Him), so enter among My servants, and enter My Garden." (89:27-30)

And this is the stage to which the name Islam actually refers, for it signifies the achievement of a condition of

complete peace and contentment through the total resignation to the will and service of God. This stage, according to Islam, is that of true spirituality.

Salvation (Heaven and Hell)

Having this understanding of religion being about a spiritual journey helps one comprehend what salvation in Islam entails and what the concepts of heaven and hell actually mean. Salvation is not about simply reciting the correct doctrine or creed. Nor is it about ritualistically performing ceremonies or practices. Rather, salvation is dependent on the condition of one's soul (i.e. how far one has progressed in the spiritual journey). As a result, heaven and hell are understood as 2 conditions (not physical places). This was explained succinctly by Prophet Muhammad. He was once asked that if heaven is everywhere as is suggested in a verse of the Quran, where is hell then? He simply replied: "Where is the day when the night comes?" Hence, just like day and night are two circumstances one experiences (not 2 different physical places), heaven and hell are also 2 types of conditions one experiences.

Heaven represents the condition of peace and contentment that is attained by developing one's soul and becoming more God-like in one's character. And hell represents the condition of unrest one experiences when one fails to control their primal instincts and incorporate the Divine attributes in their life. In every language we find references to burning with anger, burning with hatred, burning with jealousy, etc. This condition of burning inside is the hellfire referred to in scripture. So, some form of heaven and hell start in this very world. As the Quran states that when people enter the garden of paradise in the Hereafter and experience the blessings of heaven, they will say "we tasted this fruit before" (2:25). So, our soul experiences the conditions of heaven and hell to some degree in this material life, and in the spiritual realm of the Hereafter, these conditions take a more palpable form.

I recently came across a quote from the Franciscan spiritual writer, Richard Rohr, which I believe makes the same point. He states:

Peacemaking, forgiveness and reconciliation are not some kind of ticket to heaven later. They are the price of peoplehood – the signature of heaven – now.

Thus, religion is not to be understood as if it were like a game, where one recites something or performs something in order to "win" in the end. Rather it is about the development of one's soul and its ultimate union with God (the Great Source from which all souls originate). This understanding was beautifully

expressed by the famous female Sufi Saint, Hazrat Raabia. She stated:

O Lord,
If I worship you for fear of hell,
Burn me in that hell.

If I worship you hoping for paradise,
Make it forbidden to me.

But if I worship you only for your own sake,
Do not withhold from me your everlasting beauty.

Prayer – Means to Facilitate the Spiritual Connection

As you can see, in the philosophy of Islam, the focus is on the Spirit (that is, the development of the soul). Religion is understood as providing the guidance needed in order to know how to achieve one's spiritual potential. And the most effective way to establish the spiritual connection with God is through the means of prayer.

In all religions, prayer is the primary institution for fostering the realization of God as a living entity. It is the means by which one, in a meditative and contemplative condition, communicates with the Divine. As the Quran relays:

Your Lord says: Pray to Me, I will answer you.
(40:50)

So, in Islam, prayer is considered essential for spiritual progress. It is understood that just as our physical bodies requires food to grow, so too does the soul require sustenance through a connection with the Divine in order to progress.

And in Islam, prayer is conducted 5 times every day. It is meant to be a constant reminder throughout one's day, no matter how busy one may be, to take out time to reflect on the Creator and to also put all of one's worries and concerns throughout the day in perspective. The Prophet Muhammad explained that if one were to bathe 5 times every day, one would not expect that person to be unclean. And in the same way, by reflecting on God and the purpose of our creation 5 times per day, it is supposed to offer an opportunity for a spiritual cleansing.

Conclusion

To conclude, the very essence of Islam is about spirituality and the connection of the spirit with God. It teaches that everyone has a soul, which is the Spirit of God breathed into them. As a result, everyone is spiritually equal. It also teaches that life is meant to provide opportunities to grow in spirituality by developing the divine attributes within. So the focus is on the manner in which one lives his or her life. And because we all have the

spirit of God within us and we all have opportunities to develop the divine attributes within through life, salvation (the state of connecting the Spirit with God) is available to everyone. This lesson is repeated several times in the Holy Quran. It states:

Surely those who believe (Muslims) and those who are Jews and the Sabian and the Christians – whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does good (to others) – they shall have no fear nor shall they grieve. (5:69)

Having no fear or grief is a reference to the ultimate state of peace and contentment in one's spiritual journey, the goal of all spiritual wayfarers.

I will end here. Thank you for your kind attention. May God bless you all. ■

Essence of Sufism

By Syed Ambar Chishty

[This article comprises the paper prepared by Syed Ambar Chishty to be delivered at the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society's annual convention – titled "Spiritual and Religious: Connecting Spirituality with Religion, from an Islamic Perspective" – held in Columbus, Ohio in August 2019. Syed Ambar Chishty is a 17th century descendant of the renowned Sufi Saint, Hazrat Moinuddin Chishty from Ajmer, India, whose tomb is a shrine for millions of people from various religious traditions to visit every year. In this paper, Syed Ambar Chishty provides an introduction to Sufism. Sufi teachings are appreciated as being universal in its outlook, applicable to all people, extending beyond the confines with which organized religion is often viewed. And because the focus is on the purification of the soul of the individual, it is accepted as being inclusive rather than exclusive. It is also recognized as the spiritual essence of all religions: the journey of developing a connection with the Creator and engaging in a process of development of the soul. Glimpses of these notions are reflected in the presentation by Syed Ambar Chishty. The video recording of the presentations from the symposium, which include powerpoint presentations, are available on the LAIS YouTube page at: [youtube.com/playlist?list=PL41IVBGtc_2RXczCBywfwZWEw8WQisJfNa](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL41IVBGtc_2RXczCBywfwZWEw8WQisJfNa).]

I am Syed Ambar Chishty, 17th generation descendant of the great Sufi Saint Hazrat Khawaja Moinuddin Chishty of Ajmer, India, where Sufism was established for all Asia through the message "love towards all, hate towards none."

First of all, I would like to thank everyone who has given their precious time to listen me today. And I

would also like to thank the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society for giving me this opportunity to speak and share my views on Sufism.

Let me start with a quote: “The path of Sufism is the elimination of any intermediaries between the individual and God. The goal is to act as an extension of god, not be a barrier.” What do we mean by being a Sufi? What do we understand by the Sufis’ quest and pursuit? What is the status of Sufi principles in the Islamic canonical laws (Sharia)? To answer all such queries, an exhaustive detailed discussion is required with meticulous attention. One should know though that attaining the norms and ethics mentioned in the Quran about being an ideal Muslim and a person of perfect faith is the goal of Sufism. The lessons of Sufism maintain these Islamic principles, such as: *Khashiyat* and *Inabat* (Reverance and Contemplation), *Tasleem* and *Raza* (Submission and Will of God), *Tawakkul* and *Taqwa* (Trust in God and Abstinence), *Sabr* and *Sukr* (Patience and Thanksgiving), *Ibadat* and *Mujahida* (Worship and Struggle), *Ikhlas* and *Uluhiyyat* (Purity of Heart and Spirituality).

A true Sufi is someone who has reached the station of *ayn al-yaqin*, or the witnessing of certainty, which usually comes after many years of devotion. The people who try their best, but have not yet reached this stage, are referred to as *mutasawif*. There are many people who claim to be Sufis or resemble Sufis, but do not focus on actively trying to progress spiritually.

To be a true Sufi, there are ten traits that must be followed. These traits are universal to the various spiritual Sufi paths:

- **Knowledge of the Qur’an and the Sunna:** This forms the very foundation of Sufism, and any actions that contradict the basics of Islam, are not from Sufism. This also means that the Sufis strive to follow the *sunnah* (that is the example of Prophet Muhammad) with utmost excellence. In fact, the *isnad* (chains of transmission) of all the major works of Qur’an, hadith, *tafsir* (Qur’anic exegesis), *fiqh* (jurisprudence) were passed down through the people of the Sufi tradition. Therefore, everyone today who is qualified to teach any of these sciences, has Sufis in their chain of transmission.
- **Concern with perfecting one’s heart for the sake of God:** Since God looks towards our heart, not our outward forms, Sufis prioritize working on their hearts to attain *ihsan*. Sufism is not about singing, clapping, or wearing specific clothing. Rather, it’s about removing everything besides God from one’s heart.

- **Sincerity:** Sufis should be extremely meticulous in analyzing their actions, making sure that their ways are solely for the sake of God, and not their egos, and therefore they should shy away from self-praise and recognition.

- **Trueness:** This entails doing everything possible to do a deed for the sake of God alone, with no pride or ostentation. This also means being humble enough to accept advice from everyone, and not to mind if others turn away.

- **Humility of the heart:** There are countless verses of the Quran, hadith and stories which emphasize the centrality of humility. Sufis do not raise themselves above others, or believe that they are better than anyone else, preferring instead to carry themselves with humility.

- **Recognizing the people of honor, and eliminating envy:** By showing honor to people who deserve it, they strive to give everyone their rights, and not have envy towards anyone.

- **Remembering God abundantly:** Sufis strive to make *dhikr* and remember God, with presence of heart, as much as possible.

- **Conveying with excellence and eliminating discourteous argumentation:** Sufis strive for excellence by avoiding unnecessary arguments. If an issue arises, they clarify it in the best manner without being uncivil.

- **Responding to evil with goodness and having concern for others:** A Sufi has utmost concern for others, and does their best to strive for their well-being. They forgive those who wrong them and respond to any evil they face with goodness.

- **Love of God, preferring Him over all else:** In their daily life, Sufis consider God more important than everything, and strive to attain his love.

A novice on the path of Sufism struggles and makes strife in order to embrace these higher orderly ways of life in the supervision of great Masters of the Path. A Sufi Shaykh (teachers) helps their disciples to safeguard their self (*nafs*) from the treachery of satan. They put them on the continuous process of *tazkia* (cleaning and purification) of self (*nafs*) and heart (*qalb*). After that, they motivate them toward the spiritual food for their souls and make them qualified for the spiritual journey. Then there emerges a person with a pure heart and sublime character who is obedient and deserves to be called a perfect human being. He is a source of happiness, peace, Love, spiritual comfort, and success for self as well as others in the society. These are the Sufis. May God bless all of us with the company of such pious people and make our

souls enlightened and motivate us on the righteous path as a fruit of their spiritual intimacy with God.

With regard to the word Sufi, according to Shaykh Usman Hujwiri, the author of *Kashf-al-Mahjoob*, and Shaykh Abd-al-Rehman Chishti, the author of *Miratal-Asrar*, the word Sufi comes from *Safa* (purity). The people of this group were called Sufis because of their purified behavior and spotless life both in private and in public what they hard-earned by continuous process of purification of their heart and enlightening the inner state. The genesis of *Safa* (purity) is to root everything out from the Heart that is not of God and fill the heart with His glory and Love, and the branch of *Safa* rests in the detachment from this transitory mundane life and curb down the love for fulfilling of worldly desires. A Sufi desires nothing except the love of God, both in this life and the hereafter.

Khwaja Abul Hashim Kufi was called by the name Sufi first of all. He used to teach in the State of Shaam (Modern Syria) but belonged to Kufa (a province near Modern Iraq) so was called Kufi. He was a contemporary of Hazrat Sufiyan Sauri, a great Sufi Shaykh of his time.

Hazrat Sufiyan Sauri says, — “I did not know what it means to be a Sufi until I saw Hashim Sufi.” I quote from *Mirat-al-Asrar*: “Even before him there were many people who were on the same Path and popular among the people because of their purity of behavior and worshipping God with pure intention but they were not addressed as Sufi. For the very first time the society called Abul Hashim by the term Sufi.” (*Mirat-al-Asrar*, p. 256).

It is said that the first Khanqah, which is a place of Sufi gathering, was built in Ramla by a wealthy Christian businessman. The wealthy Christian man went for hunting in the forest. He saw that two old aged Muslims met each other on the way; first they embraced each other, then they sat on the ground and shared whatever food they had and after eating they separated from each other.

The wealthy Christian man was impressed to see their love and respect for each other. He met one of them and asked him, — “Who was the other fellow with whom you ate food?” He answered, “I don’t know his name and I am not sure where he is from.” The Christian asked, “When you don’t know him, how could you express such sincere love and respect for him?” The man replied, — “We are the companions on the Path of Righteousness and this is the force behind our love for each other.” The wealthy Christian then asked, “Do you have any place where you all gather and meet?” The man replied, “No”. The wealthy Christian then said, — “I will build a house where you all may gather and meet one another.” Thus, the first Khanqah

was constructed in Ramla. Khanqah is a place where the people of the Sufi Path dwell and worship God (*Mirat-al-Asrar*, p. 259).

The real purpose of Sufis is to fill the heart with the Love of God by discarding worldly pleasures and keeping the sensual desires away from the heart. They root out the vices like greed, jealousy, keeping grudge against anyone, and engage themselves in the service of humanity without discrimination just for the sake of the will of God. They keep above all the rightful conduct with the people irrespective of the religious and sectarian differences. At Sufi Khanqah, they serve food to the visitors with love and pleasant hospitality.

All of these characteristics that they apply in their life are based on the lessons of the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad. Sufis try to imitate the models of conduct set by Prophet Muhammad in implementing the Divine guidance. The good conduct and purity of heart is the very essence of Sufism and this is the reason why people love them and pay reverence to them. May God bless us to have company of such pious people and increase our heart to follow the path of righteousness due to them! As Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi (d. 1273 A.D.) stated, “If a man is truthful to his religion, then he can understand the truth in the heart of a man of another religion. He will not be cruel to him.”

In the Sufi literature, a dialogue between a master and a servant often resembles the spiritual relationship between God and man:

The master: What is your name?

The servant: Whatever name you give me, shall be my name.

The master: What do you want to eat?

The servant: Whatever food you give me sir.

The master: What dress do you wish to wear?

The servant: Whatever clothes you give.

The master: What work will you do?

The servant: Whatever you ask of me, my master.

The master: What do you want after all?

The servant: a servant has no desire, my Lord. The desires of the master are the desires of the servant.

As the years passed, Prophet Muhammad took to meditating for long periods in a cave on Mount Hira, outside Mecca. It was there, during a retreat in the month of Ramadan in 610, when he was about forty years old, that he received his first revelation in the form of a visitation from the Archangel Gabriel (*Jibreel*). It was nighttime and Muhammad was either asleep or in a deep meditative state when the angel came to him and commanded: ‘Recite!’ (*iqura!*) In reply, Muhammad protested: ‘I am not a reciter.’ (A ‘reciter’ (*kahin*) was someone who went into an ecstatic trance

and claimed to utter prophetic oracles. Muhammad was protesting that he was not one of these people.) The angel took him in a powerful embrace, holding him ever tighter until both his breath and his strength had been squeezed from him. Then the angel released him and commanded: ‘Recite!’ Again Muhammad protested: ‘I am not a reciter’. The angel took hold of him, embraced him hard a second time, released him when he was on the point of exhaustion, and commanded: ‘Recite!’ Again he protested: ‘I am not a reciter’. For a third time the angel took him in an overpowering embrace and commanded: Recite: In the name of your Lord who created – created man from a clot of blood! Recite: Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One, who by the pen taught man what he did not know! (Qur’an 96: 1–5)

In reality, knowledge is the one thing most honored among all that is valuable. It holds the highest degree; it is the most expensive jewelry. And Spiritually brings the highest profit. Why? Because you can reach the unity of God, Lord of the Worlds, with knowledge. Furthermore, accepting the prophets and messengers is done through knowledge. May peace and blessings be upon them. Alims (people of knowledge; scholars) are God’s chosen people. He chose them for his religion. He gave the light of knowledge to them. He separated them from the people, because they are the inheritors and the khalifas (appointed representatives) of the prophets. They are the group that was made masters of the people by the messengers. At the same time, they possess the highest understanding of the prophets. *Haqq Ta’ala* (The Sublime [High] Truth that is God), when praising the people of knowledge says: “...Then we left the book to such people whom we have chosen from among our servants ... some of them wrong themselves, some of them take the middle path, and some of them are ahead in doing good.” (*Fatir* 35:32)

The Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, expresses this as “God first created my spirit (*ruh*). God first created my light (*nur*). God first created the pen. God first created intellect (*aql*).” All of these mean only one thing: the Reality of Muhammad (*Haqiqat-i Muhammad*), in other words, the truth or essence of Muhammad, peace be upon him. While this is so, he was given certain names. He was called “Light” because he was away from the darkness that is hidden under the attribute of Jalal (God’s Power). God the Most High mentions this as: “There comes to you from God light and a book that explains everything openly.” (*Ma’ida* 5:15) He was called *Aql*, because he understood everything. He was called the Pen, because knowledge spread with him; then he was the means to transfer knowledge into letters.

The spirit of Muhammad (*Ruhu Muhammad*) is the

essence of the creation’s beginning and the essence of the universe. The Prophet, peace be upon him, points this out to us as: “I am from God and the believers are from me.” God the Most High created all of the spirits from the spirit of the Prophet, peace be upon him, in the divine world (*alem-i lahut*) in the best possible construction (*ahsan-i taqwim* [from *Tiin* 95:4]). In the world mentioned here, Muhammad is the name for the whole of humanity. He, peace be upon him, is the homeland.

God, after this creation, created the Throne from the light of Muhammad. He created the rest of the universe from the Throne. Then He lowered the spirits that are created into the lowest part of the universe, in other words, into the world of bodies. “Then we sent him to the lowest of the low.” (*Tiin* 95:5). In other words, He lowered that light from *alem-i lahut* to *alem-i jabarrut* (the archangelic world). He wrapped these souls, created between these two borders, with forms made from the light of *jabarrut*. This spirit is called *ruhu sultani* (the royal soul). He then sent them with this wrapping into the *alem-i malakut* (the angelic world). He put wrappings on them made from the light of *malakut* and this spirit is called *ruhu seyrani*. Then he sent them into *alem-i mulk* (the material or bodily world) and wrapped them with the wrappings of this world. This is called *ruhu jismani* (the corporeal soul), and from this He created the bodies. The following generous verse from the Qur’an says the following about these situations: “From it We created you, into it We return you, and from it We will bring you out another time.” (*Ta Ha* 20:55).

After all these happenings, God the Most High ordered these souls to get into this body. The following *ayat* (verse of the Qur’an) points this out as: “I blew into him from My spirit.” (*Saad* 38:72). Time passed and these spirits increased their relationships with the body and they forgot their word [promise] because of this. In reality, God created them and asked them “Am I not your Lord?” and they answered, “Yes.” This is the word that they forgot. They could not return to the real motherland, but the Most Merciful and the Source of Help for created beings felt mercy for them and sent spiritual books for this reason. He wanted to remind them of the homeland. The following generous verse points this out: “And remind them of the days with God.” (*Ibrahim* 14:5). This refers to the days when these spirits were one with God.

In the end, I would like to thank everyone for listing to me. I would also like to invite everyone to come visit the holy shrine of Khawaja Moinuddin Chishty in Ajmer, India, where people from all religions gather and benefit, and a sense of humanity is still alive.

Thank you very much once again. *Was salaam ba khair*. ■

Jesus, the Spirit of God

By Fazeel S. Khan, Esq.

[This article comprises the presentation delivered by the Editor at the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society's annual convention – titled “Spiritual and Religious: Connecting Spirituality with Religion, from an Islamic Perspective” – held in Columbus, Ohio in August 2019. In this presentation, the Editor explains the high regard Muslims have for Jesus and his mother Mary. He first summarizes two notable narratives as presented in the Holy Quran: Mary's conception of Jesus and Mary's giving birth to Jesus. He then explains how according to the spiritual tradition of Islam (Sufism), these Quranic narratives are interpreted in a manner that provide practical lessons on how to live one's life: the conception story is a lesson on living a life of piety, and the birth story is a lesson on how to respond to challenges in life. The Editor then explains how Jesus symbolizes the “soul” in this spiritual tradition and presents various stories in which this metaphor is used in the writings of Rumi. The video recording of the presentations from the symposium, which include powerpoint presentations, are available on the LAIS YouTube page at: youtube.com/playlist?list=PL411VBGtc_2RXczCBYwJZWEw8WQiSJfNa.]

Some people may find it surprising for a Muslim to refer to Jesus as the “Spirit of God”. But Jesus (and Mary) hold very prominent roles in the religion of Islam and are regarded as great spiritual figures in the understanding of the spirituality of the faith.

The Quran states that Jesus was a great prophet of God and was the “Messiah” for the Israelite nation. Now, the term “Messiah” as understood in Islam refers to the one “who revives the spirit of the faith”. And, so, Jesus is regarded as the prophet in the Mosaic dispensation that revived the spirit of the faith of the Israelites. So, according to Islam, Moses symbolizes the guidance and the law, and Jesus symbolizes the correct understanding and interpretation of the guidance and the law.

And Mary, the mother of Jesus, has an entire chapter of the Quran named after her. She is actually mentioned more in the Quran than in the Bible. And she is presented in the Quran as a symbol of piety, devotion and faithfulness, and is in fact described as an example of a “true believer”.

Quranic Narratives on Mary and Jesus

The Quran narrates stories about Mary and Jesus that generally correspond with related stories in the Bible. For instance, the story of Mary being given the good news of a son (who would be the Messiah), and the story of Mary then giving birth to Jesus (under very

trying circumstances). From the Quranic narratives, the key points are summarized in the following way:

1. Regarding the Conception Narrative:

An angel appeared to Mary in a vision in the form of a man. And she exclaimed: “I flee for refuge from thee (or I seek refuge from thee) to the Beneficent (meaning, to God).” The angel then said: “I am only a bearer of a message of thy Lord”. And that message was that the Lord will give her a “pure boy” whose name would be “the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary”. Mary then questions: “How can I have a son and no man has yet touched me?” And, the angel assures her: “So (it will be) ... it is a matter decreed.”

2. Regarding the Birth Narrative

The story then continues, that Mary “conceived him (Jesus); and (while pregnant) withdrew with him to a remote place.” And on this journey, she went into labor and “the throes of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm-tree.” The pains of labor were severe and she was in an extremely dire circumstance. And she uttered the words “Oh, would that I had died before this, and had been a thing quite forgotten” to describe the struggle at hand and the desperation she felt. A “voice then came to her” revealing there was a “stream beneath” where she was and that if she were to “shake the trunk of the palm-tree”, it would drop “fresh ripe dates”, so that she could drink and eat and find some comfort.

Spiritual (Mystical) Understanding of the Conception and Birth Narratives

Although these narratives have been interpreted in different ways, much like how different connotations of these stories are debated among Christians, there has been throughout Islamic history a spiritual (or some may say mystical) rendering of these stories that provide underlying lessons on spirituality. These particular interpretations go beyond the literal words of the story and delve into the realm of metaphor and allegory, offering opportunities for reflection and contemplation of meanings and significances that have universal relevance to notions of spirituality. For instance:

1. Conception Narrative: Piety and Reliance on God

Let's take the story of Mary conceiving Jesus. In the spiritual (or mystical) tradition of Islam, the focus of the story is on “**piety**”, and the profound implication that every person is able to *conceive the divine light within* by living a selfless life (one in which the ego is suppressed and reliance on God alone is paramount).

This is how the verse in the Quran in which Mary “seeks refuge in God” when confronted by an angel in the form of a man is interpreted. The idea is emphasized that the only true source of protection from

becoming engrossed in a worldly or materialistic existence is to be found in God. The famous Sufi Muslim Saint Maulana Jalal-u-Din Rumi, who is well-known for his poetry in the West (and who I will be quoting primarily in this presentation), explains this concept in his writings. He states:

Mary became self-less, and in this selfless state she said, “I will leap into God’s protection,” because that pure one (Mary) was accustomed to seeking refuge in the Unseen (God).

Since she considered this world transient, she made the Presence (God) her fortress,

So that in the hour of death (times of difficulty and struggle) she would have a bastion that could withstand any attack.

Elsewhere, Rumi explains this concept by writing:

Before everything you own slips away, be like Mary and say to the material world, I seek refuge from you with the Merciful One (God).

So, according to this interpretation, the *conception story* is symbolic of a believer becoming pregnant (in a spiritual sense) with divine inspiration and divine light. That every believer who reaches this stage of piety and selflessness is like Mary, and this results in God breathing His spirit into that person.

And the Quran lends support to this interpretation in a very interesting way. In reference to Mary it states that the Spirit of God was “breathed into *him*”. Note the personal pronoun “*him*”, not “*her*”, the masculine form used to denote “a believer” in the general sense.

2. Birth Narrative: Trials and Tribulations

Just as “piety” is the focus in the *conception narrative* in the spiritual tradition of Islam, the “**trials and tribulations**” experienced by a true believer is at the heart of the *birth narrative*. According to this interpretation, just as Mary experienced the hardships and distress of labor prior to giving birth to Jesus, so too is enduring the pain and suffering inherent in this worldly existence necessary for a true believer to give birth to spiritual life.

Rumi explains this interpretation by writing:

Our body is like Mary,
Each of us has a Jesus inside.
If pain and yearning shows up inside us,
The Jesus of our soul is born.
If there is no pain, no yearning,
The Jesus of our soul will return to its origin from
the same secret passageway from which he came.

So, Mary giving birth to Jesus, here, symbolizes the

spiritual birth of a true believer. And the suffering one experiences in this journey (likened to birth pangs in labor) is a prerequisite to attainment of this stage of spiritual life. As a consequence, the trials and tribulations one faces in life is understood as an integral part of the transformational process of being given spiritual birth. And this understanding of the birth narrative is reflected in a saying of the Prophet Muhammad. He is recorded as saying:

Every child cries when they are born due to the devil’s touch, except Mary and her son (Jesus).

Appreciating the symbolism inherent in the birth narrative (in the spiritual tradition of Islam) makes this saying understandable. It is not the physical birth that is meant, but rather the *spiritual birth* of a true believer. That, when one attains the stage of being given *spiritual birth* (as symbolized by Mary giving birth to Jesus), he or she is no longer susceptible to the temptations of the devil.

Spirituality vs. Materialism

In the spiritual tradition of Islam, the concept of spirituality is often explained by contrasting it with the notion of **materialism**. In this interpretation, materialism is represented by the ego (or worldly desires and impulses), and, conversely, spirituality is represented by a higher dimension of virtue or morality (a state of being that is beyond one’s selfish needs). And because Jesus symbolizes the “spiritual self” or the “Spirit of God within” according to this tradition, stories about Jesus are used to convey lessons contrasting “spirituality” with “materialism”.

1. Jesus vs. the Donkey

For instance, we find in the writings of Rumi various anecdotes about *Jesus and his Donkey*, where Jesus represents the *Spirit of God within* and his donkey signifies our *ego* (or primal desires). Rumi writes:

By abandoning Jesus (the Spirit within) you have nurtured his donkey (the ego).

So, like the donkey, you remain on the other side of the curtain (meaning, on the side of worldly existence as opposed to spiritual life).

Knowledge and gnosis are the property of Jesus, not of the donkey.

Oh you asinine fool!

You hear the donkey moaning, and you take pity on it; that’s how the donkey gets you to behave like an ass.

Have pity on Jesus, not on the donkey! Do not let your animal nature rule your intellect ...

Your base intellect has taken on the characteristics of the donkey. Its only thought is “How shall I find fodder?”

Elsewhere Rumi further contrasts the spiritual and the material using the “Jesus and his donkey” narrative by stating:

Listen, O heart, do not be deceived by every kind of intoxication: Jesus (the Spirit) gets drunk on God, but his donkey (the ego) gets drunk on barley.

2. *Jesus and the “Spread Table”*

Similarly, in the writings of Rumi we find mention of lessons about *Jesus and the Spread Table*, a reference to verses in the Quran in which Jesus prayed to God to send his disciples a table spread with food from heaven. Some people believe this account in the Quran may have some correlation with the story of the Last Supper in the Bible. But this story is used in the spiritual tradition of Islam to, again, contrast a spiritual state of being with a worldly or materialistic life.

In these lessons, giving up reliance on the material sources of support is understood as necessary to having a seat of the *Spread Table*. Feeding at this spiritual Table is also emblematic of having developed the Jesus within. Rumi writes that when one attains this level of development, Jesus greets the person by saying:

Welcome! Wash your hands and mouth, for now the Table is spread.

Elsewhere, Rumi combines the symbolism of the *donkey* and the *Spread Table* and describes the attainment of this stage of spiritual development. He writes:

When Jesus (the Spirit within) got rid of his donkey (the ego), his prayers were accepted; wash your hands for the Table has come down from heaven.

3. *Jesus and the Birds*

Another lesson found in the writings of Rumi deals with Jesus and the clay bird – another reference to verses in the Quran in which Jesus molds a bird out of clay then breathes into it and, with God’s permission, the bird becomes alive and takes flight (3:49).

Rumi reminds us of the notion of Jesus symbolizing the *breath or spirit of God* within every soul by using the story of the clay bird as a metaphor for the soaring spiritual heights each person is capable of reaching. He writes:

Come, soul! ...
You are Jesus and I am your bird.
You made a bird out of clay.

When you breathe into me,
I take wing for the highest.

And, elsewhere, Rumi clarifies that the bird of clay or dust is meant to represent our material existence, and that breathing the spirit into the bird symbolizes the awakening of spiritual life within. He writes:

I am the bird of the spiritual Garden,
not of this world of dust;
For a few days only, they have my body in a cage.

Conclusion

To bring this presentation to a close, one could take hours reading, and then contemplating and meditating on, and then re-reading just one of these short passages from the writings of saintly figures of the Islamic spiritual tradition, like Rumi, on the meaning of spiritual life and the illustrations of Jesus symbolizing the Spirit of God within. And one could spend years, perhaps an entire lifetime, studying their significance and trying to fully appreciate their applicability to their daily.

And yet, I am fascinated by the thought of the basic message that appears to be at the heart of this spiritual tradition, the hidden secret of this mystical realm if you will. Stripping away the layers of beautiful verses and verses ultimately leads to the simple yet profound question: “What would Jesus do?”

And with that I end. I thank you for your kind attention. ■

CALL FOR PAPERS!

The Light AND ISLAMIC REVIEW

welcomes submissions of articles for publication. Preferably, articles should be between 5-10 pages long, single-spaced, in *Microsoft Word* format and submitted via e-mail. Authors from all faiths and denominations are welcome, the subject matter of the paper, though, must be substantively related to Islam. Please contact the Editorial Board for more information on Editorial Guidelines.

(See page 2 for contact information)

Interpreting Scripture

By Dr. Ayesha Khan

[This article is an abridged version of the presentation delivered by Dr. Ayesha Khan at the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society's annual convention – titled “Spiritual and Religious: Connecting Spirituality with Religion, from an Islamic Perspective” – held in Columbus, Ohio in August 2019. In this article, Dr. Khan addresses the issue of how to interpret scripture in an age in which religious texts are often viewed as fanciful stories of the past. She does so by examining methodologies of interpretation from both a religious perspective (as presented in the Quran) and a secular perspective (in accordance with the integral theory as described by Ken Wilbur). She ends by offering an insightful application of these guidelines of interpretation using the story of Noah's ark as an illustration. The video recording of the presentations from the symposium, which include powerpoint presentations, are available on the LAIS YouTube page at: [youtube.com/playlist?list=PL411VBGtc_2RXczCBYwfZWEw8WQiSjfNa](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL411VBGtc_2RXczCBYwfZWEw8WQiSjfNa).]

“Spiritual but not religious,” is a phrase heard with increasing frequency, especially among the younger generation. But what does this phrase really mean? Is it a convenient way to avoid the heavy connotations with which the word “religion” is laden—a way perhaps to define what one *isn't* rather than what one *is*? Or is spirituality somehow distinguished from religion?

To really examine these questions, it may be helpful to think about what these words have come to represent in our society, rather than what they mean by literal definition. We yearn for spirituality, yet we cringe away from religion. Spirituality is really the yearning of human beings to understand their soul, and the soul is the part of us that was breathed into us by the Divine. The soul is the part of us that is the same, regardless of race, creed, or nationality. The soul is the commonality in all of us, and it is the way that we can see each other as brothers and sisters and also understand our connection with the Divine. There's something very naturally appealing about that oneness, equality, and connection.

Religion, on the other hand, is maligned for dividing us. The coverage on the news or in conversation is often a criticism of how religion causes violence, religion causes war. Religion is also ordinal, meaning between an individual and God religions tend to set up an order of offices meant to facilitate communion with the Divine - whether it's through an imam, a pastor, a priest, a rabbi, or pundit, there is a person between an individual and God, rather than a direct connection with the Divine. Religion is also rooted in scripture, and

scripture itself is maligned as fairytales and violent stories. So, saying we're spiritual but not religious is really a way of protecting us against all of these criticisms. Criticisms that persistently chip away at us. So even those with deep belief may find faith eroded away by these constant criticisms.

Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris, perhaps the most radical atheists of our time, have passed two *fatwas* on religion (please note, the use of the word *fatwa* is intentional, as these pronouncements are as dogmatic as many of the beliefs that they criticize). Their declarations are as follows: 1) religion causes wars, 2) religion is the domain of fairytales. Of these *fatwas*, the first is easily defensible to those with faith: violence is incited in the name of religion, but these citations are the misinterpretations of misguided people. The second *fatwa* is more difficult to defend. Scripture, ostensibly, can seem fantastical and magical. How do we reconcile these stories with intellect, knowledge and science? If scripture can't be defended, then why not replace religion with spirituality or secular humanism?

Hunter Brown a PhD in Physics and in Art and Divinity, gives us a cogent reason: spiritualism is an inherent trait in humans. Religions prescribe a way to understand the soul. Religion then, becomes a prescription, and so scripture becomes a prescription. How then is that prescription to be taken in a way that can reconcile our search for the spiritual with our observations of rational law?

By way of illustration, let's consider the following anecdote: you may remember a public service announcement (PSA) from the 80s that showed an uncracked egg with the narration, “this is your brain” followed by an egg frying in a pan with the narration, “this is your brain on drugs. Any questions?” One time I was watching TV with two friends who were brothers. The two brothers had very different personalities and temperament. So, when this commercial came on, one of them was extremely irritated, and he said, “this is so stupid, this is stupid, your brain is not an egg, and drugs are not a frying pan, and this doesn't make sense. This is just stupid, I don't get it.” The other brother, after hearing him rant for about 20 minutes, said, “your brain is full of potential to grow just like an uncracked egg. And the frying pan, or drugs, stagnate that potential. Calm down, this is a PSA, not meant just for you.” This anecdote illustrates two important points. One, instructions are meant for the masses. This is a public service announcement, the instructions are meant for the public, not only the person watching to understand. So, if one individual doesn't understand something as relevant to them, it's always worth considering again why a message may have been given as an instruction to appeal to

the masses. The need for the message is for the collective, not the individual. Secondly, this anecdote illustrates that two people can look at the same message, and see completely different interpretations, perhaps one a useful interpretation and another not as useful.

The application of this anecdote to scripture is twofold. First, one may consider that scripture lays out guidance broadly so that it applies to the masses. Instructive stories are such that they optimize conditions for a harmonious community in which an individual can form a bond with the Divine. Secondly, to emphasize important principles, scripture often uses allegories and metaphor that need to be interpreted. Such interpretation must follow a consistent methodology, otherwise interpretation diminishes to being relative — the reader interprets it according to societal ethics or personal desire negating the very purpose of scripture: to remain a light of unwavering guidance toward truth irrespective of the trends of society.

The remainder of this article will examine methodologies of the interpretation of scripture, first from a religious perspective that is laid out in the Quran, and the second from a secular perspective laid out in integral theory, a branch of philosophy described by Ken Wilbur. While this article focuses on the Quran, the reader may find these rules applicable to other books of scripture as well.

From a religious perspective, the Quran delineates rules for the interpretation of scripture. The Quran is ordered with an intentional pattern. Chapter one can be thought of as the abstract of the entire Book. It is seven verses that contain the essence of the teachings of the religion. Chapter two introduces the author of the Book and what the Book is, “I, Allah, am the best knower. This Book, there is no doubt in it, is a Guide to those who keep their duty (2:1-2)” Chapter three gives us instructions on how to read the Book,

“He it is who has revealed the Book to thee; some of its verses are decisive—they are the basis of the Book—and others are allegorical. Then those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part of it which is allegorical, seeking to mislead, and seeking to give it their own interpretation (3:7).”

Thus, we are told that there are two kinds of verses in the Quran: the decisive ones and the allegorical ones. The decisive verses are the **basis** of the Book; they contain the fundamental principles of religion. The decisive verses are very clear commands, “be with the truthful,” “keep up prayer,” “pay the poor rate,” “there’s no compulsion in religion.” These are things that you really can’t mistake for meaning anything other than what they mean. Many of these verses are three- or four-word

sentences, and they are universal principles reflected in all religions. They speak to our commonality and can be found in the Ten Commandments, the principles of the Bible, the teachings of the Buddha. Thus, these decisive verses, they are the basis of the Book and they contain the fundamental principles of the religion. The rest of the scripture is illustrative of these principles, either by historical stories or allegories that may seem fantastical. The interpretation of these stories must tie back to fundamental principles. A fantasy, or fairytale, if taken literally would be of little use to a community seeking guidance. Secondly, if there are any differing opinions in regards to metaphorical or allegorical verses in the Quran, the verses are to be interpreted in light of the decisive verses. Differences in the way that allegories are interpreted are only secondary matters. These verses are not to subvert the decisive verses. Those people that give an interpretation that subverts the decisive verses are said to be misled. Further, Muslims are told, all of it, the entire Quran, is from our Lord, and so we must find congruency in it. The meaning of the verses of the Quran should be sought from within the Quran itself. No one passage should be thought to contradict another, and most importantly, no one passage should be thought to contradict the basic principles that are laid down in the decisive verses.

The Quran reiterates this call for congruency throughout its text by commanding the reader to ponder, reflect, and understand. There are seventy verses or more have the words, “ponder,” “reflect,” and “understand” in them. A sampling is as follows:

“Do they not then ponder the word?” (23:68)

“There is surely a sign in this for a people who ponder.” (16:67)

“Thus does God make clear to you the messages that you may ponder.” (2:219)

“Thus does God make the messages clear to you that you may reflect.” (2:266)

“Do you not then reflect?” (6:50)

“So relate the narrative that they may reflect,” (7:176)

“Thus do we make clear the messages for people who reflect.” (10:24)

“God thus makes clear to you His messages that you may understand,” (2:42)

“But what is the matter with these people that they make no effort to understand anything,” (4:78)

The command to ponder, reflect, and understand or in other words, use our intellect, is clear. So congruency

in methods of interpretation should also exist from secular sources. Indeed, a notable philosopher of our time, Ken Wilber has a philosophy he calls integral theory. He theorizes that there is a societal evolution in the way that people think. And the societal evolution actually mirrors the stages of personal psychological development delineated by Piaget. The societal evolution that Ken Wilber is actually talking about, though, is generational change, the way in which the thinking of human populations has changed and developed throughout time. An evident example of societal development is with the institution of slavery. There was a time when most of the world accepted slavery, but now most societies across the world find it abhorrent, indicating an evolution in the understanding of the institution of slavery.

Using integral theory, Ken Wilbur elucidates the collective understanding of religion and the evolution of this understanding across the eras of time. The stages he discusses are as follows, 1) magical or egocentric, 2) mythic or ethnocentric, 3) rational or universal 4) post-rational/integral or spiritual.

Initially, understanding of religion was in a magical stage; in the magical stage human beings thought that they could perform some action and (magically) that action would directly alter reality. An example of this may be very literally thinking a rain dance will bring rain, or that ritual sacrifice will bring penance for a misdeed. This stage is very egocentric as the Self and the environment are not clearly differentiated so that the Self may magically alter reality. Societies evolved from this to the mythic stage, which is an ethnocentric stage. A second-person perspective is understood and an individual's understanding evolves from "me" to "us." People think of themselves as Jews, or Christians, or Muslims. An individual's identity has expanded beyond oneself, however, belief is tribal. There is a superiority, a primacy of one's own group, and there is a strong "us" versus "them" attitude. Resultingly, there is a very high fidelity to one's scripture, and when that scripture contradicts the scripture of another people, conflict is born. The Crusades are an example of this stage of understanding. Two groups that were in a mythic stage, loyal to an ethnocentric fundamental understanding of what their religions were clashed in an attempt to prove supremacy.

The next stage of societal understanding is the rational stage. Ken Wilbur argues that society is currently in this stage. Individuals generally take a third-person perspective, with ability to understand the perspectives of all humanity or a universal humanity. An ability "to walk in the shoes" of someone from an opposing group. So we strive to treat all people fairly, regardless of race,

color, sex, or creed. Historically, this level arose on a large scale with the Western enlightenment, which believed in 'the universal rights' of man and, soon, woman. In other words, rights do not just belong to the Catholics or Jews or Protestants or Muslims or Hindus, but rather to all humans. In this stage of universality, science burgeons. But science becomes the only common truth and religion is rejected as regressive. We lose sight of absolute truths, and develop what Ken Wilber calls a very narrow science. In seeking to apply this universality to all human beings, science becomes the strongest truth, but in this narrow science individuals are anchored to their five senses. Thus, what is not observable or experienced by the five senses, is rejected as regressive or not true.

However, Ken Wilber points out that there are many things experienced as human beings that aren't limited to our five senses. The measurable outcome is more than what is experienced by the five senses: as in the German word *gestalt*, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. A symphony may be an example of that. One can break it up into the cellos, the flutes, etc, but the movement that the music creates amongst the people that are listening to it, what one feel in the heart and soul is much greater than the sum of all of the instruments. Ken Wilbur calls this the broader science or integral science; he also calls it post-rationalism, and he thinks that this is what society is evolving towards. Rather than just believing that we are limited to the five senses, the common experiences of human beings outside the five senses can be shared, and integrated with scientific principles. Science and religion and spirituality become integrated. An individual is able to walk a mile in another person's shoes and still have their own perspective. This gives us an interpretation of scripture that is more than just fairytales. The scripture is prescriptive for life today.

Theoretically, this philosophy is appealing. How may it be applied. Let's apply it to the story in scripture of Noah's Ark. It is a story common to many religions. Here we will look at the Quranic version though there is little difference between it and Old Testament. There are many mentions of Prophet Noah in the Quran. This one is perhaps the longest and gives the most historical account of what happened:

And make the Ark under our eyes and our revelation and speak not to me on behalf of those who are unjust, surely they will be drowned, and he began to make the Ark and whenever the Chiefs of his people passed by him they laughed at him. He said if you laugh at us surely we to laugh as you laugh so you shall know who it is on whom will come a chastisement which will disgrace him and

whom a lasting chastisement will fall. At length when our command came and the water gushed forth from the valley we said carrying it two of all things a pair and thine own family except those against whom the Word has already gone forth and those who believe and there believe not with him but a few and he said embark in it in the name of God be it sailing and it's anchoring surely my lord is forgiving merciful (4:37-49).

In this representation a mythic interpretation would be that the world flooded, two of every kind of animal was brought onto the ark and then God drowned all the people that were disbelievers that had laughed at Noah's family (his family being those who believed in him, as his own son was actually not taken on to the ark due to disbelieving). Noah's family was then saved, and then the waters receded and the world went back to normal. That is a mythic interpretation of the story, and it may well have been that there was a large flood that encompassed what was thought of as the world at that time, but it's hard to completely integrate this with an understanding of geology. There doesn't seem to have been a flood that covered the entire earth. This scripture, if not literally true, is an allegory to be interpreted as a prescriptive, a guidance, to individuals today. How may it be?

If the Ark is representative of the soul, of faith, and a belief of the people, and the animals that were taken on to the ark represent the animal part of us all, the physical body that is guided by physiologic needs, the chiefs and their laughter is the derision of those that reject religion, the flood is the material dominance that is prevalent in the world, the story becomes informative, instructive and changes to become a lesson for us. This is a lesson of unity, a lesson of community, a lesson to hold tight to those who are family in faith, in religion; a lesson to control our impulses (those animals that are on the ark with us) because if we don't control them they run rampant, they break the ark, they're destructive to us. It is a lesson that community holding on to the covenant can protect us against the tumultuous of all the material predominance that is out there.

This story is but one example of the light found in scripture. Perhaps, it is the rejection of allegories that is regressive, and commonality and community, our inherent desire for spirituality may be found by being more "religious." ■

The Lahore Ahmadiyya View

By Dr. Mohammed Ahmad

[This article comprises the closing presentation delivered by Dr. Mohammed Ahmad at the Lahore Ahmadiyya Islamic Society's annual convention – titled "Spiritual and Religious: Connecting Spirituality with Religion, from an Islamic Perspective" – held in Columbus, Ohio in August 2019. In this presentation, Dr. Ahmad explains how the lessons discussed in the previous presentations are reflective of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement's understanding and interpretation of Islam. He outlines several distinguishing characteristics of the Movement and explains how the time is ripe to focus on spirituality, the essence of every faith tradition which is often neglected. This, he concludes, is the message of the Quran, to which the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, was divinely sent to revive. The video recording of the presentations from the symposium, which include powerpoint presentations, are available on the LAIS YouTube page at: [youtube.com/playlist?list=PL411VBGtc_2RXczCBYwfZWEw8WQiSJfNa.](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL411VBGtc_2RXczCBYwfZWEw8WQiSJfNa.)]

Introduction

I want to begin by giving you a brief introduction of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement. As a spiritual organization it aims at bringing about peace in the world and it does this principally through dialogue. As related by earlier speakers a soul at peace with itself is at peace with the rest of humanity. Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement is a revivalist organization within Islam that stands for the type of reformed religious understanding discussed earlier.

The Founder of the Movement, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, emphasized religion to be a source of spiritual life for each individual not merely something to follow blindly or practice. He further stressed the absolute need for this type of reformation in an age of materialism where worship of low desires is fueling the fire of human discord. In his book *Message of Peace* he states:

It may be asked, how can there be peace when religious differences are making the gulf wider and wider every day? But I say in reply that a genuine religious difference should be inspired only by considerations of reason, justice and observed facts. Why has man been endowed with reason if he is not to see that what he believes or does is in accordance with reason, justice and the proclamations of experienced fact? Minor differences cannot be a barrier to peace. Only those differences are a bar to peace which lead one party to vilify

and denounce the honored Founder and the Holy Book of another.

Distinguishing Characteristics of Lahore Ahmadiyya

There are several distinguishing characteristics of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement that give it a unique position and perspective amongst other Islamic organizations. These features provide it a unique basis to facilitate understanding between diverse faith communities:

- The foundation of its theology is based on spiritual development. Salvation is not about believing certain things or belonging to a certain group, but rather living a life where one's deeds reflect the coloring or attributes of God. Holy Prophet Muhammad's life and his practice of the Quranic principles serve as a living role model of the path for us to follow.
- Salvation, however, is not limited only to Muslims; rather salvation is dependent on the condition of one's soul. In this manner, we affirm the Quranic principle:

Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does good, they have their reward with their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve. (2:62)

- We believe in the founders of all religions as great prophets and messengers of God. As the Holy Quran states:

And certainly We raised in every nation a messenger. (16:36)

This extends to belief in those holy personages who are not expressly mentioned in the Holy Quran such as Krishna, Buddha and many others.

- The pinnacle of spiritual progress is receiving communication from God, and this prospect of God speaking to people is still available today, not only something of the past as stories relayed in scriptures.

Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad would call people to visit him to witness the spiritual signs that were evident and those prophesied afore time. In this manner he promoted the idea of observation that is scientific scrutiny in spiritual matters.

- Regarding "intra-faith" harmony, we believe that anyone who recites the *kalimah* (formula of faith: "No one deserves to be served besides Allah,

Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah"), is a Muslim.

- Likewise, we believe that engaging in the practice of expelling certain groups from Islam based on differences of opinion) is strictly forbidden.

The Time for Spiritual Reform

It is important to acknowledge that understanding of spirituality according to Islam as presented today is certainly not being practiced by all Muslims. As a result the word "Islam" is unfortunately not associated with spirituality in the minds of many people. This state of affairs was actually prophesied by Holy Prophet Muhammad peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, he said:

(At the time) people rolling in riches shall be many; but those well versed in the law of Islam, few and far between. The sermon-grinders in the mosques shall be cunning and crafty, and those who recite the Quran shall be deceitful dissemblers. They shall turn their faces away from Religion and expound on matters temporal. They shall devour the world as fire consumes fuel ... (Hadith collection Kanz-al Ummal, vol.5 page 217)

My people shall be seized with consternation: they will then make for their religious scholars. But they shall find that their religious scholars have become apes and swine. (Hadith collection Kanz-al Ummal, vol.7 page 190)

Just as "apes" and "swine" refer to a depraved moral condition devoid of spiritual basis and focused on ritualistic conduct only, they also describe the type of reform attempts made by Muslims during this period. Being an ape means mimicry of others while swine stands for enslavement to one's desires.

The Ahmadiyya Movement stands for a third type of reform, based upon reform of oneself, in light of the Divine attributes and focusing on the kingdom of God within. And as presented earlier the term Messiah is used to depict this type of reform. HMGTA taught this same method of reform and it was in this sense he appeared in the, "spirit of Messiah." And this type of reform is also symbolized by the Holy Prophet's other name, "Ahmad" and is the basis for the name "Ahmadiyya." It signifies the Makkan period of Holy Prophets life symbolizing peaceful striving in face of severe persecution.

This legacy of peaceful propagation is based upon the Quranic words revealed to Holy Prophet Muhammad. Maulana Muhammad Ali in his book the Living Thoughts of the Holy Prophet Muhammad writes:

The Prophet was not only confident that his message would breathe life into Arabia; he had a still

deeper faith that he had a message for the whole of humanity and that it was bound to succeed in the end. His idea of the Divine plan for the uplift of humanity was not limited to any one nation or any one generation. His well-known prayer, which is now the prayer of millions of his followers, five times a day, begins with the words: “All praise is due to Allah, the Nourisher to perfection of all nations.”

This was, therefore, the basis of his religion. According to him the Divine plan was gradually to bring the whole of humanity to perfection. He was not raised as a Messenger for the Arabs only; he was the Messenger of God for the whole of humanity:

If a deep-rooted faith in God was the secret of the Prophet’s own wonderful success, it was also the foundation-stone of the great reformation which he brought about. He did not start by applying himself to this or that vice or superstition or degrading usage or evil custom; he applied himself, first of all, solely to grounding men in faith in God. Almost the whole of his Mecca revelation has but one theme: God is the Creator of all, He is the Nourisher of all, He reveals Himself to man, He makes His will known to man, He is the Holy One, He is nearer to man than his own soul, He is the Beneficent One, the Merciful One, the Loving One, the Affectionate, the Forgiving One, the Giver of all gifts, the Ample-giving, He listens to every man’s prayer, He loves good and hates evil, He loves those who serve the poor and those in distress, He loves the truthful ones, and so on.

The man who has faith in God is like a live wire and those who come in contact with him, imbibe faith from him. Full of faith as the Prophet’s own heart was, full to overflowing, it had a magic effect on those who came in contact with him, and their hearts were filled with the same strong faith. The current of faith which was thus transmitted from the heart of the Prophet to the hearts of those who sat at his feet was further strengthened by the constant stress which revelation laid on the existence of God.

The whole of nature testified to the existence of God:

“Do they not look up to the heaven above them, how We have made it and adorned it and it has no gaps. And the earth We have spread it forth and cast upon it mountains and We have made to grow therein of all beautiful kinds, To give sight and as a reminder to every servant who turns (to God) again and again! And from the cloud We send

down water abounding in good, then We cause to grow thereby gardens and grain that is reaped, and the tall palm-trees having sheathed clusters, A sustenance for the servants, and We give life thereby to a dead land; thus is the resurrection.” 50:6-11

Conclusion

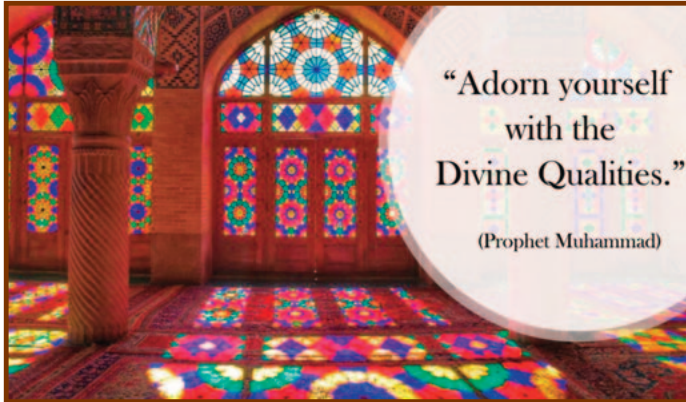
The focus of our organization today is to promote inter-faith and intra-faith harmony through education of the true message of the Holy Quran. We continue this striving by producing translations and commentaries of the Holy Quran in different languages. These are all based upon the English translation and commentary of the Holy Quran by MMA. They include German, French, Russian, Dutch, Spanish, Bhasa Indonesia, Javanese, Urdu and Arabic Commentary already published and distributed along with supportive literary works on the Religion of Islam, life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad and the four rightly guided Caliphs. Translation and commentary in Chinese, Turkish and Portuguese language are nearing completion and will be published soon.

Thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to share our thoughts with you and may God bless all! ■

**As part of the symposium
on “Spiritual and Religious:
Connecting Spirituality
with Religion, from an
Islamic Perspective,”
an exhibit was presented
on the spiritual significance
of the five pillars of Islam.**

**The six posters included in
that exhibit are reproduced
in the following pages.**

Spiritual Significance of Five Pillars of Islam



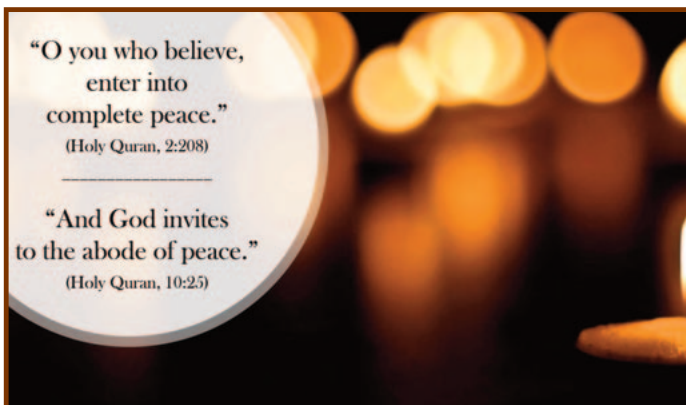
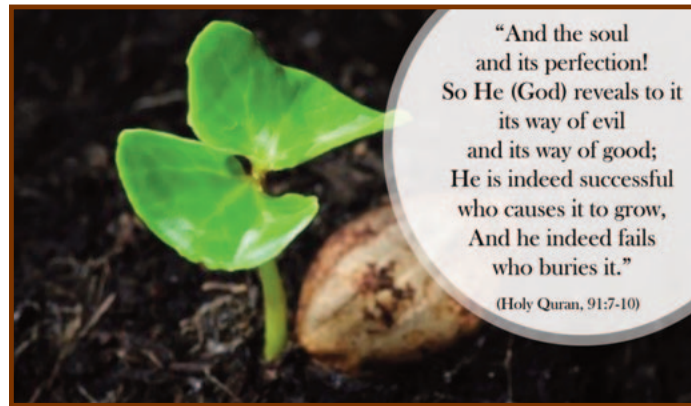
IS RELIGION SIMPLY about believing in a select creed and performing certain rituals? Where does achieving inner peace fit in? Is there a connection between religion and spirituality and, if so, what is it?

According to Islam, the goal of religion is to foster spiritual development. The beliefs and practices of the faith are all aimed at providing guidance to facilitate this personal spiritual experience.

THE QURAN (the holy scripture of Islam) explains that every person has a soul, and the soul is the Spirit of God breathed into us. As a result, every person has the Spirit of God within them. This means that the attributes or qualities of God are inherent in every person. Just as God is Loving, Merciful, Compassionate, Wise, Forgiving, etc., so too does each person have these innate characteristics within them.

THESE QUALITIES are in a latent state and must be exercised or practiced for them to develop. And the trials and struggles of life offer opportunities to develop these qualities by being more God-like in one’s character. The Quran gives an analogy of this process by likening the soul to a

seed. Just as a small seed has the ingredients within it that, if cultivated properly, can grow into a lush garden, so too does the soul have the Divine attributes within it that, if developed properly, can grow into a spiritual garden (a heavenly condition of ultimate peace and contentment).



THE FIVE PILLARS of Islam – Profession of Faith, Prayer, Charity, Fasting and Pilgrimage – offer lessons on how to live in a manner that is conducive to this objective of achieving a spiritual state of peace in this very lifetime. Hence, salvation is dependent on the resulting transformation of the soul, not on mere beliefs or practices.

1. Profession of Faith

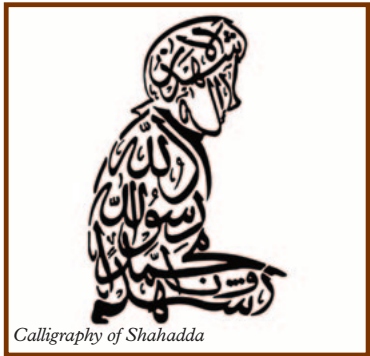
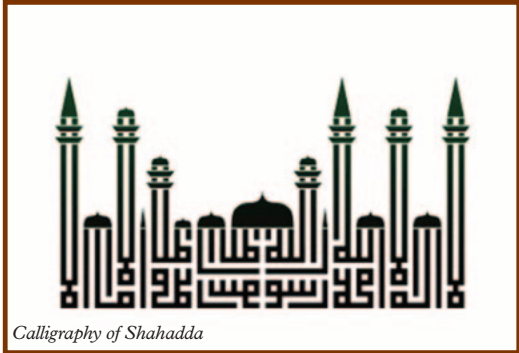
(Shahadda)

THE *SHAHADDA* is the profession or declaration of faith in Islam. It entails professing, with conviction of the heart, “*La ilaha ill-Allah Muhammad-un Rasulallah*”, two short sentences which mean: 1) There is not God but God (Allah), and 2) Muhammad is the Messenger of God. This simple formula of faith summarizes the essence of the religion of Islam, and this is what is professed when one wants to become a Muslim.



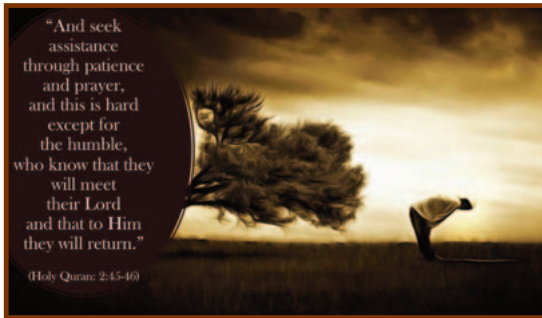
THE FIRST PART emphasizes the Unity of God, a constant theme in the Quran and a fundamental principle of all revealed religions. It signifies that God alone deserves to be the true object of one’s love, adoration and worship. It also functions as a grounding compass for all one’s motivations, decisions and actions in life.

THE SECOND PART acknowledges that Prophet Muhammad is a divinely appointed messenger of God (like messengers and prophets who appeared before him). It signifies that Prophet Muhammad serves as a role model for how to achieve the goal of making God, above all else, cherished in one’s heart. The second part is also a confirmation of the first part, ensuring an understanding from the onset that Prophet Muhammad is only a messenger and is not to be venerated as the Divine.



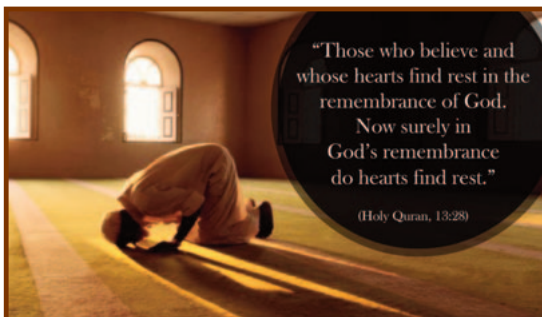
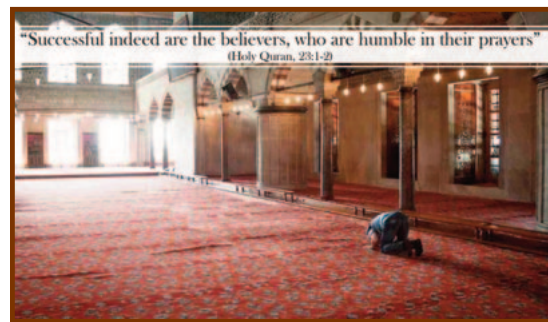
THIS PROFESSION OF FAITH, as with all articles of belief in Islam, is in reality a principle of action. As God (“Allah” in Arabic) is understood as “the Being Who possesses all the perfect attributes,” belief in God means setting one’s goal to achieve closeness to the Divine by living one’s life in a manner that develops the Divine attributes within. It entails controlling one’s lower desires and reinforcing the higher values of life so that a person can be at one with the Source of all Goodness, what is referred to in the spiritual tradition of Islam as “Union with the Beloved”.

2. Prayer (*Salat*)



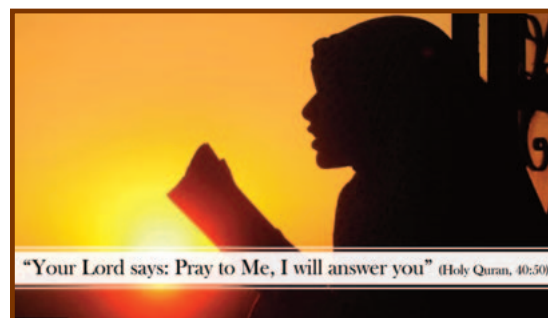
PRAYER (*SALAT*) is the natural sequel to belief in the existence of God. Just as belief in God is the foundation of every religion, prayer is a universal institution that is prescribed as the means to instill a firm conviction in God being a living force in one’s life. It is understood that true certainty in the existence of God is reached not by a conceptual belief that there must be a God in the outer world, but by an experiential realization of the Divine within.

OF ALL THE PRACTICES in Islam, prayer is given the utmost importance. It is appreciated as the first step in the spiritual progress of man as well as its greatest spiritual ascent. Prayer helps man realize the Divine within, which creates the urge to do good so that one may attain the highest degree of spiritual perfection. Just as our physical bodies require food to develop and mature, so too does the soul require sustenance through a connection with the Divine in order to progress and flourish.



PRAYER IS A contemplative practice that is to be performed with sincerity and intention – not as an obligatory ritual – to nurture the connection with the Divine. In Islam, prayer is conducted five times throughout the day, every day. Prophet Muhammad explained the purpose of this exercise. He said that if one were to bathe five times every day, that person would not be unclean; similarly, by reflecting on God and the purpose of creation five times every day, one is afforded consistent purification of the spirit.

IN ISLAMIC TRADITIONS, prayer is spoken of as *munajat*, meaning “confidential intercourse” with God. It is to be performed as if one were seeing God, with the recognition that it is the sacred means by which to develop a personal relationship with the Divine. The Quran describes the peace within created through prayer as “the heart at rest”.



3. Charity

(Zakat)

THE HOLY QURAN provides the three requirements for spiritual development in their natural order. It states in an early revelation contained in its second chapter:

“This Book, there is no doubt in it, is a guide to those who keep their duty, *who believe in the Unseen* and *keep up prayer* and *spend out of what We have given them* ... These are on the right course from their Lord, and these it is that are successful.” (Holy Quran, 2:2-5)

The first requisite is *belief in the Unseen*, which means a belief in God. The second, is the *keeping up of prayer*, which shows that belief in God is turned into certainty of the Divine existence by means of prayer. The third, *spending out of what God has given*, is the natural sequel to the second, and shows that the realization of the Divine in man leads to the desire to serve humanity.

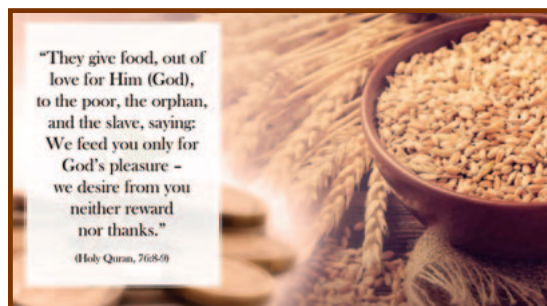


FOR THIS REASON, Prayer and Charity are routinely spoken of together in the Holy Quran. Belief in God is only the starting point in one’s spiritual journey. This belief, though, can be transformed into true conviction of the Divine existence through prayer. Yet prayer too is only a means to the ultimate goal of character reformation through acts of benevolence for humanity.



THE WORD *ZAKAT* literally means “it grew” (in reference to a plant) and signifies purification through giving. It refers to the annual giving of 2.5% of one’s wealth to those in need. But there are a variety of words used in the Quran to denote charitable deeds and this is an indication of the broadness of the concept of charity in Islam.

We find the words: *infaq*, which means spending benevolently; *ihsan*, which means the doing of good; *sadaqah*, which means truth and signifies a charitable deed. The Quran lays stress on great charitable deeds like taking care of orphans, emancipating slaves and feeding the poor, but Islamic tradition gives equal emphasis to small acts of kindness like speaking kindly to others, showing someone the way and even offering a smile.

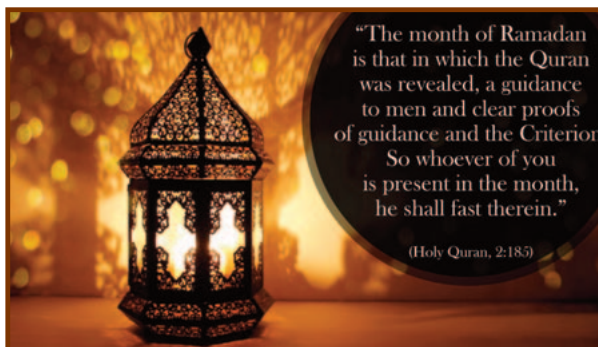


4. Fasting (Saum)

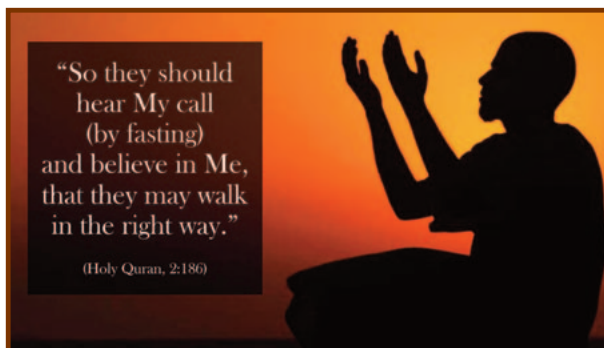


FASTING (*SAUM*) is a practice universally recognized in religious traditions throughout history. In the past, it was usually associated with mourning, sorrow and affliction. Islam introduced a unique significance to the institution. By making fasting (which entails abstaining from food, drink and intimate relations during daylight hours) a regular practice for the entire month of *Ramadan* every year, the focus shifted from an act of penitence to a deliberate spiritual exercise.

THE MONTH OF *RAMADAN* is understood as a time for spiritual renewal. It comprises the moral disciplining of one's thoughts and actions and the furthering of self-control over one's physical desires. The lesson learned through this exercise is that rather than being a slave to one's appetites and desires, one should be their master. Experiencing this sense of achievement at the end of an entire month of exercise makes one realize that he or she should also be able to change the course of one's life, giving up whatever harmful vices there may be, if he or she so wills. It also naturally results in developing patience and learning how to bear distress and be resolute in times of stress and difficulty.



FASTING IN THE MONTH of *Ramadan* also has an important social value. The institution breaks down social barriers and compels the privileged and the disadvantaged to be brought to the same level for an entire month of the year, every year. Regardless of how great the differences in prosperity and fortune there may be, all Muslims for the entire month are limited to two meals per day and feel the same hunger and thirst from dawn to dusk. It is a practical experience that cannot but awaken sympathy for the poor in the hearts of the rich and create a deep sense of awareness of the reality of unequal wealth distribution in the world.



IN MULTIPLE INSTANCES, the Quran refers to those who fast as *sai'h*, meaning "spiritual wayfarers". This is indicative of the practice's true objective. It is to produce a new consciousness of a higher life. A life above that which is maintained by material sustenance alone. A life in which the soul is connected with the Divine. A spiritual life.

5. Pilgrimage (Hajj)



THE CHIEF FEATURES of the Pilgrimage (*Hajj*) focus around the *Ka'bah* (the cube-like building draped in a black curtain near the center of the Sacred Mosque in Mecca) and Abraham (the Patriarch of monotheistic faith). The Quran states the *Ka'bah* is located where man built the very first House of Worship to God. Islamic tradition further explains that this place of worship to God later became used for storing and revering idols

and, after time, was reduced to a dilapidated state. It was Abraham and his son Ishmael who then rebuilt the *Ka'bah*, restored it to a House of devotion to God alone, and enjoined the ceremonial rites of the pilgrimage.

HENCE, FROM THE FIRST Pillar to the Fifth Pillar, we come full circle: We start with Profession of Faith in belief in One God, and we end with Pilgrimage to the sacred site dedicated by Abraham for worshipping One God. Just as Abraham cleared the *Ka'bah* of idols (as did Prophet Muhammad during his mission), the pilgrims appreciate the spiritual significance of attending the Sacred Mosque with their hearts cleansed of all the idols and vices within. For many, it is considered the pinnacle of their spiritual journey. Certainly God is not limited to Mecca, yet the vast assemblage at Mecca sees Him and feels His presence as if He were in their midst. Such is the intensified spiritual experience of a mighty concourse gathered together in one place engrossed in the contemplation of the Divine Being.



THE ANNUAL GATHERING at Mecca during the month of *Dhul Hijja* produces a mysterious communion from one pilgrim's heart to another. Millions of people, from all races and all countries, clad in the same simple dress (two white sheets), all concentrating on the One Supreme Being, assemble to feel the presence of God Who, for the time, is the sole object of their attention.

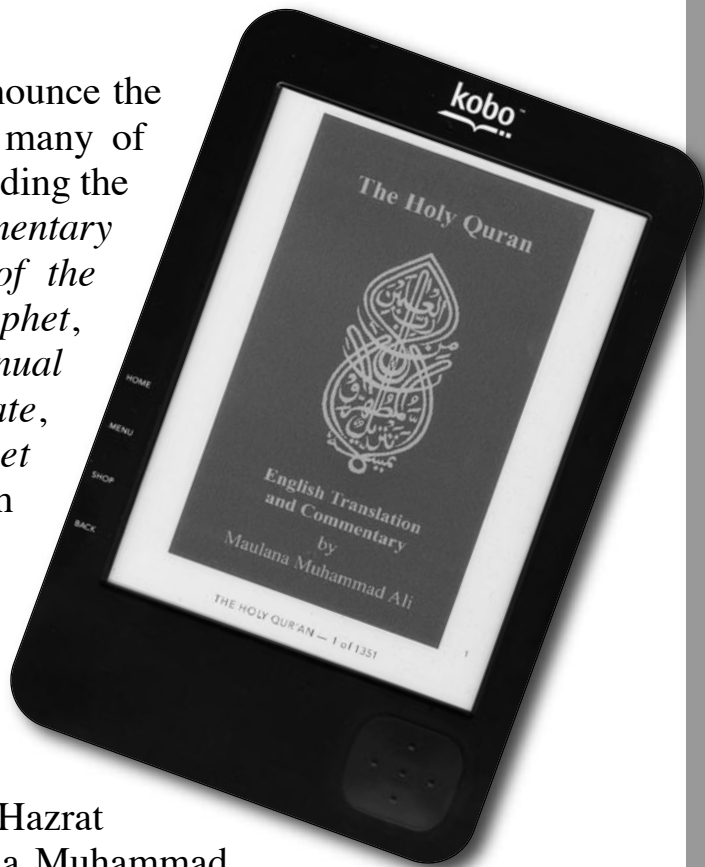


As they circumambulate the *Ka'bah*, in an ocean of humanity, as one before God, the pilgrims realize the purpose of man's creation is to have one's life revolve around achieving closeness to the Creator. In one language, the illuminating words are cried by all, "*labbaika Allah-unma labbaika,*" meaning "Here we are, O God! Here we are in Thy presence."

E-books now available!

“And when the books are spread”
(81:10)

It gives us great pleasure to announce the conversion and availability of many of our titles in e-book format, including the *English Translation and Commentary of the Holy Quran, History of the Prophets, Muhammad the Prophet, The Religion of Islam, The Manual of Hadith, The Early Caliphate, Living Thoughts of Prophet Muhammad*, among others. With the increasing popularity of e-readers, e-books have, by many accounts, become a preferred means to read literature. In order to continue to have the world-renowned literary treasures written by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, Maulana Muhammad Ali, and other Lahore Ahmadiyya authors easily accessible to the general public, we have ventured to generate e-books of our standard publications.



These, and a growing library of our e-book publications, are available through all major on-line book vendors or by contacting us directly at:

Ahmadiyya Anjuman
Isha'at Islam, Lahore (USA)

P.O. Box 3370, Dublin, Ohio 43016, U.S.A.

www.muslim.org