

*“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 eighty years**

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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.

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احمدیہ انجمن اشاعت اسلام لاہور

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

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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.

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Editor: Fazeel S. Khan

Assistant Editor: Fatima Z. Rahman

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.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.

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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.

Ahmadiyya Interpretations: A Fresh Endorsement

By Dr. Muhammad Ahmad

[In this article, Dr. Muhammad Ahmad compares the English translation and commentary by Muhammad Asad with that of Maulana Muhammad Ali. In particular, he focuses on certain verses which have been the basis for criticism of Maulana Muhammad Ali's work. As is clearly shown by his comparison, Muhammad Asad fully endorses Maulana Muhammad Ali's views; hence, any criticism against Maulana Muhammad Ali's work equally applies to that of Muhammad Asad's. The obvious reason then for the differential treatment by Muslims towards both works, Dr. Ahmad explains, cannot be based on objective criteria, but rather on an underlying political agenda.]

A colleague of mine recently told me that she received a free copy of the English translation and commentary of the Holy Quran by Muhammad Asad, entitled "The Message of the Quran", from the Council of American Islamic Relations (CAIR). Although she enjoyed the content, she expressed that the book was too bulky for her to carry around and study. I offered her a copy of the English translation and commentary of the Holy Quran by Maulana Muhammad Ali, as it is in a more compact form and would better suit her needs. In exchange she gave me her copy of the Muhammad Asad publication. This turned out to be not only a benefit for her but for me as well. I was given the opportunity to see how Muhammad Asad translated and commented on certain verses that have been the basis for some Muslims criticizing Maulana Muhammad Ali's work. Although I was aware that Muhammad Asad presented rational interpretations of the Quran, I was pleasantly surprised to see just how clearly Muhammad Asad (first published in 1980) endorsed Maulana Muhammad Ali's (first published 1917) views. In this article, I have selected a few verses from the Holy Quran and presented the translation and commentary of both Maulana Muhammad Ali and Muhammad Asad so that the reader may see the similarity in interpretations given and consistency in overall views espoused by both.

Death of Jesus

Interpreting verses of the Quran as evidencing Prophet Jesus having died a natural death on earth like all other prophets has become the hallmark criticism against Maulana Muhammad Ali's translation and commentary. In particular, Maulana Muhammad Ali's translation and commentary of Chapter 4, verses 157 and 158, and Chapter 3, verse 55 are claimed by some to be an incor-

rect interpretation of these verses. Interestingly, Muhammad Asad translates and interprets these verses exactly as Maulana Muhammad Ali has.

I reproduce below both Maulana Muhammad Ali's and Muhammad Asad's translation and commentary for the readers to view for themselves.

Maulana Muhammad Ali's translation of 4:157, 4:158 and 3:55

4:157 And for their saying: We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the messenger of Allah, and they killed him not, nor did they cause his death on the cross,^a but he was made to appear to them as such.^b And certainly those who differ therein are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge about it, but only follow a conjecture, and they killed him not for certain:

4:158 Nay, Allah exalted him in His presence. And Allah is ever Mighty, Wise.^a

3:55 When Allah said: O Jesus, I will cause thee to die^a and exalt thee in My presence^b ...

Maulana Muhammad Ali's commentary on 4:157, 4:158 and 3:55

4:157a. The words *ma salabu-hu* do not negative Jesus being nailed to the cross; they negative his having expired on the cross as a result of being nailed to it. *Salb* is a well-known way of killing (T, LA). *Salaba - hu* means *he put him to death in a certain well-known manner* (LL). That Jesus died a natural death is plainly stated in 5:117: "and I was a witness of them so long as I was among them, but when Thou didst cause me to die, Thou wast the Watcher over them". This verse is a conclusive proof that Jesus died a natural death, and is not now alive in heaven. Here Jesus says that so long as he was among his followers he was a witness of their condition, and he did not find them holding the belief in his Divinity. The logical conclusion of this statement is that the false doctrine of his Divinity was introduced into the Christian faith *after his death*, after "Thou didst cause me to die"; see further 3:55a.

A saying of the Holy Prophet is recorded in which the Holy Prophet speaks concerning himself in the very words which are here put into the mouth of Jesus. He said that he would be shown on the day of Resurrection some men who had gone against his teachings, and "I would say what the righteous servant said: I was a witness of them so long as I was among them, but when Thou didst cause me to die, Thou wast the Watcher over them" (B. 60:8). This saying shows clearly that as it was after the death of the Holy Prophet that his followers perverted his teachings, so it was after the death of Jesus that his followers perverted his teachings.

The Gospels contain clear testimony showing that Jesus Christ escaped death on the cross. The following points may be noted:

(1) Jesus remained on the cross for a few hours only (Mark 15:25; John 19:14) but death by crucifixion was always tardy. (2) The two men crucified with Jesus were still alive when taken down from the cross; the presumption is that Jesus too was alive. (3) The breaking of legs was resorted to in the case of the two criminals, but dispensed with in the case of Jesus (John 19:32, 33). (4) The side of Jesus being pierced, blood rushed out and this was a certain sign of life. (5) Even Pilate did not believe that Jesus actually died in so short a time (Mark 15:44). (6) Jesus was not buried like the two criminals, but was given into the charge of a wealthy disciple of his, who lavished care on him and put him in a spacious tomb hewn in the side of a rock (Mark 15:46). (7) When the tomb was seen on the third day, the stone was found to have been removed from its mouth (Mark 16:4) which would not have been the case if there had been a supernatural rising. (8) Mary, when she saw him, took him for the gardener (John 20:15), which shows that Jesus had disguised himself as a gardener. (9) Such disguise would not have been needed if Jesus had risen from the dead. (10) It was in the same body of flesh that the disciples saw Jesus, and the wounds were still there deep enough for a man to thrust his hand in (John 20:25-28). (11) He still felt hunger and ate as his disciples ate (Luke 24:39-43). (12) Jesus Christ undertook a journey to Galilee with two of his disciples walking side by side with him (Matt. 28:10), which shows that he was fleeing for refuge; a journey to Galilee was not necessary to rise to heaven. (13) In all post-crucifixion appearances Jesus is found hiding himself as if he feared being discovered. (14) Jesus Christ prayed the whole night before his arrest to be saved from the accursed death on the cross, and he also asked his disciples to pray for him; the prayers of a righteous man in distress and affliction are always accepted. He seems to have even received a promise from God to be saved, and it was to this promise that he referred when he cried out on the cross: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Heb. 5:7 makes the matter still more clear, for there it is plainly stated that the prayer of Jesus was accepted: "When he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared".

The statements made in the Qur'a.n corroborate the above statements quoted from the Gospels. Jesus did not die on the cross, nor was he killed as were the two thieves, but to the Jews he appeared as if he were dead.

4:157b. The words *shubbiha la-hum* may bear two interpretations: *he was made to be like (it) or to resemble*

ble (it); or the matter was made dubious or obscure (LL). The Ruh al-Ma'a.ni says the meaning may be that the matter became dubious to them. The story that someone else was made to resemble Jesus is not borne out by the words of the Qur'an, which could only mean, if an object were mentioned, that Jesus was made to resemble someone, not that someone was made to resemble Jesus.

4:158a. For the significance of *raf* see 3:55b. Being exalted in the Divine presence was opposed to being killed on the cross. Deut. 21:23 explains this, for there we have, *he that is hanged is accursed of God*. If Jesus had died on the cross he would have been accursed; hence the statement made here _ he was not killed on the cross and accursed but he was exalted in the Divine presence.

3:55a. I'Ab says that the significance of *mutawaffika* is *mumitu-ka*, i.e. *I will cause thee to die* (B. 65: v, 12). According to LA, "You say *tawaffa-hu-llahu* when you mean *Allah took his soul or caused him to die*". And according to LL, it signifies "God took his soul (S, Q) (either at death or in sleep, see the Qur'an, 6:60); or *caused him to die* (Msb)". No other significance can be attached to the words when thus used. Some commentators say that Jesus remained dead for three hours; others say for seven hours, and so on (Rz). But the word is used here really to show that the Jewish plans to cause Jesus' death on the cross would be frustrated and that he would afterwards die a natural death; see 4:157a. Pickthall's translation is, O Jesus, *I am gathering thee*, and this is the Biblical idiom for causing to die. Yusuf 'Ali, in his first edition, translated the words as meaning *I will cause thee to die*, but in the second edition he changed it to *I will take thee*.

3:55b. *Raf*' signifies *raising or elevating*, and also *exalting or making honourable* (T, LL). But where the *raf* ' of a man to Allah is spoken of in the Holy Qur'an, or in the religious literature of Islam, it is always in the latter sense, for raising a man in his body to Himself implies that the Divine Being is limited to a place. This is made plain by the prayer which every Muslim repeats several times daily in his prayers in the sitting position between the two prostrations: *wa-rfa'-ni*, meaning *and exalt me*. Of course no one supposes this prayer to be for the raising of the body to the heavens. Hence even those commentators who are predisposed, having, no doubt, been misled by Christian tradition, to accept Jesus Christ as having been raised alive to heaven, have been compelled to admit that the word *raf* 'is here used not for raising aloft but for *exalting and honouring*.

And commenting on the words which follow this statement, Rz says: *This shows that raf here is the exalting in degree and in praise, not in place and direction.*

The *exaltation* of Jesus is mentioned here as a reply to the Jews, whose object was to make him die an accursed and ignominious death on the cross.

Muhammad Asad's translation of 4:157, 4:158 and 3:55

4:157. and their boast, "Behold, we have slain the Christ Jesus, son of Mary, [who claimed to be] an apostle of God!" However, they did not slay him, and neither did they crucify him, but it only seemed to them [as if it had been] so;^a and, verily, those who hold conflicting views thereon are indeed confused, having no [real] knowledge thereof, and following mere conjecture. For, of a certainty, they did not slay him:

4:158. nay, God exalted him unto Himself^a - and God is indeed Almighty, Wise.^a

3:55. Lo! God Said: "O Jesus! Verily I shall cause thee to die, and shall exalt thee unto Me ...

Muhammad Asad's commentary on 4:157, 4:158 and 3:55

4:157a: Thus, the Qur'an categorically denies the story of the crucifixion of Jesus. There exist, among Muslims, many fanciful legends telling us that at the last moment God substituted for Jesus a person closely resembling him (according to some accounts, that person was Judas), who was subsequently crucified in his place. However, none of these legends finds the slightest support in the Qur'an or in authentic Traditions, and the stories produced in this connection by the classical commentators must be summarily rejected. They represent no more than confused attempts at "harmonizing" the Qur'anic statement that Jesus was *not* crucified with the graphic description, in the Gospels, of his crucifixion. The story of the crucifixion as such has been succinctly explained in the Qur'anic phrase *wa-lakin shubbiha lahum*, which I render as "but it only appeared to them as if it had been so" - implying that in the course of time, long after the time of Jesus, a legend had somehow grown up (possibly under the then-powerful influence of Mithraistic beliefs) to the effect that he had died on the cross in order to atone for the "original sin" with which mankind is allegedly burdened; and this legend became so firmly established among the latter-day followers of Jesus that even his enemies, the Jews, began to believe it - albeit in a derogatory sense (for crucifixion was, in those times, a heinous form of death-penalty reserved for the lowest of criminals). This, to my mind, is the only satisfactory explanation of the phrase *wa-lakin shubbiha lahum*, the more so as the expression *shubbiha li* is idiomatically synonymous with *khuyyila li*, "[a thing] became a fancied image to me", i.e., "in my mind" - in other words, "[it] seemed to me" (see

Qamus, art. *khayala*, as well as Lane II, 833, and IV, 1500).

4:158a: Cf. 3: 55, where God says to Jesus, "Verily, I shall cause thee to die, and shall exalt thee unto me *raf*" ("elevating") thee unto Me." The verb *rafa ahu* (lit., "he raised him" or "elevated him") has always, whenever the act of *raf* (elevating) of a human being is attributed to God, the meaning of "honouring" or "exalting". Nowhere in the Qur'an is there any warrant for the popular belief that God has "taken up" Jesus bodily, in his lifetime, into heaven. The expression "God exalted him unto Himself" in the above verse denotes the elevation of Jesus to the realm of God's special grace - a blessing in which all prophets partake, as is evident from 19: 57, where the verb *rafa nahu* ("We exalted him") is used with regard to the Prophet Idris. (See also Muhammad 'Abduh in *Manar* III, 316 f., and VI, 20f.) The "nay" (*bal*) at the beginning of the sentence is meant to stress the contrast between the belief of the Jews that they had put Jesus to a shameful death on the cross and the fact of God's having "exalted him unto Himself".

Supernatural Birth and Alleged Miracles of Jesus

Another charge leveled against Maulana Muhammad Ali's work is that it wrongly denies the supernatural birth of Prophet Jesus and other miraculous events in Prophet Jesus' life. Notwithstanding the exhaustive explanation for this view in the commentary and the specific persuasive arguments proving its validity, this criticism is widespread. Again, Muhammad Asad, however, translates and interprets these verses exactly as Maulana Muhammad Ali has. I reproduce the relevant sections from both works below.

Maulana Muhammad Ali's translation of 3:47 through 3:49

3:47. She said: My Lord, how can I have a son and man has not yet touched me?^a He said: Even so; Allah creates what He pleases. When He decrees a matter, He only says to it, Be, and it is.

3:48. And He will teach him the Book and the Wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel:

3:49. And (make him) a messenger to the Children of Israel (saying): I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, that I determine for you out of dust the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird with Allah's permission^a, and I heal the blind^b and the leprous, and bring the dead to life^c

Maulana Muhammad Ali's commentary on 3:47 through 3:49

3:47a. Only her espousal had yet been decided, and perhaps she had not been informed of this when she was

given the good news of a son being born to her. Hence she says that man had not touched her yet. And she was told in reply, “Even so”; i.e., the child will be born by God bringing about the circumstances which result in the birth of a child. The words do not show that she would conceive out of the ordinary course of nature, for there is no doubt that Mary had other children, which no one supposes to have been conceived out of the ordinary course of nature. Nor do the words that follow prove anything beyond the simple fact that Mary must give birth to a son in accordance with the prophecy. The whole of creation is brought about, we are told again and again, by the Divine word *Kun* (‘Be’), yet no one supposes that creation is not brought about according to the laws of nature.

3:49a. To understand the significance of this passage it is necessary to bear in mind that the chief characteristic of Jesus’ speeches is that he spoke in parables and preferred to clothe his ideas in allegorical language. If this is kept in mind, there is no difficulty in interpreting this passage. The first of the statements in this passage speaks of the making of birds and breathing into them. It is perfectly intelligible if taken as a parable, but quite incomprehensible as a statement of fact. If on the one hand a prophet’s dignity is much above such actions as the making of toy birds, on the other the act of creation is not attributable to any but the Divine Being. To understand this parable, however, the several words used may be explained first. In the passage under discussion four words require to be explained: *khalq*, *Tin*, *nafkh*, and *Tair*. The primary significance of *khalq* is *measuring, proportioning*, synonym *taqdir* (LL); hence *khalq* comes to signify the mere act of *the determining of a thing*. The word was used in this sense in pre-Islamic poetry. The act of *khalq* in the sense of creation cannot be attributed to any being except Allah. The Qur’an has laid the greatest stress upon this point. It again and again speaks of the Divine Being as *the Creator of everything*, so that there is nothing of which anyone else may be said to be a creator. And of those who are taken as gods by any people, it says in particular that *they do not create anything, while they are themselves created* (16:20; 25:3).

Then there are the two words *tin* and *nafkh*. Man is spoken of as being created from *tin* or *dust*, which stands for his humble origin, but the *nafkh* or *breathing* into him makes him deserving of respect by the angels. This, while hinted at on various occasions, is clearly stated in 38:71, 72: “When thy Lord said to the angels: Surely I am going to create a mortal from dust. So when I have made him complete and breathed into him of My spirit, fall down submitting to him”. Thus it is by the breathing of the Divine Spirit into man that he is made perfect.

The word *tair* or *ta’ir* means *a bird*, but just as the word *asad* (lit., *a lion*) is metaphorically used for *a brave man*, in a parable it is quite unobjectionable to take the word *tair* as signifying *one who soars into the higher spiritual regions and is not bent low upon earth or earthly things*. In 6:38 it is said: “And there is no animal in the earth, nor a bird that flies on its two wings, but (they are) communities like yourselves”, the meaning apparently being that among men there are those who only walk upon the earth and do not rise above their earthly concerns, while others soar into the higher spiritual regions. Elsewhere (7:179; 25:44), those who having hearts do not understand, and having ears do not hear, are likened to cattle. So what is meant here is that Jesus, by breathing a spirit into mortals, will make them rise above those who are bent low upon the earth, and the apostles of Jesus, who were all men of humble origin (which is referred to in the word *dust* in the parable), whose thoughts had never risen higher than their own humble cares, left everything for the master’s sake and went into the world by the command of the master preaching the truth. Here was, no doubt, mere dust having the form of a bird, which the messenger of God converted into high-soaring birds by breathing truth into them. The fact that a story of Jesus making birds is related in a Gospel of Infancy is in no way a bar to this explanation, for it is very likely that a parable was misunderstood by the writer of that Gospel, and the Qur’an has only referred to it to cast light upon the truth.

3:49b. The miracle of Jesus healing the sick has been rationally explained in the *Enc. Bib.* by the Rev. T.K. Cheyne, who has shown that all the stories of healing of the sick have arisen from the spiritual healing of the sick, as in Matt. 9:12; “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick”; and as in Jesus’ message to John the Baptist: “The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them” (Matt. 11:5). The concluding words clearly show that the sick and the lame and the blind belong to the same category as the poor to whom the Gospel is preached, being the poor in heart. Compare also Matt. 13:15: “For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.” Here the *healing* cannot refer but to healing of the spiritual diseases. The Holy Qur’an gives a similar explanation of the healing of the sick when, speaking of itself, it says that it is “a healing for what is in the breasts” (10:57), i.e. for the spiritual diseases. The prophet’s healing is spiritual, not healing of the physical diseases. The Qur’an speaks of the blind

and the deaf frequently, but it never means those who have lost the senses of seeing and hearing.

3:49c. Last come those who are dead. The Qur'an says plainly that those who die are not sent back to this world: "Allah takes (men's) souls at the time of their death, and those that die not, during their sleep. Then He withholds those on whom He has passed the decree of death and sends the others back till an appointed term" (39:42). And again speaking of the dead: "And before them is a barrier, until the day they are raised" (23:100). But the use of the word *mawta*, i.e. *the dead*, and of their *being raised to life*, is frequent in the Holy Qur'an in a spiritual sense: "Is he who was dead, then We raised him to life ... like him whose likeness is that of one in darkness" (6:122). And again: "O you who believe, respond to Allah and His Messenger, when He calls you to that which gives you life" (8:24). Similarly we have: "Neither are the living and the dead alike. Surely Allah makes whom He pleases hear, and thou canst not make those hear who are in the graves" (35:22). The prophets are raised only for quickening to life those who are spiritually dead, and it is to this quickening through Jesus Christ that the Holy Qur'an refers here.

It should be noted that three classes of men are spoken of as being regenerated, viz.: (1) those who were found in the natural state of dust, and who, like dust, humbly submitted themselves to the prophets' handling, and who were made to soar high into the spiritual regions, not caring for their worldly concerns, (2) those who were spiritually diseased, and they were healed and made whole, and (3) those who were quite dead and were spiritually quickened. Hence the three different descriptions.

Muhammad Asad's translation of 3:47 through 3:49

3: 47. Said she: "O my Sustainer! How can I have a son when no man has ever touched me?" [The angel] answered: "Thus it is: God creates what He wills:^a when He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it, 'Be' - and it is.

3:48. And he will impart unto thy son^a revelation, and wisdom, and the Torah, and the Gospel, and [will make him] an apostle unto the children of Israel."^b

3: 49. "I have come unto you with a message from your Sustainer. I shall create for you out of clay, as it were, the shape of [your] destiny, and then breathe into it, so that it might become [your] destiny by God's leave;^a and I shall heal the blind and the leper, and bring the dead back to life by God's leave;^b and I shall let you know what you may eat and what you should store up in your houses.^c

Behold, in all this there is indeed a message for you, if you are [truly] believers.

Muhammad Asad's commentary on 3:47 through 3:49

3:47a. See 19:16-22 and the corresponding notes. In the context of the story of Mary in *Al 'Imran*, the announcement made to her, as well as the parallel one to Zachariah (verses 39-40 above), is meant to stress God's unlimited power of creation - specifically, in both cases, His power to create the circumstances in which His will is to manifest itself - and thus to bring about any event, however unexpected or even improbable it might seem at the time of the announcement.

3:48a. Lit., "to him".

3:49a. The passage which follows here - up to the end of verse 51 - may be understood in either of two ways: as part of the announcement made to Mary (implying that he would thus speak in the *future*) or, alternatively, as a statement of what, at a later time, he actually *did* say to the children of Israel. In view of the narrative form adopted in verses 52 ff., the second of these two alternatives seems preferable.

3:49b. Lit., "[something] like the shape of a bird (*tayr*); and then I shall breathe into it, so that it might [or "whereupon it will"] become a bird...". The noun *tayr* is a plural of *ta'ir* ("flying creature" or "bird"), or an infinitive noun ("flying") derived from the verb *tara* ("he flew"). In pre-Islamic usage, as well as in the Qur'an, the words *ta'ir* and *tayr* often denote "fortune" or "destiny", whether good, or evil (as, for instance, in 7:131, 27:47 or 36:19, and still more clearly in 17:13). Many instances of this idiomatic use of *tayr* and *ta'ir* are given in all the authoritative Arabic dictionaries; see also Lane V, 1904 f. Thus, in the parabolic manner so beloved by him, Jesus intimated to the children of Israel that out of the humble clay of their lives he would fashion for them the vision of a soaring destiny, and that this vision, brought to life by his God-given inspiration, would become their real destiny by God's leave and by the strength of their faith (as pointed out at the end of this verse).

3:49c. It is probable that the "raising of the dead" by Jesus is a metaphorical description of his giving new life to people who were spiritually dead; cf. 6:122 - "Is then he who was dead [in spirit], and whom We thereupon gave life, and for whom We set up a light whereby he can see his way among men - [is then he] like unto one [who is lost] in darkness deep, out of which he cannot emerge?" If this interpretation is - as I believe - correct, then the "healing of the blind and the leper" has a similar significance: namely, an inner regeneration of people who were spiritually diseased and blind to the truth.

Theory of Abrogation of Quran Verses

Another common criticism of Maulana Muhammad Ali's work is that it rejects the theory that certain verses of the Holy Quran are abrogated by others. On its face, this theory is preposterous – it is an attempt to justify perceived contradictions in the divine scripture. Nonetheless, this criticism against Maulana Muhammad Ali's work is prevalent. Again, Muhammad Asad, the work of whom is now accepted and sponsored by CAIR, expresses the very same opinion as that of Maulana Muhammad Ali on this issue. I reproduce the relevant verses and commentaries below.

Maulana Muhammad Ali's translation of 2:106

2:106. Whatever message We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring one better than it or one like it. Knowest thou not that Allah is Possessor of power over all things?

Maulana Muhammad Ali's commentary on 2:106

2:106a. Reading the verse under discussion in the light of the context, it is clear that the Jews are addressed here. The two previous sections deal, more or less, with a particular Jewish objection to the revelation of the Prophet, viz., that they could not accept a new revelation which was not granted to an Israelite. This is plainly stated in vv. 90 and 91. The same subject is continued, the Jews being addressed throughout. Their objection was: Why was another revelation sent down to Muhammad, and why was a law containing new commandments promulgated? That objection was to be answered. The answer is given partly in v. 105, and partly in the verse under discussion.

In the former of these they are told that Allah chooses whom He pleases for His revelation. In the latter, that if one law (i.e. the Jewish law) was abrogated, one better than it was given through the Holy Prophet. It should be noted that the new law is here stated to be better than the one abrogated or like it. It is a fact that though the law of the Qur'an is decidedly superior to and more comprehensive than the previous laws in most respects, yet there are many points of likeness in the two. Hence the words *one like it* are added.

In the verse that follows, attention is called to the laws of nature as prevailing in the universe. Is it not true that the old order in nature gives place to a new one, the inferior to the better? It was therefore quite natural that the Mosaic law, which was in the main given for a particular people in a particular age, and suited only their requirements, should give place to a new and universal law, the law of Islam. The old law had been partly forgotten, and what remained was now abrogated to give place to one better and in certain matters one like it. It

will thus be seen that the reference here is to the abrogation of the Jewish law, the statement being really an answer to the objection of the Jews.

That some of the Quranic verses were abrogated by others, though a generally accepted doctrine, is due to a misconception of the words of this verse. The word *ayat* occurring here has been wrongly understood to mean a verse of the Qur'an. Similar words occur elsewhere: "And when We change a message (*ayat*) for a message (*ayat*) — and Allah knows best what He reveals — they say: Thou art only a forger" (16:101). This is a Makkan revelation and it is an undisputed fact, admitted by all upholders of abrogation in the Qur'an, that there was no abrogation at Makkah, because the details of the law were not revealed there. Therefore the word *ayat*, occurring there twice, could only mean a message or a communication from God, and the first *message* meant the previous scriptures and by the second *message* was meant the Qur'an.

The interpretation adopted by the commentators generally is not based on any saying of the Prophet; it is their own opinion. Nor is there a single report traceable to the Prophet that such and such a verse was abrogated. A companion's opinion that he considered a certain verse to have been abrogated by another could not carry the least weight. It was the Prophet only on whose authority any verse was accepted as being a part of the Holy Qur'an, and it was he only on whose authority any verse could be considered as having been abrogated. But there is not a single *hadith* of the Prophet speaking of abrogation.

Another consideration which shows the erroneousness of the doctrine that any verse of the Qur'an was abrogated by another is the hopeless disagreement of the upholders of this view. In the first place there is no agreement as to the number of the verses which are alleged to have been abrogated; while some accept no more than five verses to be abrogated, others carry the number to hundreds. This shows that the view is based simply on conjecture. Secondly, if one commentator holds a certain verse to be abrogated, another calls this an erroneous view. In Bukhari especially do we find opposite views cited side by side. What happened really was this that when a commentator could not reconcile one verse with another, he held the verse to be abrogated by the other, but another who, giving deeper thought, was able to effect a reconciliation between the two, rejected abrogation. This seems to be the basis on which the theory of abrogation of Qur'anic verses rests, and this basis is demolished by the Holy Qur'an when it says: "Will they not then meditate on the Qur'an? And if it were from any other than Allah, they would have found in it many a discrepancy" (4:82). There are no

discrepancies in the Qur'an, and it is want of meditation on it that is responsible for the theory of abrogation.

Muhammad Asad's translation of 2:106

2:106. Any message which, We annul or consign to oblivion We replace with a better or a similar ones.^a Dost thou not know that God has the power to will anything?

Muhammad Asad's commentary on 2:106

2:106a. The principle laid down in this passage - relating to the supersession of the Biblical dispensation by that of the Qur'an - has given rise to an erroneous interpretation by many Muslim theologians. The word ayah ("message") occurring in this, context is also used to denote a "verse;" of the Qur'an (because every one of these verses contains a message). Taking this restricted meaning of the term ayah, some scholars conclude from the above passage that certain verses of the Qur'an have been "abrogated" by God's command before the revelation of the Quran was completed. Apart from the fancifulness of this assertion-which calls to mind the image of a human author correcting, on second thought, the proofs of his manuscript, deleting one passage and replacing it with another-there does not exist a single reliable Tradition to the effect that the Prophet ever, declared a verse of the Quran to have been "abrogated". At the root of the so-called "doctrine of abrogation" may lie the inability of some of the early commentators to reconcile one Qur'anic passage with another: a difficulty which was overcome by declaring that one of the verses in question had been "abrogated". This arbitrary procedure explains also why there is no unanimity whatsoever among the upholders of the "doctrine of abrogation" as to which, and how many, Qur'an-verses have been affected by it; and, furthermore, as to whether this alleged abrogation implies a total elimination of the verse in question from the context of the Qur'an, or only a cancellation of the specific ordinance or statement contained in it. In short, the "doctrine of abrogation" has no basis whatever in historical fact, and must be rejected. On the other hand, the apparent difficulty in interpreting the above Qur'anic passage disappears - immediately if the term ayah is understood, correctly, as "message", and if we read this verse in conjunction with the preceding one, which states that the Jews and the Christians refuse to accept any revelation which might supersede that of the Bible: for, if read in this way, the abrogation relates to the earlier divine messages and not to any part of the Qur'an itself.

Conclusion

A comparison of the selected parts of Maulana Muhammad Ali's English translation and commentary

of the Holy Quran with that of Muhammad Asad's, reveals consistency in the explanation of the meaning of the particular verses. In the face of such congruity, an obvious question arises: why is Maulana Muhammad Ali's work marginalized by many Muslims? In fact, from the comparison above, any fair minded critic should discern that Maulana Muhammad Ali's explanations are much more valid as he presents far more support for his views. Indeed, as with much of the information we receive nowadays, the reason appears to have embedded in it an underlying political agenda. It is not the work of Maulana Muhammad Ali that is necessarily troubling to his critics, it is his association with the Ahmadiyya Movement and, in particular, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. As Maulana Muhammad Ali writes in the preface of his monumental work:

And lastly, the greatest religious leader of the present time, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, has inspired me with all that is best in this work. I have drunk deep at the fountain of knowledge which this great Reformer - Mujaddid of the present century and founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement - has made to flow.

It cannot be denied that it was Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, who first presented arguments, on the basis of verses from the Holy Quran, for the natural death of Prophet Jesus and for a natural, as opposed to miraculous, explanation to certain incidents in Prophet Jesus' life.

It is high time that Muslims put past prejudices behind them and focus exclusively on the welfare of the Muslims as their primary concern. CAIR should be congratulated for its decision to sponsor a translation based on the work's merits, not political affiliation. We hope the sponsorship of Muhammad Asad's translation and commentary will have the effect of opening the minds of Muslims to alternative interpretations to certain Islamic concepts and also prove to be a catalyst to the eventual acceptance of Maulana Muhammad Ali's translation and commentary by Muslim organizations throughout the western world.

Back to the Quran! Back to Muhammad!

The Primary Message, Mission and Vision of the Ahmadiyya Movement

By Maulana Muhammad Ali

[This article comprises a part of Maulana Muhammad Ali's writings from the year 1926, with slight modifications, wherein he articulates the poignant aspects of the Ahmadiyya Movement founded by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. In this article, he outlines the doctrinal particularities of the Movement and also reveals the practical effect of the Movement's distinguishing characteristics on the advancement of the Muslim nation and its role on earth. In essence, Maulana Muhammad Ali explains that the goal of the Ahmadiyya Movement is simply to bring Islam back to its original and pure state, free from external interpolations and influences. He argues that it is the foreign notions, finding no support in the Quran and the authentic teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, which are blindly believed in and followed by the Muslim masses, that have caused the decline of the great Islamic nation. The spiritual force of Islam, not temporal power, he argues, is the key to bringing about a resurgence of the glory of Islam – hence, Muslims need to direct their attention "Back to the Quran! Back to Muhammad!"]

The Ahmadiyya Movement is a movement within Islam

In the words of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of the Movement, "the essence of our religion is *La ilah-a illallah, Muhammad ur Rasul ullah* (i.e. none deserves to be served but God and Muhammad is His Apostle)." He further clarified:

Our belief which we hold in this world's life - with which by the grace of God we hope to depart from this world - is that our Lord and Master Muhammad, the Chosen, may peace and blessings of Allah be on him, is the last of the prophets and the most excellent of messengers. Through him religion was brought to perfection and the blessings were made complete by which man following the right course, can attain to God. And we believe, being certain in the highest degree, that the Holy Qur'an is the last of the heavenly books, and not the minutest of points can be added to its laws, limits, orders and commandments, nor can aught be diminished from it.¹

And God speaks to His chosen ones in this *ummat* (group) and they are dyed with the dye of the prophets but they are not actually prophets, for the law has been perfected in the Qur'an, and they are only given a right understanding of the Qur'an.²

There is no need now to follow separately the prophethoods and books that have gone before for the prophethood of Muhammad comprises them all ... All truths that lead to God are in it, no new truth will be revealed after it nor was any truth revealed before it which is not contained in it. Hence all prophethoods come to finality in this prophethood, and so it ought to have been, for everything that has a beginning has also an end.³

Allah is He Who sent our Holy Prophet after all the prophets so that all people may be gathered together under one flag.⁴

The Ahmadiyya movement stands for freedom from mental slavery

I have presented these quotations from the writings of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, ranging from the beginning of his career to its very close, simply to show that the Ahmadiyya Movement is just like any other movement within Islam and the basis of it is laid on the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad, may peace and blessings of God be upon him. I wish to add that the Ahmadiyya Movement represents Islam, so far as doctrine is concerned, in the most simple and most original form. Islam at its origin meant, first and foremost, allegiance to the word of God. But at the present day, the Holy Book is relegated to the background and the Muslims seek guidance from books of law (*fiqh*) which were compiled hundreds of years afterwards by learned men, no doubt, but which only answered the needs of the day and were not meant for all ages.

The service which these great men rendered to the cause of Islam in their own day is now abused as a hindrance to the progress of Islam. The Holy Qur'an was revealed to answer the needs of men of all ages; the door of understanding its import and to deduce laws from it to answer new needs of the coming ages was never closed for mankind. In fact, to close that door would be tantamount to transferring allegiance from the word of God to man-made law, to seat men on the throne of Divinity. It is due to this servile attitude to the great and learned scholars of the past that the Muslim priest today accepts the common notion that the realm of religion is beyond the flights of reason, that reason has no place in religion. Now, such an idea is not only foreign but also quite opposed to the spirit of Islam. Islam, from its very birth, freely appealed to reason and the Holy Qur'an repeatedly reproves man for not using

his reasoning faculty. “Why do you not think,” “why do you not ponder,” “why do you not reflect” – this is the ever recurring exhortation throughout its pages.

The Holy Prophet himself encouraged his companions to give free vent to their reasoning faculties; they were fully conscious of the great gift of reason which God had bestowed upon them and which the Holy Prophet had allowed them to use in matters temporal as well as religious. Thus, towards the close of his life, he appointed Mu’az, a famous companion, to be Governor of Yaman, and asked him as to how he would decide cases brought before him. He readily replied that he would resort to resolve the issue by first seeking an answer in the Holy Qur’an, then in the *Sunna* (practice of the Prophet) and failing to find light on the particular point in either of these, he would then use his own reason. Such was the view of the immediate disciples of the Holy Prophet as regards the free use of reason. But the prevailing idea in the Muslim world today is that in all religious matters we must accept the reasoning of this or that great man as final and the result is that Muslims, who once led the world in great ideas, now lie in an abject state of mental slavery, their reasoning faculties stunted, almost dead. “Back to the Qur’an! Back to Muhammad!” – this is the clarion call of the Ahmadiyya Movement. It strives to bring Islam back to the pure faith of the Holy Prophet and his companions and back to the freedom which our great and learned forefathers enjoyed. By returning to this original state, only, lies the real advancement of Islam. This is not a step backward but rather a step forward; it takes Muslims out from the darkness and mental slavery into which they have fallen, brings them forth into the light and freedom that is the birth right of every Muslim.

The Ahmadiyya movement stands for a negation of priest-hood in Islam

Every student of Islam knows that the idea of priesthood was quite unknown to Islam at its birth, yet how prevalent it is in the Muslim world today. The whole Muslim world, from one end to the other, cries in vain under the burden of a priesthood which is not willing to forego its merciless grasp on the multitudes. The Muslims today are exactly in the same condition in which Jews and Christians were in at the advent of Islam. The existence of priesthood and monkery in the older religions was emphatically condemned in the Holy Qur’an, yet the Muslims today bow in allegiance to their *Ulema* (religious scholars) and *Pirs* (perceived holy figures) exactly in the same manner: “They have taken their doctors of law and their monks for lords besides Allah” (9:31). The message of the Ahmadiyya Movement is: Emancipate yourself from these two curses, for they are

the greatest obstacles to the advancement of the world of Islam!

The Ahmadiyya Movement stands for placing the Qur’an before all.

The purity of Islam has again been affected seriously by the over-importance attached by some to the compiled reports of the sayings and doings of the Holy Prophet. “Tradition,” as it is generally called, no doubt plays an important part in the religion of Islam in so far as it casts light on many of the details of the religion. Much of the history of Islam is also preserved therein. But there is not the least doubt that “tradition” is only a secondary source to the Holy Quran; it is, after all, merely an *explanation* of what is contained in the Holy Quran. It has, moreover, the defect of having been transmitted orally over a long period of time and, therefore, is subject to change and alteration. Nor can the first or subsequent reporter be expected to transmit the *very* words that he heard. In most cases, it was the import which he transmitted and the import would no doubt, more or less, be affected by the state of mind and understanding capacity of the reporter. Accordingly, if “tradition” is not read under these limitations, it is likely to do more harm than good to the cause of Islam. The Ahmadiyya Movement gives to tradition its proper place: it accepts it only as a secondary source of the teachings of Islam, rejecting any tradition which is inconsistent with the Holy Qur’an, however reliable the collection in which it is contained may be!

The Ahmadiyya Movement stands for a complete Qur’an.

On the basis of certain traditions, none of which can be traced to the Holy Prophet, it is supposed that the Holy Qur’an contains certain verses which are abrogated by others and that there are certain verses which are abrogated only for purposes of recitation and they are therefore not to be found in the pages of the Holy Book. This mistaken view has long been accepted by the commentators and traditionalists, with the solitary exception of one or two individuals. This flawed belief has now been finally exposed by the Ahmadiyya Movement, conclusively establishing that the doctrine has been rejected by the Holy Quran itself. The doctrine of abrogation is based on the view that commandments contained in certain verses of the Holy Book are irreconcilable with those contained in others, which amounts virtually to the admission that there are discrepancies in the Qur’an. Such a suggestion was condemnable on its very face, but what is more surprising is that this wrong conception has been entertained notwithstanding its plain denunciation by the Holy Book itself, which states:

Do they not then mediate on the Quran? And if it were from any other than Allah, they would have found in it many a discrepancy (4:82).

That such a view should find such wide spread acceptance in the face of this clear denunciation only shows how the Qur'an has been neglected on account of some popular idea gaining hold in the minds of even the learned men. By rejecting the doctrine of abrogation in the Holy Quran, the Ahmadiyya Movement stands for the belief in a complete Qur'an, one in which nothing is abrogated and from which nothing has been left out!

The Ahmadiyya Movement represents the original liberal outlook of Islam

So far as the purity of the doctrines of Islam as represented by the Ahmadiyya Movement goes, I now come to a second phase. The movement lays emphasis on the original broad and liberal outlook of Islam, which over the course of time has entirely been lost sight of. At its inception, Islam was the most liberal of all the religions of the world. It laid down as one of its basic principles the belief that prophets appeared among every nation in the world. It was, further, obligatory for every Muslim to believe in all those prophets. Thus do we find in the very beginning of the Holy Quran:

And those who believe in what is revealed to thee and what was revealed before thee (2:3).

And again the Quran calls upon the Muslims to respect the great religious leaders of every nation of the world when it says:

And there is not a nation but a warner has appeared in it (35:24).

Nay, it even forbids speaking evil of the false deities of other people:

Do not abuse those whom they call upon beside Allah (6:109).

It further enjoins Muslims to be the guardians of the holy places of worship of other religions:

And had there not been Allah's (ordering the) repelling of some people by others, certainly there would have been pulled cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques in which Allah's name is much remembered (22:40).

The protection of cloisters, synagogues and churches, along with that of mosques, was, therefore, one of the avowed objects of Islamic wars. Now these factors must tend to make a Muslim a most forbearing and peaceful neighbor, whether as an individual or as a nation, a most useful citizen, and a most cosmopolitan resident of the earth. But, unfortunately, the Muslims

have quite forgotten these basic teachings. The Ahmadiyya Movement stands for, among other things, championing these liberal teachings of Islam among the Muslims.

The Ahmadiyya Movement stands for the solidarity of Islam

This liberal attitude of Islam is represented by the Ahmadiyya Movement not only in relation to other religions for which it inculcates love and respect, but also in its relation with the various Muslim "sects" (or schools of thought, as they really are). It lays stress on the fact, which has entirely been neglected, that in Islam there are no sectarian differences worth the name, all Muslims being one in the fundamentals of religion. However great the differences between Muslims may be, these are relating only to secondary and minor points, not the fundamentals of the faith. Islam stands really for a compact nation spread all over the world, a nation agreeing entirely on the basic principles of religion. Whether a Muslim calls himself a Sunni, a Shia, a Wahabi or an Ahmadi, they are all agreed on One God regarding Whose attributes they have no essential differences, they are all agreed on One Prophet whom they all consider to be the Last of the prophets, they are all agreed on One Book, the Holy Qur'an as the last of the divine scriptures which is complete. Nay, they all believe in all the prophets of God, in all the Divine books, in the day of Resurrection, and in the reward for good and evil.

There is even unity among them even in the practical side of religion. All the Muslim "sects" acknowledge the same five prayer services at exactly the same times, with the same number of *rakats* in each service. They have the same month of fasting, the same *zakat*, and the same pilgrimage as well. The world cannot offer another example of a nation spread so widely over the world, with its component parts separated from each other for over thirteen hundred years during times when there were no means of communication, and yet agreeing on so many principles in theory as well as practice.

The narrow minded *mullah* (priests), however, is blind to this great consensus among Muslims throughout the Islamic world and, rather, the minor points of difference loom large in his jaundiced eye. The result is that despite such wonderful agreement on so many points of vital importance, the Muslim world is shattered into pieces, and almost every person, every sect, every school of thought is denounced *kafir* (disbeliever) by another. The Ahmadiyya Movement has done immense service to the solidarity of Islam by denouncing this tendency. It accepts the principle, which really forms the basis of Islam, that all are Muslims who

declare faith in “*la ilaha illallah Muhammadur Rasul-ullah,*” regardless of whatever sect or school of thought he or she may belong. Accepting this principle only can restore the wonderful solidarity of Islam, before which all opposition to the holy cause is bound to vanish.

The Ahmadiyya Movement stands for the irresistible spiritual force of Islam

Islam achieved supremacy due to the irresistible spiritual force it possessed. There was no royal convert to it, no Asoka or Constantine to lend it the resources of an empire. Unlike other great religions, such as Christianity and Buddhism, which won the world with the help of their kingly converts, Islam won the world simply by its spiritual force and made its humble converts rulers of empires. Yet, so contrary to facts, it has been supposed that Islam won its way in the world by use of the sword. The sword is a symbol of temporal power, but where was the temporal power which came to the help of Islam? The Holy Prophet was a man who possessed not a vestige of temporal power; it is historically undeniable that it was his marvelous spiritual force that made Arabia and, eventually, the world accept him. Notwithstanding, it is true, when the sword was taken up by the enemies of Islam for the purpose of annihilating it, the Muslims were permitted to fight in self defense, and they fought only as long as religious liberty was not re-established. If one studies the history of Islam, he will see the fact written bold in its pages that the Holy Prophet ceased fighting when the enemies of Islam laid down the sword. If he had taken up the sword for the purpose of propagating Islam, why should he have laid it down before Arabia was converted? Why should he have not forced the vanquished Quraish at Mecca to accept Islam? The whole of history belies the accusation that Islam became predominant by physical force.

The Ahmadiyya Movement comes as the harbinger of the good news that the spiritual force of Islam, which brought about its predominance in the world at its rise, is inexhaustible and that even today it can effect by spiritual force what it caused thirteen centuries ago. Nay, the world is more prepared today for the acceptance of Islam than it was thirteen hundred years ago because Islam is the religion of reason, and reason is appealing more and more to the world as it makes progress in knowledge. With the very limited resources at its disposal, the Ahmadiyya Movement has brought hundreds of educated people in the heart of modern civilization and learning to the fold of Islam. Because the simplicity and rationality of Islam’s teachings is appealing to all, all that is required on the part of Muslims is an increased effort to bring about another revolution in the history of the world, a revolution having at its basis the

spiritual force of Islam. The sooner the ranks of the Ahmadiyya Movement are strengthened, the sooner the great spiritual revolution in Islam will be brought about.

The Ahmadiyya Movement stands for self-reliance

Muslims have believed for long that the supremacy of Islam in the world will be brought about when the Messiah descends from above and the Mahdi joins him from below, and both ravage the world, destroying all opposition to Islam by the sword. This belief has slowly deprived them of all faith in themselves and in their own exertions. Now, as regards the traditions speaking of the advent of the Mahdi, there is little in them that can be said to be authentic. Both *Bukhari* and *Muslim*, the two most reliable collections of traditions, do not accept any of these traditions. As regards the Messiah, there has again been a misconception. Some prophecies contained in reliable traditions of the Holy Prophet no doubt speak of the coming of Prophet Jesus, but finding literal fulfillment of prophecies has always been a source of disaster. In the first place, the Holy Quran, which must be placed above all traditions however reliable they may be, speaks plainly of the death of Prophet Jesus. When questioned about the belief in his divinity, Prophet Jesus is said to reply:

I did not say to them aught save that Thou didst command me: That serve Allah, my Lord and your Lord; and I was witness of them so long as I was among them, but when Thou didst cause me to die, Thou wert the Watcher over them. And Thou art witness of all things (5:117).

This is a clear statement from the Holy Quran that the belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ arose among Christians *after* Prophet Jesus’ death. Now if Prophet Jesus is dead according to the Qur’an, he cannot come back to this world. Again the Holy Quran declares in clear words that the work of prophethood was made complete by the Holy Prophet Muhammad and that he was the last of the prophets:

This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favor on you (5:3);

and

Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the apostle of God and the last of the prophets (33:40).

Since the belief that Jesus Christ will return finds no support whatsoever in the Holy Quran, the traditions speaking of his advent should be interpreted metaphorically, not literally. Unfortunately, a mistake in interpretation was made early on and writer after writer copied it without thinking about how the literal interpretation

of this prophecy was opposed to the clearest dictates of the Holy Quran.

The metaphorical interpretation of this prophecy was made known by the founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement. He not only showed such an interpretation was consistent with the plain statements of the Holy Quran but also revealed how a study of the traditions and other earlier scriptures led to the same conclusion. For, authentic traditions contained in *Bukhari* itself give two differing descriptions of two Messiahs, the Jewish Messiah of the past who is spoken of as having a white complexion and curly hair, and the Muslim Messiah to come who is spoken of as having a brown complexion and straight hair. Furthermore, there are traditions clearly referring to Prophet Jesus as being dead: one in particular stating, "If Moses and Jesus were living, they could not have but followed me," and another stating, "Jesus Christ lived for 120 years." With such overwhelming testimony for a metaphorical interpretation of the prophecy, it is clearly inappropriate to maintain a literal interpretation of this prophecy.

And what exactly is the metaphorical interpretation? It is that a reformer should arise among the Muslims who would appear in the *spirit* and *power* of Jesus Christ. This interpretation had a very clear basis; the earlier scriptures had made it plain. We find therein a similar prophecy, one concerning the second coming of Elijah before the advent of the Messiah. When Jesus had appeared, Elijah had not yet returned and the Jews seemed to be in the right in rejecting Jesus as Christ because the prophecy was, apparently, not fulfilled. When the matter was brought to the attention of Jesus, though, he solved the difficulty by pointing out that Elijah had in fact returned, not in the same person but in the person of John the Baptist who appeared in the *spirit* and *power* of Elijah. Here was a precedent as to how a prophecy concerning the second coming of a person is to be interpreted. This interpretation is exactly suited to the prophecy of Jesus Christ's own second-advent. This was made clear by the founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, but the narrow-minded *mullah* insists on a literal interpretation regardless of what the Holy Quran says.

And if the prophecy signifies the coming of one in the spirit and power of Jesus Christ, what is the underlying fact? The Jews believed that Christ would come as a king and restore the temporal power of the Jews. On the contrary, Christ came as the symbol of the spiritual power of the Israelites. The Muslims were also destined to lose their temporal power in the world after rising to eminence, and in the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah they were told that Islam was again destined to attain supremacy in the world, now as before, through

spiritual force. Islam possesses an irresistible spiritual force but it can only be brought about by exertion on the part of the Muslims. This cannot be done so long as their false hopes in the descent of the Messiah and the Mahdi coming with temporal power exist. The Ahmadiyya Movement stands for eliminating these false hopes so that self-reliance among Muslims is generated, without which they cannot gain what they have lost.

The Ahmadiyya Movement stands for Democracy in Religion

History bears witness to the fact that in the early days of Islam, all important matters were settled by counsel. Affairs of state as well as affairs of public interest were decided through consultative means, and the view of the majority, notwithstanding the opinion of a *Khalifa*, was followed. Even the Holy Prophet followed this dictate. He respected the opinion of the majority and went outside of Medina at the time of the battle of *Uhud* to face the enemy despite his personal opinion of defending remaining within the City and defending themselves therein. In the time of the earlier caliphs, not only were matters of state decided by counsel, but even matters of religion were subject to the same rule. Thus, although both the temporal and religious laws of the Muslims were made by the majority, autocracy soon took the place of democracy, both in state and religion. The founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement had reestablished this basic democratic principle in Islam. When the Movement gained a little strength, he at once formed an Association for the management of affairs relating to the work of the organization and issued written directions that when a matter was settled by the opinion of the majority of the members of the Association, it was deemed as final. The Ahmadiyya Movement continues to follow this democratic principle even in matters of religion.

The Watchword of the Ahmadiyya Movement: Advance!

The religion of Islam brings the message of unity to a world hopelessly in disagreement. It establishes a two-fold brotherhood: it establishes a brotherhood of the Muslims of the world in which the white and the black, the European and Asiatic and the African, all stand on an equal level; it eliminates all differences of race and nationality and brings about peace and love among the various nations of the world and minimizes their political differences. But it also establishes a vaster brotherhood of humanity. In a saying of the Holy Prophet, the prophets of the world are spoken of as brothers, though the laws given by them differed somewhat depending on the conditions in which they were sent. This saying no

doubt lays down the basis of a vast brotherhood of the whole of humanity, and when a Muslim is required to believe in every prophet of the world, he is really told to love and respect every follower of that prophet. Islam thus lays down the basis of universal love and concord in the human race and the welfare of humanity in general requires that the message of Islam should be taken to the whole world. The more Islam spreads, the greater the peace that must reign in the world and it is therefore the Muslim's duty to humanity that he should carry this noble message of peace to the farthest ends of the world. The conquests of Islam are the conquests of love and peace — the name Islam itself indicating *peace*. The early Muslims were animated with this spirit. They knew how great a blessing to the world Islam was. But the Muslims of the present day are mostly ignorant of the real message of Islam and the spirit to carry that blessing to the world no more inspires them. The Ahmadiyya Movement, comprising the true spirit of love and brotherhood met with in Islam, presents that great message to the Muslim world: Advance! And be an ambassador of peace to the world!

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Celebrating the Abrahamic Faith: Eid-ul-Adha Khutba 2006

By Fazeel S. Khan

[The following is the Eid-ul-Adha Khutba (sermon) delivered by the Editor to a group of members of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Jamaat in Houston, Texas. The khutba focuses on the significance of celebrating an event in the life of Prophet Abraham and the lessons on 'unity' and 'sacrifice' that is learned from this celebration.]

Today Muslims around the world celebrate *Eid-ul-Adha*, or what is commonly referred to as the Islamic festival of sacrifice. This celebration commemorates the great sacrifice Prophet Abraham was willing to make solely for the sake of submitting to Almighty Allah's will. The story of the grand sacrifice is well known, being narrated in the Christian and Jewish traditions as well. There are, however, many unique lessons learned from the Islamic account of this event. The Holy Quran relates:

(Abraham prayed): My Lord, grant me a doer of good deeds. So We gave him the good news of a forbearing son. But when he became of age to work with him, he said: O my son, I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice you; so consider what is your view. He said: O my father, do as you are commanded; if Allah please you will find me patient. So when they had both submitted and he had thrown him down upon his forehead, and We called out to him saying, O Abraham, you have indeed fulfilled the vision. Thus do We reward the doers of good. Surely this is a manifest trial. And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice (37:100–107).

Significance of celebrating an event in Prophet Abraham's life

For one, there is a lesson to be learned in Islam recognizing an event in Prophet Abraham's life as worthy of being celebrated. It could rightfully be questioned, if an historical event is to be celebrated in Islam, why not an incident from the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad? Why not celebrate the Holy Prophet's birthday as the Christians do of Christ? Why not celebrate any one of the miraculous occurrences or examples of divine support during the life of the Holy Prophet, like the Jews do at Hanukah, their *festival of lights*? The reason is simple, yet profound in terms of its significance: Islam aims at unifying mankind. What better way to facilitate this than to establish as one of its only two primary celebrations the remembrance of a person who is revered by followers of all other major religions, including Jews, Christians and even Hindus for many consider the great *Rishi* Brahma to be no other than Abraham.

We are told in the Holy Quran:

Abraham was not a Jew or a Christian, but he was an upright man, one who submitted to God, and not taking others for god" (3:66).

Thus, celebrating *Eid-ul-Adha* is a call to persons of all faiths back to the original, simple, broad principles of religion taught by their patriarch, Abraham. It is a call to all children of Abraham to reflect on the foundation of all religions; that is, believing in and submitting one's self completely to the One true God.

The "shahada" as proof of Islam's faithfulness to the Abrahamic Faith

Clear evidence of Islam's faithfulness to this original message of Abraham is revealed by the affirmation of faith, or *shahada*, that one recites when accepting Islam. A Muslim simply declares: "la illaha illallah" ("there is no god but Allah"), "Muhammad ur rasool Allah"

(“Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah”). This simple declaration, focused on the unity of God is all that is required for one to become a Muslim. Some question why the second part of the *shahada* is even needed then; isn’t the first part of the declaration sufficient? What must be understood is that the second part of the *shahada* neither adds to nor detracts from the first part, it only confirms it. It is meant to establish that there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is *only* a Messenger and in no way himself divine. Thus, from the outset, while establishing the unity of God, the *shahada* provides a preventative measure so that Muslims will not falter as previous nations had by raising their prophets to a status in which they share a part of divinity. Furthermore, in order to fully realize the epithet “there is no god but Allah,” and reject all other idols – material and emotional – the Holy Prophet is presented as a guide and exemplar for all who strive to put the declaration into practice. Thus, the *shahada* provides the goal to which man is to aspire (that is, a firm belief in the One true God) and also provides the means (that is, the example of the Holy Prophet) as to how one can achieve it.

Abraham – the “upright”

Another point of interest is the unique word Allah uses to describe Prophet Abraham in the Quran. He is referred to as *hanif*, or “upright.” This term is used repeatedly in the Holy Quran for Prophet Abraham:

And they say: Be Jews or Christians, you will be

on the right course. Say: Nay, (we follow) the religion of Abraham, the **upright** one, and he was not one of the polytheists (2:135).

Abraham was not a Jew nor a Christian, but he was (an) **upright** (man), a Muslim; and he was not one of the polytheists (3:67).

Say: Allah speaks the truth; so follow the religion of Abraham, the **upright** one. And he was not one of the polytheists (3:95).

And who is better in religion than he who submits himself entirely to Allah while doing good (to others) and follows the faith of Abraham, the **upright** one? And Allah took Abraham for a friend (4:125).

Say: As for me, my Lord has guided me to the right path — a right religion, the faith of Abraham, the **upright** one, and he was not of the polytheists (6:161).

Of all the descriptive words used to describe prophets in the Quran, Abraham is uniquely referred to as “upright.” The clear meaning of the attribute is that Prophet Abraham was unwavering in his submission to Almighty Allah, always inclining to the correct state. However, there may be a secondary significance as well. Just as throughout the Quran we see a connection between the physical and the spiritual – material illustrations being used to shed light on spiritual matters – the use of the word “upright” may have a deeper meaning. In the physical evolution of our species, it is the *upright posture* that distinguishes modern/civilized man from its ape-like predecessors. Charts showing the progression of the species over thousands of years, reveal the curvature of the spine dictating how “evolved” the species is at a particular point in history. So too, it appears, that Prophet Abraham being referred to as an “upright” man is an indication to a turning point in mankind’s spiritual evolution. Just as Adam represents a new type of man, the one from whom modern, civilized man progressed, so too it appears that Prophet Abraham represents the existence of unique type of man that possessed the spiritual qualities to comprehend and follow higher spiritual matters, the one from whom later generations would inherit spiritual maturity. The Quran seems to be highlighting Abraham’s unique position in the history of man’s spiritual progression – just as Adam is our father in the physical field, Abraham is our father in the spiritual sphere.

Significance of “Sacrifice” to this celebration

Aside from the call to unity of mankind through the personage of Prophet Abraham, another lesson to be learned from *Eid-ul-Adha* is the true meaning of “sacri-

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fiце.” As we all know, the ceremonial sacrificing of an animal at *Eid-ul-Adha* is only symbolic of killing the animal passions within ones’ self. By willing to sacrifice his only child, Prophet Abraham was sacrificing everything. Remember that Prophet Abraham was given a son at very old age; his son was not only a source of love and affection, but also of strength and economic support. Yet he was willing to sacrifice all this in order to submit to what Allah willed. And this is the true meaning of sacrifice, as we are told in the Quran:

Not their flesh, nor their blood, reaches Allah, but to Him is acceptable observance of duty on your part” (22:37).

Thus, true sacrifice to God is not the offering of food, money or even another’s life, but rather the sincere willingness to submit to His will. Such loyalty to God and not to anything else – not even one’s most basic emotions – is in fact a perfect illustration of a firm belief in the Oneness of God. Nothing, not even the life of his only son, could compete with Abraham’s allegiance to the Creator.

There is also another sacrifice in this story that is often overlooked. When Prophet Abraham was given the vision from God that he interpreted as a request to sacrifice his son, what did he do? Did he simply carry out what he understood needed to be done? No, he went and asked his son for his opinion! He was a father, in a position of authority over his child, yet he consulted with his son and sought his advice. Consulting with others is certainly a sacrifice for it comprises the giving up of power and control. The great principle of *consultation*, the very cornerstone of democracy, was exhibited by Prophet Abraham even under these trying conditions. Every person in a position of authority over others, whether a president of a nation or *Amir* of a *Jamaat*, should learn from this lesson: consulting with and appreciating the opinions of those under your authority is certainly a sacrifice but it can lead to perfect unity. As in the case of Prophet Abraham and his son, it is related: “*both of them submitted.*” Thus, *Eid-ul-Adha* also provides an opportunity to acknowledge the importance of the principle of consultation, a necessary sacrifice for good leadership and a precondition to peace and unity.

Pilgrimage (Hajj) – a practical illustration of “unity” and “sacrifice”

The lessons of *unity* and *sacrifice* that one derives from the *Eid-ul-Adha* observances are all practically manifested in the *hajj*, which occurs during the *Eid-ul-Adha* celebration. People of all nations, colors, socio-economic status’, come together, as equals, standing shoulder to shoulder, as they circumambulate the *kabah* in their simple white sheets offering prayers to the One

God. Can any better example of unity in mankind be presented? Moreover, the pilgrims voluntarily suffer the hardships of the journey, giving up the various normal luxuries one is accustomed to, incurring the costs of travel and experiencing various physical exertions. Indeed, such devotion is unique in the world, a true sacrifice display of sacrifice. The *kabah* itself, the centerpiece of the *hajj*, specifically, is a tribute to the unity of God, for it was cleansed of all 360 idols that were inside it and restored to a place where the One true God was, and is still today, only worshipped. And just as the idols were removed from this structure that is considered the *heart* of Islam, so too is it understood that the purpose of the *hajj* is to sacrifice the idols hidden within own one’s heart as well. Surely, the pilgrimage, one of the five pillars of Islam, a duty incumbent upon every able Muslim, presents an opportunity to put into practice the fundamental lessons learned from the festival celebrating the personage of Abraham.

Conclusion

To end this *khutba*, I would just like to remind you all, and myself especially, that aside from the ritualistic sacrificing of an animal on this occasion in remembrance of Prophet Abraham’s ultimate sacrifice, if we also strive to sacrifice our ego, slaying the animal passions and idols within ourselves, and reaffirm our commitment to submit to God’s will only, we will have truly learned and benefited from the lessons from the story of Prophet Abraham. In the faithful application of this lesson lies the prospect of establishing unity and peace. May Almighty Allah give us the guidance and the strength to put these lessons into practice. *Ameen. Eid Mubarak* (May the blessings of *Eid* be upon you)!

Balancing the Prophet

By Karen Armstrong

[We reproduce here a section of Karen Armstrong’s review, originally published on the *Financial Times* website (April 27, 2007), of Robert Spencer’s book “*The Truth About Muhammad*”. Karen Armstrong, a former nun, and popular contemporary writer on religion, who recently published a biography of the Prophet Muhammad entitled “*Muhammad: a Prophet for our Time*”, has become a prolific spokesperson for advocating the need for the West to reassess its view of the religion of Islam. In her review of “*The Truth About Muhammad*”, Karen Armstrong gives Spencer a lesson on intellectual honesty and provides him with a dose of common sense. She exposes Spencer’s views for what they truly are: an unformed, narrow-minded, and possibly purposefully distorted, understanding of the sub-

ject matter. This short piece is illustrative of her writings in general; she is faithful to objectivity and relies on rationality, clearly distinguishable from the rhetoric expounded by the likes of Spencer who simply regurgitate the same old, outdated anti-Islam arguments of the past albeit wrapped in a new glossy finish.]

Ever since the Crusades, people in the west have seen the prophet Muhammad as a sinister figure. During the 12th century, Christians were fighting brutal holy wars against Muslims, even though Jesus had told his followers to love their enemies, not to exterminate them. The scholar monks of Europe stigmatised Muhammad as a cruel warlord who established the false religion of Islam by the sword. They also, with ill-concealed envy, berated him as a lecher and sexual pervert at a time when the popes were attempting to impose celibacy on the reluctant clergy. Our Islamophobia became entwined with our chronic anti-Semitism; Jews and Muslims, the victims of the crusaders, became the shadow self of Europe, the enemies of decent civilisation and the opposite of “us”.

Our suspicion of Islam is alive and well. Indeed, understandably perhaps, it has hardened as a result of terrorist atrocities apparently committed in its name. Yet despite the religious rhetoric, these terrorists are motivated by politics rather than religion. Like “fundamentalists” in other traditions, their ideology is deliberately and defiantly unorthodox. Until the 1950s, no major Muslim thinker had made holy war a central pillar of Islam. The Muslim ideologues Abu ala Mawdudi (1903-79) and Sayyid Qutb (1906-66), among the first to do so, knew they were proposing a controversial innovation. They believed it was justified by the current political emergency.

The criminal activities of terrorists have given the old western prejudice a new lease of life. People often seem eager to believe the worst about Muhammad, are reluctant to put his life in its historical perspective and assume the Jewish and Christian traditions lack the flaws they attribute to Islam. This entrenched hostility informs Robert Spencer’s misnamed biography *The Truth about Muhammad*, subtitled *Founder of the World’s Most Intolerant Religion*.

Spencer has studied Islam for 20 years, largely, it seems, to prove that it is an evil, inherently violent religion. He is a hero of the American right and author of the US bestseller *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam*. Like any book written in hatred, his new work is a depressing read. Spencer makes no attempt to explain the historical, political, economic and spiritual circumstances of 7th-century Arabia, without which it is impossible to understand the complexities of Muhammad’s life. Consequently he makes basic and

bad mistakes of fact. Even more damaging, he deliberately manipulates the evidence.

The traditions of any religion are multifarious. It is easy, therefore, to quote so selectively that the main thrust of the faith is distorted. But Spencer is not interested in balance. He picks out only those aspects of Islamic tradition that support his thesis. For example, he cites only passages from the Koran that are hostile to Jews and Christians and does not mention the numerous verses that insist on the continuity of Islam with the People of the Book: “Say to them: We believe what you believe; your God and our God is one.”

Islam has a far better record than either Christianity or Judaism of appreciating other faiths. In Muslim Spain, relations between the three religions of Abraham were uniquely harmonious in medieval Europe. The Christian Byzantines had forbidden Jews from residing in Jerusalem, but when Caliph Umar conquered the city in AD638, he invited them to return and was hailed as the precursor of the Messiah. Spencer doesn’t refer to this. Jewish-Muslim relations certainly have declined as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict, but this departs from centuries of peaceful and often positive co-existence. When discussing Muhammad’s war with Mecca, Spencer never cites the Koran’s condemnation of all warfare as an “awesome evil”, its prohibition of aggression or its insistence that only self-defence justifies armed conflict. He ignores the Koranic emphasis on the primacy of forgiveness and peaceful negotiation: the second the enemy asks for peace, Muslims must lay down their arms and accept any terms offered, however disadvantageous. There is no mention of Muhammad’s non-violent campaign that ended the conflict.

People would be offended by an account of Judaism that dwelled exclusively on Joshua’s massacres and never mentioned Rabbi Hillel’s Golden Rule, or a description of Christianity based on the bellicose Book of Revelation that failed to cite the Sermon on the Mount. But the widespread ignorance about Islam in the west makes many vulnerable to Spencer’s polemic; he is telling them what they are predisposed to hear. His book is a gift to extremists who can use it to “prove” to those Muslims who have been alienated by events in Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq that the west is incurably hostile to their faith.

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Roger Bissessar lives and writes in Trinidad & Tobago. He is a qualified Process Engineer (BSC Chemical & Process Engineering) and provides support to motivational and educational programs within the Commonwealth. He is an Associate Member of the Institute of Chemical Engineers (AMIChemE) and a life member of the Guild of Graduates of the University of the West Indies.

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