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Is Shariah immutable? Asghar Ali Engineer

It is believed by millions of Muslims across the world that Sharia laws are immutable and represent divine will. This is based on serious misunderstanding. Sharia is not and cannot be immutable. Recently I was invited to the Jaipur Literary Festival to be part of a panel discussion on the book *Heaven on Earth* by Sadakat Kadri of London, which is on the application of Sharia laws across the Muslim world. He has travelled to different Muslim countries and talked to various ulema and muftis about Sharia as applied to their respective countries. All of them were defenders of conservative Sharia formulations and refused to admit any change. They maintained that Sharia being divine cannot be changed. It is from this rigidity of our ulema that the misunderstanding among common Muslims arises that Sharia is divine and hence immutable. In fact our ulema forget that *ijtihad* was not only permitted but encouraged by the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) and the hadith pertaining to Ma`adh bin Jabal is well-known. When the Prophet appointed him to the governorship of Yemen and he came to take leave of the Prophet, Ma`adh was asked how he would govern. Ma`adh said, according to the Quran. The Prophet thereupon asked what he would do if he did not find the solution to the problem in the Quran, to which Ma`adh said he would govern according to the Sunnah. But when the Prophet asked if he could not find it in the Sunnah also, Ma`adh said `ana af tahidu` (I will exert myself to find the solution). The Prophet thereupon patted his back and told him he was right. All ulema accept this hadith and yet, while theoretically admitting the permissibility of *ijtihad*, refuse to engage in it or allow it saying there is no one capable of doing it. In fact, what is unalterable are the principles and values underlying Sharia ie *usul al-fiqh*. But laws based on these *usul* must undergo change in keeping with changes in the social and cultural context. In fact cultural context plays a very important role in the formulation of Sharia. The Arab *adaat* (customs and traditions) form an important part of Sharia formulations. The late Abdurrahman Wahid, who headed Indonesia's religious organisation *Nahdlatul Ulama* and also served as president of that country, told me once that there was great debate among the ulema of Indonesia over whether Indonesian customs and traditions can become part of Sharia as applicable in that country; those who advocated Indonesian *adaat* ultimately won. Let us remember that what was called the Muslim *ummah* (community) during the Prophet's time was limited to Arabia only. But when Islam spread to different areas the *ummah* was no more confined to the Arabs alone; it also encompassed the Iranians, Uzbeks, Turks, Chinese, Indians and others. Thus there were various linguistic and cultural groups within the fold of Islam. Sharia was influenced by these factors. Thus the *ummah* was no longer a homogenous group but comprised of various cultural communities with their own age-old customs and traditions. However, the values, *magasid* (intentions) and *masalih* (welfare) of human beings did not change. *Magasid al-sharia* and *masalih al-sharia* do not change, but in order to keep these values, *magasid* and *masalih* intact, the rules framed by the ulema must change. When Imam Shafi`i moved from Hejaz to Egypt, which was a confluence of Arab and Coptic cultures, he realised this and changed his position on several issues. However, what I am saying does not apply to *ibadaat* ie matters pertaining to worship, the world hereafter etc but only to matters pertaining to *mu`amalat* ie interpersonal relations like marriage, divorce, inheritance and many other similar socio-economic matters. The most important, of course, among these is matters pertaining to marriage, divorce etc. In Jaipur I spoke mainly on women's position in Sharia and women's position in the Quran. The fact that the venue was packed with people shows the interest women's position in general and that of Muslim women in particular generates. I commented that the book referred to earlier deals with only the status quo and application of Sharia laws of patriarchal and feudalised Islamic societies. It very much misses what I call the transcendental Quranic vision. The Quran gives absolutely equal rights to man and woman without any discrimination. However, the Quran was revealed in a highly patriarchal society which later also became feudalised when the caliphate turned into a feudal empire. Thus patriarchy and feudalism completely distorted the fundamental Quranic vision of gender equality and women's individuality and dignity. Unless we understand these sociological and cultural aspects and relate them to the theological one, we will miss the very revolutionary role which Islam wanted to play in totally transforming women's status. However, it is highly regrettable that Muslim societies could not produce ulema with the capacity to relate sociology with theology. Even in modern and post-modern societies our ulema totally lack a transcendental vision of Islam. They have become prisoners of the past and have frozen Islam in a feudal, patriarchal state. We need theologians with vision to fulfil the Quran's mission of going beyond the present which is full of injustice. Our society is replete with gender injustices and the Quran's central value is

justice justice in all areas of life. Gender justice is as emphatically emphasised as justice in social and economic matters. In order to emphasise gender justice it is high time that we produce female theologians with profound knowledge of the Arabic language. Even the most conservative ulema cannot oppose the concept of female theologians. • The writer is an Islamic scholar who also heads the Centre for Study of Society & Secularism, Mumbai.

The ethical ideal.. Qaisar A.moini..#

IT can be argued that the biggest dilemma confronting the Muslim world currently is a moral and ethical one. The root cause of all the major ills that plague Muslims ignorance, poverty, intolerance, etc is the fact that many of us have failed to apply the practical ethics taught by Islam in our everyday lives. The Quran and Sunnah contain very clear guidelines regarding the construction of an ethical personality. The Almighty desires that each individual reach the exalted station of ashraf al-makhlūqat, the pinnacle of creation. Yet most Muslims are content out of either lack of direction or lack of effort to be counted amongst the *asfala safileen*, or the lowest of the low. The disastrous results of such a course of action are clear for all to see. But what is strange is that in a country like Pakistan, which is so full of religiosity and claims to be an 'Islamic' society, there is a huge moral and ethical vacuum. This either means that the majority of us are hypocrites, or we have not endeavoured far enough into the bottomless oceans of knowledge to seek out the pearls of truth and act upon it. One would like to believe the latter is the case. Considering that Rabiul Awwal, and particularly this day, is linked to the blessed birth of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) that greatest of teachers and possessor of the most sublime morals it would be in order to reacquire ourselves with the examples of moral excellence found in the life of the Messenger. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, in order to improve our own ethical situation we need to go beyond just professing love for the Prophet and try to apply his example to our own lives. Secondly, in the wake of crude attempts by some to malign his impeccable character, Muslims need to practically demonstrate to other communities what it means to be a follower of the Messenger. In other words, burning down our own cities to 'protect' his honour is light years away from the example he has set; building a compassionate, knowledgeable, egalitarian and indeed ethical society is in line with what the Prophet taught. To get a proper idea about the personality of the Prophet, we must consult the traditional primary sources of Islam: the Quran and the authentic hadith. This is important for as Iranian scholar Prof Syed Hossein Nasr argues in his book *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, 'In order to understand the significance of the Prophet it is not sufficient to study from the outside historical texts pertaining to his life. One must view him also from within the Islamic point of view. However, it is also important to consider what those outside of Islam say about the Prophet, especially regarding his moral excellence. While there is much spurious material available in historical texts meant to malign the Prophet's character due partly to Orientalist biases against Islam and partly due to the early controversies regarding the recording of hadith within the Islamic realm there are some truly remarkable and frank admissions from non-Muslim thinkers regarding the Messenger's ethical excellence. For example English historian Edward Gibbon says in *History of the Saracen Empire*, which he co-authored: 'The greatest success of Muhammad's (PBUH) life was effected by sheer moral force without the stroke of a sword.' On the other hand Mahatma Gandhi is quoted to have said: 'I became more .. convinced that it was not the sword that won a place for Islam. ... It was the rigid simplicity, the utter self-effacement of the Prophet, the scrupulous regard for his pledges, his intense devotion to his friends and followers, his intrepidity, his fearlessness, his absolute trust in God and in his own mission. Aside from the words of such luminaries of history, most Muslims have from childhood heard traditions in which the moral excellence and outstanding character of the Prophet have been highlighted. Traditions which speak of his magnanimity towards adversaries, his tenderness towards the weak, the poor and the downtrodden of society, his love of knowledge, his dislike of arrogance and ostentation, his simplicity etc. Yet if we study our own society most of these values are completely absent, despite our claims of love for the Prophet. Instead, what we find here and in most Muslim states is a vicious society steeped in ignorance, malice and exploitation. Justice the foundation upon which an Islamic society is built is completely absent. And those who talk of imposing Sharia present a frightening, mutilated version of Islam, one which is at complete odds with

the Prophet's Islam. This disconnect between what we preach and what we practise must be urgently addressed in order to reform society. The pulpit must be at the forefront of this struggle: instead of focusing on relatively minor issues and fanning differences, society's shortcomings (and their solutions) must be highlighted in mosques. This is admittedly a tall order, but until the pulpit perhaps the most powerful of religious platforms is used to construct a better society, change will not be forthcoming. Going back to what Prof Nasr has written, in the Holy Quran the Almighty announces that He and the angels confer blessings upon the Prophet, going on to order those who believe to do the same ('Surah Ahzab'). Such is the stature of the Noble Messenger that without conferring blessings upon him and his progeny the daily prayers are incomplete. These are clear signs for those who believe that there is no better an example to emulate in order to achieve excellence in this world and the next. • The writer is a member of staff.
18.01.2013

The ethical framework

By Ahmad Raza

SURAH Luqman provides an outline of the Islamic ethical framework. Verses 12 to 19 clearly spell out the indicators of a well-organised ethical framework for everyone. God says in Verse 12 that, "And certainly We gave wisdom to Luqman [and said] be thankful to God. Those who are grateful are grateful [for their own soul]. And whoever denies, then God is free of need and praiseworthy". The innate ethical sense programmed in a human being commands him or her to be thankful to God. This act of thanksgiving makes a person humble and generous to fellow human beings. Those who show compassion and warmth to the creatures of God are the true manifestations of ethical sensibility. The act of thanksgiving purges our egos from feelings of evil and whisperings of all sorts, hate, jealousy, revenge and oppression. This ego-cleansing activity has been termed by the Sufis as takhliya. Some spiritual teachers have made it mandatory upon their students to engage in takhliya every night and prepare a balance sheet and diagnose and rectify in case some evil feelings towards a fellow creature have crept into one's thoughts and feelings. The visible psychological effect of this purging gradually makes an ego recipient to the pain and suffering of fellow creatures. The real value of thanksgiving is thus revealed in one's own ego transforming and becoming humble. The permanent psychological advantage thus lies in humility and not pride and prejudice. It connects a person with God. Then Luqman engages in a conversation with his son from verse 13 onwards. He advises him, "...Do not indulge in an act of association (shirk) with God. Shirk is the greatest injustice". The next verse urges man to be kind to his parents: "...His mother carried him bearing weakness after weakness.... Be thankful to Me and to your parents; to Me is the [final] destination". Parental care is thus incumbent upon a person under all circumstances, except in case one's parents force one to engage in an act of association (shirk) with God. The right of parental care is inalienable because God says that one should keep worldly relations with one's parents in a decent manner even if they force one to indulge in shirk, but one must not engage in it at any cost. The intactness of familial organisation is irreversibly connected to parental care. The sociological implication of ethical sensibility can be seen here very explicitly that bears upon the social foundations of human societies. The act of being thankful to God and one's parents not only cleanses one's ego but keeps the social system healthy, clean and dependable. Verse 16 takes up the problem of evil very squarely. Luqman advising his son says, "Oh son! If the [evil] is equivalent to a mustard seed and remains hidden inside a rock or in the heavens or in the earth, God shall bring it forth. Verily God is subtle and aware". Those who think that they can get away with doing evil or hide it from divine accountability are mistaken. God has made examples of evil individuals and evil civilisations that transgressed and committed tyranny against others. The best practice Luqman advises his son is to stay away from evil. Verses 17 to 19 describe the behavioural attributes of a person which have far-reaching moral, cultural and social consequences for a harmonious and healthy society. Luqman advises, "Oh my son! Establish prayer, and command good and forbid evil and be patient over what befalls you...." The next verse advises "And do not turn thy face away from people and do not walk in insolence on the land. Verily, God does not like the arrogant and the boastful". Verse 19 says that "And be moderate in your pace and lower your voice. Verily the braying of the donkey is the most disagreeable of sounds". The practice of prayer connects one with God. This spiritual connection has a logical corollary: that one practises well and avoids evil in life. This also leads one to be patient and bear the pains, discomfort and

losses in one's life. This patience is then reflected in interpersonal life and psychomotor activities of a person. One walks in harmony and talks with temperance. The attributes outlined by Luqman help create an ethical personality that is likeable. The ethical individual thus created would form the basis of a trust-efficient, interdependent and harmonious social fabric. The ethical and self-aware individuals then turn out to be the building blocks of a socially aware and critical collective. This ethical model is absent from our collective life. Our public discourse and our textbooks promote pedagogy of loud speech, arrogance, complaining, discrimination and impatience etc. Our personality building discourse in classrooms as well as personality testing methods are based on alien ethical concepts. For example, aggressive, competitive and self-confident are considered to be the core values of a successful manager. So management books are replete with examples of 'aggressive managers' who achieved success in their life by subscribing to utilitarian ethics, and which only focus around the notion of self-interest. One must pause here and ask what kind of 'success' one is looking for. Similarly, TV talk shows, which promote loud speech and violent aggression, are highly rated and liked. Thus, our crisis is ethical and not of a political or economic nature. *The writer is a social scientist based at the University of Management and Technology, Lahore.*

Role of the family

ISLAM recognises the importance of the family. It is a natural and fundamental unit of society. If all families of a given society are conscious of their roles and responsibilities in creating and developing healthy, righteous members, then society and subsequently the nation will benefit. We all belong to a family and our nurturing, growth, mindset and character revolve around our family traditions. According to medical science, every child is a carrier of genetic factors of its family. Similarly, it is also evident from social history that many children prefer the vocations of their parents. If a child is born in a politician's or sportsman's family, then it is probable he may become a politician or a sportsman in future to continue the family tradition. Also, if a family is educated with a strong inclination towards a particular religion, then the child is likely to pursue the same tradition. Thus the child is a reflection of the parents and carries forth family traditions. Parents are always concerned about their children. Even prophets have expressed deep concern for their offspring. The Holy Quran refers to Hazrat Ibrahim, who wished that his children may be steadfast on the straight path and be regular in their prayers. He prayed, "My Lord! Make me one who performs prayer and also from my offspring..." (14:40). When Allah granted him leadership (imamah), he asked for the same position for his offspring (2:124). Families in modern times face numerous challenges. Modernisation and urbanisation have totally changed the traditional patterns of family life. People are more conscious and in a hurry to earn more money to improve the quality of material life. No doubt in the present age when the cost of living is high it has become necessary for everyone to contribute towards the family income. But one must not forget the traditional values which are considered essential for family harmony. In an ideal family setting, children get enough attention, quality time, love, guidance and patronage from their elders to build their future lives and similarly, grandparents enjoy respect, good healthcare and financial protection. Nowadays, many parents are busy in their jobs for long hours and children as well as grandparents are often neglected. They feel alienated and some youngsters can develop behavioural problems. Islam does not prohibit the legal ways of earning money, but it does underline a sense of responsibility towards family, society and the ummah at large. The Holy Quran directs believers to "...Ward off from yourselves and your families a fire (Hell) whose fuel is men and stone..." (66:6). Every family wishes for its children to achieve the best in their careers. But certain eternal values whose roots are to be found in all civilisations must be adhered to. For example, the first and foremost requirement of every child is to have his mother's milk at the start of life. Nowadays, many mothers, due to a number of reasons, avoid breastfeeding their children, which results not only in physical weakness of the child but also intellectual and spiritual frailty. The Quran says that mothers should suckle their children for two whole years (2:233). The second requirement is to provide the right environment that makes a child curious, imaginative and ethical. The home should be made a centre of Islamic values where future leadership is nurtured. The parents, as well as other senior members of the family, must avoid abusive language, violence and other unethical practices in the home environment. They should keep their home environment free from unhealthy activities like smoking, drugs and other abuses. At a tender age, many

children do not listen to their parents, but they do try to copy them. If the parents are sincere towards their religion, practising it daily and have a positive attitude towards their neighbours, kith and kin and humanity their children will also acquire the same traits later in life. If parents solve problems by creating understanding through mutual discussion, the children will develop the same method. Another important aspect relates to schooling. It is incumbent upon parents to make sure their children get quality education. Schools are supportive in the overall nurturing of a child, but the main responsibility lies on parents. Children spend a few hours in school, but the majority of their time is spent at home. In the Quran, our worldly life is likened to a sport (6:32); all sports require the spirit of sportsmanship. Likewise, our life is demanding, littered with challenges. Its competitive nature requires consistent and persistent efforts. It is a jihad in Islamic parlance. In other words, one needs exercise to stay healthy, reading and reflection to stay fit intellectually, positive attitude in social interactions to command respect, savings and prudent living to meet economic exigencies and above all the regular practice of religion to strengthen the faith. A cursory look at the present society indicates the alarmingly low level of the ethical standards of our new generation. The burgeoning gap between parents and children has blighted the social fabric and day-to-day incidents of violence and lawlessness require urgent steps to improve the situation. The government has a great responsibility in this regard. For example, it needs to revise the curriculum and make relevant changes. The media, educationists and social scientists also need to contribute by suggesting essential changes to improve the child-parent relationship and strengthen the bonds of family life. The writer is an educationist.

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Is Sharia immutable? By Asghar Ali Engineer

IT is believed by millions of Muslims across the world that Sharia laws are immutable and represent divine will. This is based on serious misunderstanding. Sharia is not and cannot be immutable. Recently I was invited to the Jaipur Literary Festival to be part of a panel discussion on the book *Heaven on Earth* by Sadakat Kadri of London, which is on the application of Sharia laws across the Muslim world. He has travelled to different Muslim countries and talked to various ulema and muftis about Sharia as applied to their respective countries. All of them were defenders of conservative Sharia formulations and refused to admit any change. They maintained that Sharia being divine cannot be changed. It is from this rigidity of our ulema that the misunderstanding among common Muslims arises that Sharia is divine and hence immutable. In fact our ulema forget that ijthad was not only permitted but encouraged by the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) and the hadith pertaining to Ma'adh bin Jabal is well-known. When the Prophet appointed him to the governorship of Yemen and he came to take leave of the Prophet, Ma'adh was asked how he would govern. Ma'adh said, according to the Quran. The Prophet thereupon asked what he would do if he did not find the solution to the problem in the Quran, to which Ma'adh said he would govern according to the Sunnah. But when the Prophet asked if he could not find it in the Sunnah also, Ma'adh said "ana ajtahidu" (I will exert myself to find the solution). The Prophet thereupon patted his back and told him he was right. All ulema accept this hadith and yet, while theoretically admitting the permissibility of ijthad, refuse to engage in it or allow it saying there is no one capable of doing it. In fact, what is unalterable are the principles and values underlying Sharia ie usul al-fiqh. But laws based on these usul must undergo change in keeping with changes in the social and cultural context. In fact cultural context plays a very important role in the formulation of Sharia. The Arab adaat (customs and traditions) form an important part of Sharia formulations. The late Abdurrahman Wahid, who headed Indonesia's religious organisation Nahdlatul Ulama and also served as president of that country, told me once that there was great debate among the ulema of Indonesia over whether Indonesian adaat ultimately won. Let us remember that what was called the Muslim ummah (community) during the Prophet's time was limited to Arabia only. But when Islam spread to different areas the ummah was no more confined to the Arabs alone; it also encompassed the Iranians, Uzbeks, Turks, Chinese, Indians and others. Thus there were various linguistic and cultural groups within the fold of Islam. Sharia was influenced by these factors. Thus the ummah was no longer a homogenous group but comprised of various cultural communities with their own age-old customs and traditions. However, the

values, maqasid (intentions) and masalih (welfare) of human beings did not change. Maqasid al-sharia and masalih al-sharia do not change, but in order to keep these values, maqasid and masalih intact, the rules framed by the ulema must change. When Imam Shafi'i moved from Hejaz to Egypt, which was a confluence of Arab and Coptic cultures, he realised this and changed his position on several issues. However, what I am saying does not apply to ibadaat ie matters pertaining to worship, the world hereafter etc but only to matters pertaining to mu'amalat ie interpersonal relations like marriage, divorce, inheritance and many other similar socio-economic matters. The most important, of course, among these is matters pertaining to marriage, divorce etc. In Jaipur I spoke mainly on women's position in Sharia and women's position in the Quran. The fact that the venue was packed with people shows the interest women's position in general and that of Muslim women in particular generates. I commented that the book referred to earlier deals with only the status quo and application of Sharia laws of patriarchal and feudalised Islamic societies. It very much misses what I call the transcendental Quranic vision. The Quran gives absolutely equal rights to man and woman without any discrimination. However, the Quran was revealed in a highly patriarchal society which later also became feudalised when the caliphate turned into a feudal empire. Thus patriarchy and feudalism completely distorted the fundamental Quranic vision of gender equality and women's individuality and dignity. Unless we understand these sociological and cultural aspects and relate them to the theological one, we will miss the very revolutionary role which Islam wanted to play in totally transforming women's status. However, it is highly regrettable that Muslim societies could not produce ulema with the capacity to relate sociology with theology. Even in modern and post-modern societies our ulema totally lack a transcendental vision of Islam. They have become prisoners of the past and have frozen Islam in a feudal, patriarchal state. We need theologians with vision to fulfil the Quran's mission of going beyond the present which is full of injustice. Our society is replete with gender injustices and the Quran's central value is justice — justice in all areas of life. Gender justice is as emphatically emphasised as justice in social and economic matters. In order to emphasise gender justice it is high time that we produce female theologians with profound knowledge of the Arabic language. Even the most conservative ulema cannot oppose the concept of female theologians.

Vaccinators targeted

RECENTLY we read with great pain that extremists in Pakistan killed several women who were active in administering anti-polio drops to children. Many feel that one of the reasons behind the attacks was that the extremists think an international conspiracy is afoot to reduce the population of Muslims in the world, and the anti-polio drops make a person impotent. Some Muslims and mosque imams in India too thought likewise and in their Friday sermons asked Muslims not to allow social workers to administer anti-polio drops to their children. But in India it was just an appeal. No one was physically harmed, much less killed. In Pakistan the extremists believe in a culture of violence. For them the only solution to their orders being defied is to shoot people dead. For example, Malala Yousufzai was shot — but thankfully survived — because she did not obey the Taliban's call to stop advocating education for girls. Those who kill others in the name of Islam can hardly be called Muslim, let alone pious Muslims. In order to be a pious Muslim one has to be just. The Quran says that "...Do justice, it is closest to piety...." (5:8) How can one claim to observe the norms of justice by killing others? Justice is something most difficult to do. Even for murder we require at least two pious and honest witnesses and to prove rape or fornication we need four such witnesses. One has to make sure, according to Sharia, that before accepting their testimony, the witnesses are honest and pious. Testimony cannot be accepted from just anyone. To kill someone without justification is a great sin. The Quran says that "...Whoever kills a person unless it be for manslaughter or for mischief in the land, it is as though he has killed [the] whole humanity. And whoever saves a life, it is as if he has saved the whole humanity...." (5:32). This is a very important statement of the Holy Book. Life is sacred. It is not so cheap that anyone can kill any other person just like that. If life could be taken by anyone at any time, entire humanity would be wiped out in the course of time. Perhaps the extremists need to ask themselves which rule of Sharia has prescribed that administering anti-polio drops should be punished with death? Besides, this cure did not exist in the early days of the faith. The orthodox elements greatly resist any change in Sharia law even with proper justification, but do not hesitate to change Sharia or invent new laws through false reasoning when it suits

their interests. This is what killing women administering anti-polio drops amounts to. It is pure innovation with false justification. These very extremists would not mind producing and selling drugs through smuggling to buy weapons and destroy thousands of young lives. All intoxicants are strictly prohibited in Islam, particularly liquor and drugs, and yet the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan are known to be producing and smuggling drugs to buy weapons. I have attended an anti-drugs conference in Afghanistan and know how thousands of people are suffering because the Taliban want weapons. Even a number of women are addicted to drugs in Afghanistan. So much for the version of Islam propagated by the Taliban. Also, whoever said that anti-polio doses make men impotent? Have they done any research on that? Or do they believe only in hearsay? To believe in something without confirming its truth is highly condemned by the Quran. The Holy Book calls it zann (suspicion, guess). The Quran condemns zann. In some cases it says it is a sin, in other cases it is described as personal desire and nothing to do with the truth. The Holy Book advises believers to avoid zann as much as possible. If the extremists have proof the anti-polio drops are harmful, let them produce it. Or do they want these young children to be afflicted with polio and remain disabled for life? Life is a beautiful gift from Allah. Do they want this beautiful gift to become an affliction for these young ones? That too on the basis of mere suspicion or guesswork?

Also, this campaign has been launched by the UN to eliminate this curse from earth and make our lives healthier and happier. It is far from aimed at reducing the number of Muslims. Polio doses are being administered throughout the world. The whole of humanity is benefiting from the campaign, particularly in Africa and Asia where most of the world's poor live. Perhaps it is a conspiracy of the Taliban to paralyse the coming generation of Muslims so they live at their mercy and through their charity. There is so much emphasis in the Quran and hadith on knowledge (ilm). Instead of encouraging science and learning Muslim extremists are being ignorant and superstitious. They want to keep Muslims in the darkness of ignorance through the sheer power of the gun.

Muslims are in fact duty-bound to eliminate ignorance and usher in an era of enlightenment. But the Taliban do not want modern education, especially for women, do not want modern medicines and do not want freedom for anyone. Instead they are spreading the gun culture. Is this Islam? We have to produce young Muslims to counter this menace of extremism as it is no less a curse than polio. The writer is an Islamic scholar who also heads the Centre for Study of Society & Secularism, Mumbai.

Plurality of Expression By Muhammad Ali December 28, 2012

RELIGION is viewed as divine inspiration and as guidance for the salvation of human beings. When the divine message, which reveals itself through allegorical and symbolic language, is understood and practised by people in different contexts with different focuses, the understanding appears in the form of multiple interpretations. Hence, in the presence of multiple expressions, if a particular interpretation is considered 'the' interpretation instead of 'an' interpretation and when attempts are made to impose it through force, it causes conflict and polarisation in society. According to William Chittick, an eminent scholar in Islamic learning, Islam appeals to different dimensions of human needs such as the mind (intellectual), the heart (spiritual) and the body (rule and law). Historically, Islam has been understood differently by different groups of people. For example, the theologians and philosophers put emphasis on the intellectual aspect (mind), the Sufis focused on the spiritual dimension (heart) and the jurists paid attention to the legal aspect of Islam. In the formative period of Islam, there were major developments in different areas of human knowledge in the Muslim world such as theology, philosophy, jurisprudence, Sufism, art, architecture and science. Those developments are considered a valuable contribution of Muslims to human civilisation. It shows that in the early period of Islam, Muslim societies were considerably flexible and open to studying religion through different perspectives. The diverse exegeses of the Holy Quran during that period reflect people's interest in understanding Islamic teachings with the help of prevailing knowledge and science. Society then was also comparatively open to learning from other traditions. For instance, during that period Greek philosophy and science was given considerable attention. The books of Greek philosophers were translated into Arabic and conscious efforts were made to relate them to Islamic thought. Hence this trend of seeking knowledge from

different sources helped Muslims to develop an environment where different views could be tolerated and accepted. Today, we live in a globalised and multicultural society. This society demands a paradigm of thinking which leads to appreciation of multiple perspectives. In this context, we can learn from the formative period in order to develop a culture of tolerance and acceptance of the plurality of views. There is a need to re-examine our way of thinking and argument, which is mostly influenced by Hellenistic logic. This logic basically encourages debate and rejection instead of understanding and appreciation. Maltese thinker Dr Edward de Bono has called this way of argument 'rock logic' based on the paradigm 'I am right, you are wrong', which leads to conflict and polarisation. Today, we require a 'water logic' that encourages understanding of different perspectives through dialogue. Today we need the culture of dialogue rather than debate. Dialogue leads to understanding of different perspectives with a win-win approach. Debate can lead to rejection with a winlose mindset. From the debate approach it is difficult to develop the culture of harmony and coexistence in a diverse society like Pakistan. In understanding religion we need to adopt the paradigm of a humble student rather than a proud scholar. When religion is approached with humility, it helps one realise that human attempts to understand the divine message cannot be the final or absolute understanding; rather, a continuous effort is required. On the other hand when religion is approached with scholastic vanity, one tends to reject other perspectives. In such a rigid environment learning stops and stagnation prevails. In this regard, Maulana Rumi's allegory about the elephant is very powerful in understanding attitudes towards the truth. According to Rumi, once an elephant was brought to a place where people had not seen such an animal before. The elephant was put in a dark room and six people were asked to touch the creature and describe it. The first man touched the elephant's leg and reported that the unknown phenomenon was similar to a tree trunk. The second man touched the elephant's stomach and said that the elephant was like a wall. The third man touched the elephant's ear and asserted that the phenomenon was precisely like a fan. The fourth man touched the elephant's tail and described the beast as a piece of rope. The fifth man felt the elephant's tusks and declared the phenomenon to be a spear. The sixth person touched the elephant's snout and announced the phenomenon was a snake. The six men started arguing to prove their observation to be correct. However, when the elephant was brought out from the dark room all of them were surprised. They had touched only one part of the elephant but assumed they had absolute knowledge about the creature. Similarly, we understand one aspect of faith and view it as the absolute understanding. Developing a culture of dialogue and acceptance of the plurality of expression is not an easy job. In this regard education, media and other social institutions can play a vital role to inculcate the culture of acceptance and appreciation of plural interpretations. In short, our society today is facing critical challenges in the form of violence and polarisation. There is a dire need to understand that we cannot eliminate the differences which have been part of our history. Rather, we need to learn to live with the differences by accepting and celebrating them. In this regard we need to develop new lenses to look at the plurality of expression.

The symbol of Adam

THE Quranic discourse on the nature of Adam is multilayered and symbolic. It ranges from biological to metaphysical dimensions connected to the existence of Adam. But the most important aspect of the Quranic discourse is the unveiling of the spiritual dimension of Adam. God addresses the angels and reveals His intention that He has decided to send Adam as His representative on earth (2:30). The angels collectively object to this selection on the grounds that Adam will shed blood on earth and create disorder. God replies to this angelic objection by saying that "...I know which you know not". Then Adam, on orders from God, demonstrates his competence to comprehend everything and name things micro as well as macro (2:31-32). The biological Adam became the spiritual Adam when the divine touch was applied to him (7:11). Therefore Adam became a perfect combination of knowledge, soul and desire. It was the desiring aspect of Adam which made him vulnerable to the allurements of Satan (Iblis). Adam and Eve tasted the fruit of the forbidden tree; this revealed the deviant dimension of their self, rooted in their biological structure, which led to disobedience and compromise on their immortality. This also revealed the dialectical aspect of Adam's nature. That he was capable of unleashing good and evil from the core of his being simultaneously. That now he has to rediscover lost immortality by a subtle synthesis of knowledge, soul and desire. This was the beginning of the historical Adam on earth. Shaikh-ul-Akbar Mohyieddin Ibn al-Arabi in his book *Fusus-ul-Hikam* has opined

that God chose Adam to be His representative on earth because he (Adam) reflected the essential attributes of the divine in his cosmological design. He was chosen by God to be the microcosm for the entire creative process. He was the mirror of realities in which the possibilities of the macrocosm (cosmos and its constituents) perfectly found expression. The microscopic and macroscopic dimensions of the cosmological processes are programmed in his very being. The key to this cosmic treasure chest lies within the very being of Adam. His ontological attributes, which include knowledge, soul and desire, equip him sufficiently to engage with all levels and all forms of cosmic realities. The strife between good and evil is primordial. It co-evolved with the very origin of the tribe of Adam on earth. The first blood was shed by the son of Adam. Cain murdered Abel. He did this because his nature was a combination of knowledge and desire. He was after power and domination. Abel refused this killing allurements because his nature was a combination of knowledge and soul. He let his brother kill him because he had an innate sense of empathy, altruism and self-sacrifice. This was the first historical scuffle of good and evil. The subsequent history of the race of Adam bears testimony to the dialectical engagement of self-corruption and self-purification, between accumulation and distribution of wealth and between hate and love. According to the Biblical narrative, Cain thus founded the first city. The city became a symbol of inequality, domination and control of fellow men. On the contrary, Abel's worldview of a nomadic life upheld equality, sharing and empathy as the basis of human existence on earth. Most of the social, economic and political problems of the tribe of Adam on earth are connected with eternal struggles between the two opposing worldviews. Slavery, violence, genocide, oppression and accumulation of wealth are the legacy of the tribe of Cain. Peace, meditation, freedom, spiritual liberation and mutual sharing of economic resources are the characteristic attributes of the tribe of Abel. Those who follow the worldview of Abel may not be millionaires, but they are more close to their self, more peaceful at heart and more kind and generous to their fellow brothers and sisters. Whatever they possess — social or economic capital — is open for all. They share it with all human beings without any discrimination on the basis of colour, race, language, sex and nationality. They rise at midnight and pray to God. They seek forgiveness and mercy from God. They tremble at the thought that they might have been unjust to someone and seek guidance from God. The cultural contradictions of our age are also rooted in our historical legacy. The desire to control the entire resources of the earth is ceaseless and unending. The power to dominate and enslave people is abundant. The combination of knowledge and desire has become the dominant paradigm of our global civilisation. Those who fit into the 'myth of competitive advantage' are allowed to exist. Those who cannot must carry the burden. They must suffer and perish. One can witness the global economic peril of inequality in societies of Asia, Africa and Latin America. On the other hand, much of the global wealth and resources are controlled by a few nations of the world. This time around the tribe of Cain has arrived on the bandwagon of globalisation. The external impetus to this is provided by meek nations who let the powerful take control of their economy, agriculture, manpower and natural resources. The internal strength to this mammoth economic giant is injected by the almighty multinational corporations, the unequal control of knowledge and technology, the powerful neo-capitalism of global stocks and share markets, and the marketisation of pleasure by all sorts of objects, foodstuffs, brands, beliefs and bodies. The indomitable footprint of the tribe of Cain is everywhere.

Islam on good governance

NO nation can dream of development without good governance. It is an essential prerequisite for all state and non-state organisations to abide by the principles of good governance in order to move forward and attain the goal of public welfare. At the state level, it is considered important and connected with a nation's overall development and its sustainability. People cannot make progress unless they follow the principles of good governance. Good governance is a culture that makes people act responsibly, thoughtfully and conscientiously. They behave with restraint and avoid abuse of power. People in authority act within the parameters of the law and take upon themselves the country's concerns and hardships. They remain impersonal in the discharge of their duties and imperturbable in front of critics. They respect popular will but never go beyond their tether. Unfortunately, during the course of Muslim history we have hardly seen any worthwhile examples of good governance. The majority of Muslim lands remained under dynastic rule; most rulers were despots, self-serving and a law unto themselves. Their princes used to fight for the throne and

their infighting often led outsiders to invade. They were least concerned about the welfare of their subjects. Common people had very limited access to the corridors of power. However, we have a shining example when the Holy Prophet (PBUH) became head of the state of Madina and exemplified good governance. He created a bond of brotherhood among the Muslim citizens, concluded agreements with non-Muslims and remained concerned about their welfare. He upheld the Islamic value system in which justice remains central. He declared that all humans are the offspring of Adam and that there is no difference between Arab and non-Arab (Ajam). Islam is a religion which guides us in all aspects of human life. Our value system originates mainly from the Holy Quran and our progress is forever dependent on its application. We find a number of Quranic injunctions considered to contain the essentials of good governance. First is the concept of amanah (trust). Allah says that to Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on earth. Every human being is a trustee on earth. All his possessions, including health, wealth, livelihood, power and status belong to Allah. One who performs his or her duties honestly and diligently is upholding his amanah. Allah enjoins believers to "...Betray not Allah and His Messenger, nor betray knowingly your amanah [things entrusted to you and all the duties which Allah has ordained for you]" (8:27). In the light of this concept, no one in authority is absolute; one has to remain answerable to his conscience. Another important principle of good governance is that the ruler must be sincere and of impeccable character. He must consider himself not a ruler but a servant. Similarly, he should be mindful of his every act, that it should not harm his subjects. Those who transgress their limits are the most disgraceful, and the Quran refers to them as zalimoon. Merit is also one of the important principles of good governance, whereby all appointments in state and non-state organisations are made on the basis of competence. Every human is born with certain inherent competencies and those who actualise their competencies with hard work, integrity and honesty get a premium. Nature rewards them for being active and hardworking. The Quran says "And that man can have nothing but what he does" (53:39). In meritocratic societies people upgrade themselves professionally and grow economically due to their performance, competence and ability. Islam encourages Muslims to acquire knowledge and occupy the best position in their societies. We read the life story of Hazrat Yousuf who was in captivity but was called to head the food ministry because of his high degree of competence and knowledge. He was thus able to prevent the impending famine. Here knowledge became fundamental in governance. Many Western societies are ahead of us because of knowledge and it is the demand of the present time that our parliament and all lawmaking and law-enforcing bodies be occupied by knowledgeable people. Similarly, the concept of taqwa is also closely linked to good governance. It is an all-inclusive concept which says that every believer should be mindful of Allah's omnipresence and be aware of accountability. We live in the constant presence of Allah. No act goes unrecorded and no one escapes the accountability of his or her doings. If a public servant develops such a sense of Allah's presence in his mind and heart, it would result in peace and well-being in society. The absence of taqwa in any society often leads towards unethical practices. For example, our present-day society is in the grip of widespread corruption. This is the result of poor governance over the years. When a politician submits a fake degree to stand in elections, when a police party kills a person in a fake encounter, when a businessman evades taxes, when a builder uses outdated material, when a teacher skimps on class work in order to sell his time privately and when a doctor recommends a drug to gain commission from a pharmaceutical firm then the concept of taqwa is grossly violated. The foundations of society are undermined and the nation's future is ruined. Many think they will escape judgement but the Quran says "And We have fastened every man's deeds to his neck and on the Day of Resurrection We shall bring out for him a book which he will find wide open" (17:13). The writer is an educationist.

Women's access to holy places by Asghar Ali Engineer 7, December 2012

RECENTLY a women's organisation in Mumbai, the Akhil Bhartiya Muslim Mahila Association, conducted a survey and found that in 18 Sufi mausoleums women are prohibited from entering the astana, or sanctum sanctorum, in which they were previously allowed. Main among these mausoleums is the Haji Ali dargah, which is highly popular among non-Muslims as well. Hundreds of non-Muslims, particularly Hindus, can be seen visiting this dargah. The report was released to the press and caused a furore. It became a hot topic of discussion attracting full media attention. A number of newspapers and TV channels began focusing on why women cannot enter mausoleums and mosques. Is it really prohibited? And if so why and on whose authority?



In fact for everything Muslim maulvis and maulanas rush to consult hadith, and if something is stated in the hadith they follow it without question. They do not want to understand that even if a hadith is authentic it has a context and the Prophet (PBUH) said something in a particular context. Our ulema simply quote hadith completely ignoring the context. According to some scholars, it was for this reason that the Prophet discouraged people from collecting hadith as he knew it would cause a lot of problems after his passing. Naturally, when the press questioned some ulema about prohibiting women from entering dargahs they promptly quoted hadith and said since it is prohibited in the traditions they cannot do otherwise. In fact they were not even honest enough to state that the whole issue is controversial. Some quote hadith from Imam Bukhari saying it is prohibited while some quote hadith from Muslim saying it was prohibited but later on the Prophet allowed it. In fact the Holy Prophet had prohibited women from entering cemeteries because some women would embrace the graves of their loved ones and wail. The Prophet always discouraged excessive weeping, wailing and breast-beating and encouraged dignified ways of grieving. Women were found to be grieving in such a manner more than men and hence the Prophet discouraged women from entering cemeteries but later allowed it if they visited graves in a dignified way. But many ulema (aslaf), who thought that women are weak and unable to control themselves, ignored this later tradition of the Prophet and treated it as an absolute ban and enforced it wherever they could.

The Prophet was very humane and had asked women to avoid going to cemeteries out of consideration, but some of his followers treated it as an absolute ban. There is no other reason for banning entry of women in cemeteries and in fact they are as much entitled to enter cemeteries and visit the graves of their loved ones as men. One maulana even went to the extent of saying that women's entry to dargahs is banned as when women enter a dargah they (the Sufi saints buried there) see them unclothed. There is a limit to absurdity of belief. How could the saints, who strictly controlled their passions during their lifetimes, give in to temptation and be disturbed by women after their deaths? Religion is something noble and transcendent and should not be stretched to such absurd lengths. Such comments show the intellectual level of some people. In fact, instead of raising ourselves to the high moral level of religion we drag it down to our lowly thinking. I need not repeat here that the Quran has accorded equal dignity to women. In South Asia women are not allowed to enter mosques whereas they are allowed everywhere else, including the holiest mosque, the Kaaba, where men and women pray together and perform the tawaf (circumambulation) of the Kaaba together. The Prophet clearly has said that do not stop Allah's female servants from entering His house, yet our ulema do not allow them to enter mosques. Is it not because of their misogyny? I asked one maulana if Friday prayers were obligatory for women and should they not pray in mosques on Friday as men do? He said they should but then who would cook the afternoon meal if women were in the mosque? The maulana did not even know that under the rules of maintenance it is for a man to either serve cooked food to his wife or pay for a cook, as per the Fatawa-i-Alamgiri. The Quran, through its teachings, has tried to take us beyond the status quo so that women could realise their full potential and dignity but men, with their hardened patriarchal attitudes, have not been ready to accept gender equality as it hurts their male ego. Hence through various means men have managed to lower women's dignity to pre-Islamic levels. The Islamic world has an unenviable record as far as women's rights are concerned. If Muslims are serious about Islamic teachings it is high time they raise themselves to the level of the Quran and accord women what is due to them. The Quran and hadith both lay great stress on acquiring knowledge (ilm) and yet our ulema have issued fatwas instructing believers not to teach women beyond what is necessary to perform their obligatory rituals like prayers etc. It is a matter of great shame and the earlier we rectify things the better it would be for us. Women's education and high status is a sine qua non for our progress. •

The Value of Prayer. By Ahmed Raza0, November 2012

PRAYER constitutes the kernel of human existential reality. The act of prayer links every human being with God.

The core of the human self overcomes its immense loneliness in this universe by engaging in the act of prayer. Every word uttered during this act liberates us from fear and pain. However, the most important attribute of prayer resides in its ability to let us become part of the great cosmological interdependence created by God. Our prayers put us in direct communication not only with the Absolute Being, but also other creatures of the world. Prayers are as necessary a part of human existence as the rising of the sun for the general sustainability of life on earth. The cognitive programmes of the human self are so coded by God that man likes to connect with this ultimate reality in the darkness of night. Do the words whispered and spoken loud or resonating in hearts have any consequences? They do seem to possess an affective and cognitive importance. Clinical research published in the International Journal of Clinical Practice has shown that repetitive and sequential cueing to human infants makes them respond to those stimuli. These infants respond to sequences of laughter and anger. Psychologist Jean Piaget has also conducted studies with children on their concept of God. He has argued that children relate to God the way they relate to and understand their parents. Their understanding of God is connected to and shaped by their understanding of their parents and their role in their life. However, they experience a transformation in their cognition of God when they realise the 'fallibility' of their parents. They start associating omniscience and omnipresence with the being of God. In fact, praying to God is nothing but a psychological reflection of our childhood cognitive resonances with that living reality, which gives meaning and broader relevance to our finite being within the general scheme of the cosmos. We are grounded in our prayers. This removes from ourselves the burdens of personal, cultural and historical incongruities. The Quran also points to this cognitive programming of the human ego to reach out for God. In one of the verses of the Holy Book, God speaks to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and informs human beings that if they shall seek Him, their prayers shall be answered. God hears the call of human beings and responds to them. Prayer thus creates an ontological relationship between the human and the divine. The words uttered in the darkness of midnight with joyful pain in the heart and tears in the eyes make a person the centre of the cosmic design. His heart resonates with the divine. Prayer also indicates that there is a cosmic register which records our joys and pains without any alteration. The Quranic verse, '...We are closer to him [man] than [his] jugular vein' (50:16) testifies to this effect. Where else should human beings look for the healing of their pains, fears and losses, if not to the 'Closest One'? We discover when the moment of death arrives that we spent our entire lifetime seeking worldly status, power and money. We were enamoured with childhood games and chased butterflies which were never meant for us. All religious traditions of the world have been engaged with this ceaseless desire to communicate with the living reality of the world. The Hindu yogi, the Buddhist bhiksu, the Christian monk and the Muslim fakir all have yearned over the ages to understand the cosmic soul and find effective ways and means to establish grounds of communication. Some through self-mortification, some through meditation, some through sheer solitude and some through invocation have established authentic psychological practices which not only enlighten one's ego but help in linking with the living reality of the cosmos. The energy which is experienced by the praying ego can also be felt by other creatures of the world. The Quran testifies to this fact by telling us that the birds would join Prophet Daud in his prayers (38:17-20). The Quran consistently through the exemplars of the prophets teaches every human being how to pray, using what words and at what time and seek which of God's blessings. One can read in the Quranic text prayers for seeking forgiveness, prayers for thanksgiving, prayers for seeking knowledge, prayers for moral and spiritual growth, prayers for peace and purity of heart, prayers for bounty and giving, prayers for learning to worship God, and prayers for protection from the hidden evil of the world. Everything in the world knows its forms of prayer and remembrance of God. Prayer leads our ego to the centre of our being which is nothing but a continuous participation in the cosmic nexus of eternity, life and immortality. According to the mystic Abdul Karim Naqshbandi, the words uttered during prayer and invocation from the lips of a mortal (man) makes him immortal and eternal because of the very intensity and energy of these words. The mystic Bayazid Bustami states that God lives in the broken heart of a praying ego while Jalaluddin Rumi says in his famous Masnavi that the rhythmic beats of the goldsmith's instruments are nothing but the reverberations of the living and praying heart. The midnight prayers and solitary weeping do

make a difference. They link us to the only true source of all life the eternal and living God. • The writer is a social scientist based at the University of Management and Technology, Lahore.

Thoughts on Haj **By Nikhat Sattarov 23, 2012**

The pilgrimage to Makkah, a much desired goal in life for most Muslims, had always seemed a distant probability. It was surprising then that when a sudden decision was made to perform Haj this year, I agreed without any trepidation. The first six days in Makkah were peaceful. The next few days spent in Madina, mostly at the Masjid-i-Nabavi, the initial structure of which was laid by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), are a treasured memory and showed Islam in all its diversity. People from literally every country in the world stood up for each of the five daily prayers, but several had different ways of performing these. The Quran was available in several languages, including in Braille. Particularly visible were both young and old hajis from Central Asian countries. It was both touching and a lesson in humility to watch a young woman from Dagestan and an older one from Indonesia communicate using sign language. People visit the holy places to find solace, seek absolution, peace and strength. Everyone finds something or the other, and returns with a passion for another trip. We had our first exposure to the single-minded ferocity of crowds during the first tawaf. Televised pictures show a sea of humankind moving in almost rhythmic and circular waves. As you move towards the Maqam-i-Ibrahim or try to get a closer look at or touch the Hajr-i-Aswad, you will be pushed and pulled in all directions unless you can maintain your feet on the ground. With bruised arms and an almost ruptured kidney, I was able to recognise groups from certain countries and steered away from them during later tawafs. Perhaps the most painful experience was the failed trip to the Riaz-ul-Jannah in the Masjid-i-Nabavi, located next to the resting place of the Prophet. The graves of Hazrat Abu Bakr and Hazrat Umar are located next to that of the Prophet, while the Riaz-ul-Jannah, as its name suggests, is said to be one of the gardens in heaven. I expected a quiet place of dignity, silence and contemplation, where people would stand in reverence, with bowed heads, recite the salaam and slowly walk away. What one found instead was mayhem, physical fights between overzealous pilgrims who wanted to get ahead and poorly equipped volunteers who beseeched the unruly crowd to remember where they were. Women chanted loudly and pushed with all their might. Was this the behaviour of people who revered and loved their benefactor? Could the authorities not have helped by posting signs requesting silence, putting barriers for some sort of queues, or by posting more and better trained women instead of just two to manage hundreds of people? Also, one had not realised how the sanitation system and lack of facilities would put pressure on our frail human physique. The Saudi government needs to be lauded for its monumental efforts each year to facilitate the increasing number of pilgrims. But it may be even more important to pay attention to the quality of facilities. The camps at Mina were crowded, badly planned with inadequate sanitation services, made worse by extremely poor civic sense and lack of communal spirit among the pilgrims. For the three nights, we survived on sips of water and a few biscuits. People ate and threw garbage everywhere, and not even once were the toilets, the bins or the pathways cleaned. We spent the compulsory few hours each day in Mina standing or sitting outside, or walking along the streets away from the camps. Outside, people sat, slept and ate alongside piles of rubbish. South Asians in general and Pakistanis in particular demonstrated their worst attributes in two aspects. One was their almost total disregard for cleanliness of any sort. The other was complete lack of discipline in making lines and queuing up for food, tokens or getting on or down from a bus. Haj, it seemed, has also become an accomplishment, to be attached to names, displayed in homes and bragged about in public. Many, if not all, were busy taking videos and photographs of each other in various poses, including in extending their hands for dua. It was a social and religious symbol of piety, and pictures had to be taken to prove this. The books we were provided with before departure contained strictures for women not to mingle with groups of men and to keep to themselves. However, nowhere did we find any instructions telling men how to behave towards women. All training sessions were conducted by men, and issues related specifically to women were addressed in detail by them. Despite the number of women exceeding that of men, the facilities for women were less adequate, poorer in quality, particularly in the way of toilets, washing and ablution places, prayer areas and arrangements to hear and participate in

duas.Makkah, Madina, but most of all the Kaaba are magical places. Haj itself is a magical experience. To gain from it as much as possible, one needs to be considerate, quiet, clean and have an environment that facilitates dignity.Haj organisers and would-be hajjis would do well to undertake training in communal living, proper behaviour in mosques and sacred places, cleanliness and waiting for their turns, and above all, consideration for others. Perhaps we can then hope for the spirit of Haj and Islam to be revived.

Contracts recognised in Islam Sidrah Unis #

BUSINESS enterprise and market mechanism are more often than not governed by a set of rules and regulations which not only entail a system of profit and loss sharing but also lay down a clear cut mode of accountability, sureties, guarantees and the works.So, a complex system evolves whereby business, be it in the form of trade and commerce, industry, agriculture or banking for that matter can be carried out smoothly and efficiently. At the core of every such structure, regardless of its size, so put up, lies a contract or innumerable contracts which define the work relationship between associates.Islam recognises a contract and enjoins fulfilment of promises entered into through it, "O you who believe! When you contract a debt for a fixed period, write it down. Let a scribe write it down in justice between you..." (2282; "O you who believe! Fulfil (your) obligations." (501); "... fulfil (every) covenant. Verily, the covenant will be questioned about." (1734).In order for a contract to be valid in Islam, certain conditions have to be satisfied. First and foremost, the contracting parties should be legally competent to enter into a contract. A person is legally competent if he or she is an adult and sane. A contract essentially involves an offer and an acceptance. Further, the subject matter of the contract must be lawful. Keeping in view public good and for the purpose of discouraging unethical investments, Islam has forbidden dealing in commodities declared haram i.e. commodities like pork, wine, drugs, etc., whose use and consumption has been forbidden to Muslims.The agreement should not involve gharar or risk referring to transactions wherein the characteristics of the subject matter itself are not certain or clearly laid down be it with regard to form or quantity so such a deal involves an element of risk similar to gambling.The Prophet (pbuh) has forbidden the purchase of the unborn animal in its mother's womb, the sale of milk in the udder without measurement, the purchase of spoils of war prior to their distribution, the purchase of charities prior to their receipt, and the purchase of the catch of a diver. The last prohibition pertains to payment for whatever a diver may catch on his next dive. This has been prohibited because the payer does not know what he is paying for. Also, any contract wherein the element of riba, be it express or implied, is present has been strictly forbidden.Riba literally means `increase.` In Shariah, it is an addition over and above the principal amount i.e. paying money for the use of money. The Holy Quran and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet expressly prohibit riba. "And that which you give in gift (to others), in order that it may increase (your wealth by expecting to get a better one in return) from other people`s property has no increase with Allah..." (3039).The contract should have clarity and the contracting parties should be honest and avoid any form of concealment; "And mix not truth with falsehood, nor conceal the truth..." (242). Islam has also forbidden entering into a transaction when it would prove detrimental to the interests of another person already entering the same. The Holy Prophet once said "A person should not enter into a transaction when his brother is already making a transaction and should not make a proposal of marriage when his brother has already made a proposal except when he gives permission."On the whole, any condition or term of contract which does not conform to Islamic laws makes the contract invalid. It has been reported that Burairah came to Aisha and said, "My people (masters) have written the contract for my emancipation for nine ounces of gold to be paid in yearly instalments, one ounce per year; so help me." Aisha replied "if your masters agree, I will pay them the whole sum provided the allegiance will be for me." Burairah's masters refused the offer.When the Holy Prophet came to know of this he told Aisha, "Buy Burairah and stipulate that her allegiance will be for them, as the allegiance is for the slave-freer." Aisha did so. Later, the Holy Prophet addressed the people and said, "What is wrong with some people who stipulate things which are not in Allah's laws? Any condition which is not in Allah's laws is invalid even if there were a hundred such conditions. Allah's rules are the most valid and Allah's conditions are the most solid. The allegiance is for the slave-freer."Broadly categorised, the following are some forms of contract recognised in Islam.Shirkah In this form of contract, the contracting parties enter into a joint investment in a business enterprise and share

profits and losses. The former is shared equitably in accordance with the agreement whereas the latter is shared in proportion to the capital invested. **Wadiyah** This is a contract whereby any object or deposit is kept for safe keeping with a person who is not its owner. The depository in this case becomes the guarantor and guarantees return of the object or deposit to the depositor when he so demands it. **Bay** This is an agreement between two parties i.e. the buyer and the seller whereby ownership of property is transferred from one person to another at a price. This includes a contract of exchange whereby ownership of a commodity is transferred from one party to another in exchange of another commodity as agreed to between the parties, the same being trade by barter system. **Ijarah** It literally means 'to give something on rent.' This is of two kinds. Firstly, it refers to hiring of services of another person where wage serves as a consideration. Simply put, it covers the contractual relationship of an employer and an employee. The employer is referred to as 'musta'jir' whereas the employee is called 'ajir'. The second case, which is analogous to leasing, refers to transferring the usufruct of a certain property to another on payment of rent. The lessor is called 'mu'jir' whereas the lessee is called 'musta'jir'. **Ariyah** This is a gratuitous loan of an object to another for a specific period of time after passing of which the item so loaned is returned to the lender. **Rahn** Also called collateralised borrowing, a debtor in this case places a valuable asset in the custody of the creditor as collateral for debt incurred. In case of default in payment by the debtor, the creditor can dispose of the collateral.

Civilisation and religion By Muhammad Ali | 11/16/

THE study of religion has been a phenomenon of interest. It is because of this curiosity that historically different perspectives have been developed to understand, interpret and extract meaning from religious concepts and practices. Some of the dominant approaches have been theological, jurisprudential, spiritual etc. However, with developments in human knowledge, particularly with the emergence of the disciplines of sociology and anthropology, the civilisational or cultural perspective has become a dominant feature in the study of religion. Broadly speaking, the civilisational or cultural perspective attempts to understand religious concepts and practices through cultural viewpoints and expressions. According to this perspective, faith cannot be exercised in a cultural vacuum. Rather, it needs a context. Therefore, faith and culture are integrated. Where religious concepts shape the culture of a society, religion gets influenced by culture. Hence to understand religion one needs to explore and reflect on the multidimensional expressions such as literature, music, art, architecture, philosophy etc. of a culture or society. Islam is a revealed religion with a long and dynamic history. During its extended history, Islam has voyaged through different societies and inspired them. The inspirations from the divine message have been expressed differently in various contexts. The colourful expressions of Muslim societies can be observed in their rich cultural/intellectual heritage such as literature, architecture, art, calligraphy, theology, philosophy and so on, that they have contributed to civilisation. The civilisational dimension of Islam has received less attention from academia in comparison to the theological dimension. Even today Islam is discussed narrowly following the mediaeval logical approach. The majority of educational institutions in the Muslim world are still concentrating on the theological aspect in their study of Islam. However, a few institutions and individuals are making conscious efforts to include the cultural dimension of Islam in the areas of research and study. For instance, Marshall Hodgson's book *The Venture of Islam* is one of the examples that explore Islam as a civilisation rather than a set of theological, abstract concepts. Why do we need the cultural approach to study Islam? This perspective may be significant for different reasons. First, this approach provides a broader perspective to look at a religion. It does not focus on one area. Rather, it encompasses all the activities taking place in a society. It does not judge the different cultural expressions. Rather, it explores them to understand. It encourages making space for differences by appreciating the diverse expressions. Secondly, this approach attempts to understand the process of cultural and religious diversity in society. Today, in many Muslim societies the question of 'pure' culture is emerging as a challenge. Sometimes certain cultures are seen as superior or more Islamic and efforts are made to impose these on others by force. This question has created internal polarisation among different groups of people. There is a dire need to understand that cultural purity is a relative concept and one culture cannot fit all Muslims across the world. The context matters in different aspects of life such as clothing, food and

housing. For example, living in a desert area demands different clothes and food as compared to people living in mountainous areas. The cultural approach provides space for people to tolerate and appreciate differences rather than put others down by force. Hence, it would be helpful for Muslims to understand each other and reduce the conflict within Muslim societies. Thirdly, the cultural approach is important to learn from history how Muslims responded to challenges in the past in different contexts. It would be helpful in identifying and analysing the factors that support or contain a society's development and progress. It will lead towards devising new responses for emerging challenges rather than only depending on the past. Furthermore, this perspective provides an opportunity to people to understand the interaction between different civilisations and faiths. Historically, civilisations have interacted and negotiated with each other. Where there are differences among civilisations there are many commonalities as well. The process of studying religion through the cultural perspective facilitates understanding and creates harmony between different faiths and civilisations. The civilisational approach will be helpful for Muslims as well as others to understand the common ground for coexistence. In addition, the civilisational approach also encourages learners to be creative in learning from the past and applying it to the present. This approach leads the learner to move from the domain of memorisation to comprehension, application and creation. Ultimately, as a creative approach it leads to a higher level of learning and understanding. This perspective also includes the practices of common people. Historically, it has been observed that while exploring the history of religion mostly the elites and rulers have been in focus while the common people have been left out. Thus the civilisational perspective in studying religion is a more inclusive one. In sum, today we are living in a complex and multicultural world. Such a world demands creative and inclusive approaches to understand the complex issues of contemporary societies. We need to reflect on our understanding of religion in order to reconcile it with the challenges of the contemporary world. In this regard the civilisational approach can be instrumental in bringing a fresh outlook to understanding and reinterpreting religious concepts and practices. We need to include this perspective in our curriculum along with other traditional approaches. It will help our younger generation to understand their religion in a broader perspective, particularly in comprehending the importance of context in religion. • The writer is an educator.

Civilisation and religion By Muhammad Ali 16, November 2012

THE study of religion has been a phenomenon of interest. It is because of this curiosity that historically different perspectives have been developed to understand, interpret and extract meaning from religious concepts and practices. Some of the dominant approaches have been theological, jurisprudential, spiritual etc. However, with developments in human knowledge, particularly with the emergence of the disciplines of sociology and anthropology, the civilisational or cultural perspective has become a dominant feature in the study of religion. Broadly speaking, the civilisational or cultural perspective attempts to understand religious concepts and practices through cultural viewpoints and expressions. According to this perspective, faith cannot be exercised in a cultural vacuum. Rather, it needs a context. Therefore, faith and culture are integrated. Where religious concepts shape the culture of a society, religion gets influenced by culture. Hence to understand religion one needs to explore and reflect on the multidimensional expressions such as literature, music, art, architecture, philosophy etc. of a culture or society. Islam is a revealed religion with a long and dynamic history. During its extended history, Islam has voyaged through different societies and inspired them. The inspirations from the divine message have been expressed differently in various contexts. The colourful expressions of Muslim societies can be observed in their rich cultural/intellectual heritage such as literature, architecture, art, calligraphy, theology, philosophy and so on, that they have contributed to civilisation. The civilisational dimension of Islam has received less attention from academia in comparison to the theological dimension. Even today Islam is discussed narrowly following the mediaeval logical approach. The majority of educational institutions in the Muslim world are still concentrating on the theological aspect in their study of Islam. However, a few institutions and individuals are making conscious efforts to include the cultural dimension of Islam in the areas of research and study. For instance, Marshall Hodgson's book *The Venture of Islam* is one of the examples that explore Islam as a civilisation rather than a set of theological, abstract concepts. Why do we need the cultural approach to study Islam? This perspective may be significant for

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The power of words By Amin Valliani

EVERY organ of the human body is valuable but the tongue, through which we speak, is the most important in the whole scheme of our relationship with the society around us. It is a medium through which we interact with the outside world. We converse with others and form opinions regarding their character, rectitude, trustworthiness, seriousness, pretentiousness etc. Similarly, in every vocation one can be successful through the proper use of words. One can leave a lasting imprint of his or her personality on others through the decent use of words. Yet not all people are successful in society and many face difficulties in dealing with others. Among the reasons for this may be the rough use of words. If one's speech is filled with invective, it not only creates hatred and hostility in society but also displeases Allah. Therefore, Islam is quite particular in asking believers to be extra conscious while using language. The Quran says `O you who believe! Keep your duty to Allah and fear Him and speak (always) the truth` (33:70). At another place Allah says that `On the day when their tongues, their hands and their feet will bear witness against them as to what they used to do` (24:24). It is said that an injury by a sword can be healed, yet an injury inflicted by words remains incurable. The tongue can break a heart, while it can also console a broken heart. It can establish peace, create

friends, impact others, win hearts and minds and also leave long-lasting memories in others' hearts. Conversely, the tongue, if used negatively, can hurt people, create foes, establish animosity and above all destroy the peace of society. Therefore, all world religions, including Islam, urge us to be aware of our language. Islam, being a religion of peace, is very emphatic that one should be mindful of his or her daily utterances. It even declares in the Quran that 'Kind words (spoken) and forgiving of faults are better than sadaga (charity)...' (2:263). The human being is the crown of creation, endowed with intellect. He is usually called a speaking animal as he can speak his mind and thoughts through his tongue. Every word spoken or written consciously or unconsciously has a tremendous impact. This is a distinctive feature that marks us out from all other species. The Holy Quran refers to the covenant made with the Children of Israel. Among the conditions set forth include the use of the tongue. For example the holy book says '...Speak good to people...' (2:83). When Hazrat Musa was ordered to visit Pharaoh, he was directed to 'Speak to him mildly; perhaps he may accept admonition...' (20:44). This elaborates clearly the importance of tone and tenor through which one speaks to family, friends and society at large. Our words should be appropriate to make statements civilised and decent. Also, words once uttered cannot be taken back. Islam has endowed us with an excellent value system which has been instrumental in impacting the lives of people of all cultures. The mystics and scholars who served Islam by spreading its message to every nook and corner of the world used language filled with love, persuasion and appeal. However, our present-day society is extremely polarised. We have drifted away from Islam's perennial message. It can easily be observed that many people are involved in gossiping, backbiting, loose talk and character assassination. These are negative traits which are detrimental to society. It is time to look within and reflect on the state of our society, which needs overhauling. In order to refine society, the Islamic message regarding the proper use of words needs to be highlighted. The very first step needed is to teach people to avoid diseases of the tongue which include lying, backbiting, mudslinging, rumour-mongering etc. Like the diseases of the body, diseases of the tongue can do major damage. Allah says in the Quran that '...Man was created weak' (4:28). Therefore, every one of us is prone to illnesses of various kinds. Similarly, our egoistic nature is also weak and attracts various forms of negativity. The life pattern of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) is worth emulating for all of us. In the Quran Allah refers to those who used to hurt the Prophet with malicious remarks, which the Prophet would hear without uttering a word. This indicates that the Messenger was listening much more than speaking. Those who listen and reflect without uttering too many words tend to have a greater understanding of issues. Every child learns language in his or her home environment. He or she also acquires basic traits from the home. In nurturing the future generations, all parents should take special care. They should create a spiritual environment, where a strict regimen for physical, social and spiritual well being should be the order of the day. Abusive words should have no room in any corner of the home. Institutions which are directly or indirectly linked to the development of the new generation, such as schools and colleges, teach subjects regarding the correct use of language. Yet they pay more attention to syntax rather than to the social use of language. In order to create a peaceful, loving society, children need to be taught interactive skills coupled with the temperate use of words.

Malala and TTP logic By Asghar Ali Engineer 02, November 2012

THE recent attack on Malala Yousufzai has shocked not only Pakistan but the whole world. There was near unanimity among the people of Pakistan that the attack was unjustified. The Pakistani Taliban claimed that the attack was carried out by them at the behest of Maulana Fazlullah, reportedly hiding in Afghanistan. Pakistan has requested the Afghan government to hand over Fazlullah and his men. It is a matter of shame that a religious 'leader' should be involved in the attempted murder of a teenage girl. Her 'crime' was that she was campaigning for the education of girls. The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan has justified attacking Malala on religious grounds and described her as a 'spy of the West'. Justifying the attack, the Taliban have reportedly said: 'For this espionage, infidels gave her awards and rewards. And Islam orders killing of those who are spying [for] enemies, while the second reason given was that Malala 'used to propagate against mujahideen (holy warriors) to defame the Taliban. The Holy Quran says that people propagating against Islam and Islamic forces [should] be killed. This is obviously an extremely weak defence. Firstly, if the Taliban knew anything about Islam they would know that a child cannot be punished unless he or she attains adulthood. Only those who can understand the consequences of what they are doing (people with reasoning power) are liable to

punishment in Islam. Even prayers, fasting or Haj are not obligatory on children. Secondly, nippah (intention) is necessary for performance of an act in Islam. Even prayer or fasting without nippah will not be acceptable. The weakness of the argument is obvious from the fact that the Taliban have equated the campaign for education of girls with `spying`. It is quite ridiculous. Before trying to execute somebody the crime has to be proved in a court of law. And Islamic punishments cannot be carried out by just anyone; one has to take the case to the court of a qazi (judge) who hears the case, demands proof and asks for witnesses. Even as grave a crime as zina (illegitimate sexual intercourse or adulterous relationship) requires four witnesses who have witnessed the act itself for imposing the Islamic punishment of 100 lashes (or stoning to death, though there is controversy about this punishment). No one can take the law into their own hands and execute someone who has allegedly committed the crime. There will be total anarchy if this becomes the norm. Only a duly constituted government can appoint a properly qualified qazi who can try the accused and pronounce appropriate sentence. There can also be mitigating circumstances which a qazi has to take into account. Not only are the Taliban not a government, they are not even fit to be called mujahideen. A mujahid fights only in the way of Allah (fi sabil-illah), which itself is an act of great responsibility and means that there should be no selfish desires involved and no arbitrariness at all. Their acts are far from Islamic or in the way of Allah; more often than not they are oppressive, exploitative and totally arbitrary, besides being inhumane.

How strange that the Taliban are describing campaigning for education as an act of `spying`. Can there be more irresponsible and arbitrary judgment than this? Do `mujahideen` act so irresponsibly? Or since they decided to murder an innocent teenage girl are they trying to find lame excuses to label their action `Islamic`? They can deceive themselves, but not those who are experts in Islamic law and dispensing Islamic justice. The Taliban should know that a qazi or a mufti, while calling something `Islamic`, has to quote from the Quran or the Sunnah or both, and where there is any ambiguity to quote the opinion of an imam or founder of any of the schools of law and not just describe anything one wants to as `Islamic`. It is a gross error to do so and much more so if done intentionally, which is what the Taliban have done in this case. Just by calling something Islamic does not make it so. There is total unanimity among all Islamic scholars that ilm (knowledge) is obligatory on all Muslim men and Muslim women (muslimah). The Prophet (PBUH) did not use the word Muslim, which would have included both men and women, but mentioned Muslim men and women separately so that Muslim women are not left out in the matter of acquiring knowledge. And the Prophet made acquisition of knowledge for both men and women obligatory. Then, can acquiring knowledge be equated with spying? The Prophet is also reported to have said that a man who has a daughter and educates her and marries her to an educated man will enter paradise. He even went to the extent of saying that he would guarantee such an individual's entering paradise. Also, the Quran makes us pray to the Lord to increase our knowledge (rabbi zidni ilman); all commentators agree that this applies to both men and women. The Quran calls knowledge light and ignorance darkness and asks us to pray to Allah to take us out of darkness and into light. All this clearly shows that what the Taliban have done is patently un-Islamic and must be strongly condemned. All those responsible for the dastardly act must be tried in a court of law and if found guilty, given stringent punishment. • The writer is an Islamic scholar who also heads the Centre for Study of Society & Secularism, Mumbai.

Spirit of Haj By Ali Murtaza Zaidi 26, October 2012

Haj is quite unique. While the other acts of worship concentrate on one pertinent aspect of life, Haj is a comprehensive act of worship, one which caters to each and every angle of human life. In this worship, a believer is required to submit to the will of the Creator not in one dimension, but in all. While the act of Haj is quite alive in our society, the propensity to cater to the action, rather than the spirit, has unfortunately not made an exception in its case. In simple words, the ritual remains; the spirit, however, hides under layers of vagueness. It is quite clear that without highlighting and understanding the spiritual essence of Haj, the benefits it provides would not only be compromised, but would reduce as our distance from the core idea behind Haj increases. The central idea behind Haj lies in disconnection, followed by the creation of another

unique connection. In today's world, our objectives of life have become quite blurred. One way or another, even the average individual realises that our priorities have become somewhat jumbled. In doing so, we end up worshipping things like material well-being and social status, while the most important aspects of life have taken a rather insignificant role. Stemming from our limited and misconstrued understanding of the universe and to satisfy our innate desire for self-fulfillment and ultimate achievement, we create artificial identities and objectives. Haj breaks the hollow shell of attachments, involvements and routines. Going through the symbols and rituals of Haj, where everything is changed from location, clothing and routine to behaviour and habits a Muslim experiences the hidden dimensions of life. It reconnects us to Allah; makes us think about Him. The worship of Allah is not only a duty, but a pleasure. It seems that our lives are so full of other feeble and fake pleasures that there seems to be a lack of capacity on our part to understand and appreciate the enjoyment that can be found in worshipping Allah. By suppressing all other worldly pleasures such as dress, applying perfume, looking in the mirror and physical desires, the believers become ready to be enveloped by the immense satisfaction that can be found in devotion to Allah. Through the ambiance created by staying in a desert and looking towards Jabal-1-Rahmah in Arafat, which has no geographical beauty, Haj offers a unique chance for everyone to experience the immense satisfaction of spiritual connection with Almighty Allah. By going through this process, many Muslims develop and attain an exalted standing. It is as if a human is reborn, which is symbolised by the shaving of the head, demonstrating that all sins have been washed away and a new, pure life can start. As millions of people, dressed in the same way, flock to the holy lands of Hejaz, the social conventions of class are destroyed. Everyone bows before the same iconic structure, rich and poor, young and old, white and black. This very process reminds the believer of not only his humble origins, but also of his humble end. We may differentiate ourselves by wealth or colour, but Haj is a very keen reminder that we all came into the world in the same way, and will surely exit it on equal terms. Haj is practice for a new social order based on humility resulting in equality and justice. In a way the whole practice of Haj is a very symbolic act. In order to fully benefit from the fruits of Haj it is important to understand exactly what each of its components highlight. The white cloth of ihram reminds the believer of the simplicity of the way in which he came into the world. Additionally, it reminds man of his final resting place, where he would lie within another white cloth, separated from the world, similar to the way in which he is separated during Haj. The tawaf is also metaphorical. It symbolises how we as believers should be living our lives, circling around Allah. Everything in our lives should first be based on the consent of Allah, and then our own likes or dislikes. The journeys within Haj represent the everlasting journey that a believer must undertake in order to achieve spiritual attainment. Similar to the way we travel from Makkah to Mina and Arafat, a believer must travel through the many difficulties of life to finally achieve spiritual attainment. As stated earlier, all procedures of Haj hold deep symbolism, from the stoning of the devil, sacrifice of animals, shaving of the head, to the drinking of the pure Zamzam. It is quite surprising how so many important aims are attained by the act of Haj. A very important aspect of Haj lies in its political effect. It is a glorious show of strength, of unity and brotherhood. It is a demonstration unlike any other where millions of people gather from countries around the world, every year, announcing to the world that 'Yes, we are united in the name of Allah'. It firmly establishes the point that Islam is not declining, but ever developing. It is quite evident that once a believer follows in the footsteps of the great prophets and goes on the same journey as they did, it brings him closer to Allah. When all these things combine, a Muslim feels a deep connection with God, as if time had somehow stopped for him and he is left to attain closeness to Allah, which is the purpose of all worship. • The writer is a religious scholar.

Significance of fauna by Mohammad Niaz 10/19/2012

A NUMBER of biological entities such as birds, animals, insects, plants, fruits etc have been mentioned in the Holy Quran for our knowledge and guidance. Some of them have been described in terms of praise, importance, need, correlation and significance as masterpieces of Allah's creation. Every element, creature, and living being has a significant role to signify, glorify, and attest to the infinite power and wisdom of Allah. As far as birds are concerned, the story of the hoopoe (hudhud) in the times of Hazrat Sulaiman is significant. Allah had bestowed Sulaiman with many gifts, including the ability to understand the language of

animals. In Surah Naml, the story of the hudhud has been mentioned in detail. The bird played a pivotal role in bringing news of Bilqis (the Queen of Sheba) to Sulaiman, after which she embraced Islam. The hoopoe had informed Hazrat Sulaiman that Bilqis, together with her people, worshipped the sun. Sulaiman gave the bird a letter for the queen to check the bird's truthfulness. In return, she sent gifts to the prophet but he rejected them all. Later she visited Sulaiman and upon seeing the grace and glory of the prophet, she embraced Islam. There is also mention of ants in the Holy Quran, again in Surah Naml (which translates to 'the ants'). In verse 18 of the chapter it is stated: 'Till when they came to the valley of the ants, one of the ants said 'O ants! Enter your dwellings lest Sulaiman and his hosts should crush you, while they perceive not.' On hearing what the ant said Prophet Sulaiman prayed and thanked Allah for granting him such a gift. The instance of sending flocks of birds upon the army of Abraha has been significantly recorded in Surah Fil. The incident took place during the year of the birth of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). Abraha, the ruler of Yemen, and his army with a contingent of elephants intended to invade Makkah to demolish the Kaaba. While they were marching towards Makkah no one dared to face them. However, suddenly flocks of birds appeared with the grace of Allah. The birds threw down upon the army small stones; none of the invaders escaped and the force faced destruction. In the Quranic parable of Hazrat Yunus there is mention of a large fish that swallowed him alive. The prophet had been thrown off a ship and was swallowed by the fish. When the fish disgorged him onto dry land his skin had gone soft after being inside the fish. Yunus was feeling discomfort in the sunlight. Then a gourd plant was ordered to grow by Allah for his comfort. As the prophet sought forgiveness, Allah caused the plant to grow near him under which he took shelter and rested in its shade. The importance of trees has also been highlighted in Islamic tradition, such as when Hazrat Musa was travelling in the desert and in search of fire, he came to a tree, where he heard the voice of Allah (28:29-30). The historical importance of the tree (babul) under which the Bayt ar-Rizwan took place is mentioned in Surah al-Fath (48:18). The miracle of Allah in Ghar-i-Saur (Cave of Thaur) is also worth mentioning; how the spider and dove played their parts in protecting the Holy Prophet and his companion Hazrat Abu Bakr from the enemies. The Prophet and Hazrat Abu Bakr had taken refuge in the cave while on their way to Madina during the Hijra. However, when the polytheists of Makkah, who were in pursuit, approached the cave a spider built a web at the entrance to it, while a dove laid its eggs in a nest. Seeing the spider web and a nest at the entrance of the cave, the Makkah non-believers assumed that there was nobody inside as had someone been inside the cave the spider's web and nest would have been disturbed. This event is mentioned in Surah Tawbah. Allah tested the people of Prophet Saleh with a she-camel. This event has also been described in the Holy Quran in detail (11:64-68). It was forbidden to kill the she-camel but the tribe of Thamud killed the camel, which provoked Allah's anger and therefore severe punishment was inflicted on the wrongdoers. The Quran says: 'And O my people! This she-camel of Allah is a symbol to you: leave her to feed on Allah's (free) earth, and inflict no harm on her, or a swift penalty will seize you!' (11:64). It is also known how the death of Namrood (Nimrod) occurred due to a mosquito bite. The concept of biodiversity conservation can be linked to the story of Hazrat Nuh when he was ordered by Allah to keep animal and bird pairs in the Ark. Similarly, there is mention of some other fauna in the hadith. We know the story of a deer that some sahaba had captured when the Prophet asked them to let it be for it was feeding its fawns. Similarly, there is an incident where eggs/chicks had been picked up from a nest, which made the parent birds restless. The Prophet ordered that the birds be put back. From these events there emerged Islamic laws and rules of giving protection to animals and birds, especially during times of breeding. • The writer is deputy conservator, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Wildlife Department.

Sharia: the way forward y Saleem Ahmed October 12, 2012

SHARIA, the Muslim code of conduct, permeates the ethos_____the very soul of Muslim life. Thus, the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam (1990), sponsored by the Organisation of Islamic Conference, affirmed the Sharia as the sole information source for guidance on Muslim daily living. This was the 'Muslim response' to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Started by five highly respected imams Jafar ibn Muhammad (702-765CE), Abu Hanifa (699-767), Malik ibn Anas (711-795), al-Shafi'i (767-820), and Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780-855) the Sharia represents the fruit of their labours from perusing through the available hadith literature to enunciate their respective views on how Muslims should lead their lives in conformity with the Quran and hadith. Their writings elaborate on, for example, rituals (for prayers, fasting



and pilgrimage) and punishments (e.g. for adultery, apostasy and pilferage). And while each imam worked independently, their writings were distilled by devout followers as Sharia ('the way'). Some conservative Muslims consider Sharia to be 'mandated by God'. But I discovered that the six hadith compilers Bukhari, Muslim, Ibn Majah, Abu Dawood, Tirmidhi and Al-Nasai who collectively compiled the lion's share of the known 12,000 plus hadith, produced their compilations decades after these imams had died. Thus, the only hadith collection these imams could have consulted was al-Muwatta, a relatively small (1,800 hadith) collection of Imam Malik ibn Anas. While dealing mostly with rituals, it also carries some hadith on other matters, including hadd (capital or corporal punishment for adultery, fornication, apostasy, drinking and theft). For example, it carries six hadith on adultery in which the Prophet (PBUH) prescribed rajam (stoning adulterers to death). But the other hadith collections mentioned above, in addition to hadith prescribing rajam, also carry the following three hadith not found in al-Muwatta, in which the Prophet apparently forgave adulterers: One example is cited by Abu Dawood in which it seems that no one was punished. In another case, on learning that some Muslims had killed an adulterer, the Prophet asked: 'Why did you not let him live? Perhaps he would have repented and been forgiven by God' (Tirmidhi, 1010). And in a third case, when a man confessed to having committed a sin requiring hadd punishment, the Prophet asked, 'Haven't you prayed with me?' The man said, 'Yes.' The Prophet replied, 'God has forgiven your sin' (Bukhari, 8.812). Why don't we find these reports in al-Muwatta? Since Imam Malik was a jurist, he was probably particularly interested in learning about specific punishments the Prophet prescribed. Therefore, his question to his respondents, who were descendants of the Sahaba (the Prophet's companions), could have been narrowly focused, such as: 'What punishment did the Prophet prescribe for adultery?' (This was about 100 years after the Prophet died). And since rajam was the answer, it became incorporated in the Sharia. On the other hand, questions such as: 'How did the Prophet handle cases of adultery?' or 'Did the Prophet ever forgive adulterers?' would probably evoke the type of responses that Dawood, Muslim, and Bukhari obtained in the above examples. Conservative Muslims might argue that Sharia scholars knew all hadith. But then there would have been no need for Bukhari to have spent several years travelling around the Muslim world interviewing individuals whose predecessors had been the Prophet's companions. One could even argue that he and other hadith compilers undertook their respective missions because they felt there must be more to the Prophet's life than conveyed through Imam Malik's small hadith collection. The changed prophetic response to adultery could also reflect the evolving nature of Quranic guidance. While the unquestioned following of Sharia by some Muslims underscores the power of faith, the Quran also encourages ijtihad (introspection) when issues are unclear. Thus, Muslims might consider reviewing the 80-90 per cent hadith that became available after the Sharia compilers' deaths. This will probably suggest that the hadith of compassion, forgiveness, and gender equality are more in line with Islam being a religion of peace than those of punishment. Underscoring hadith such as: 'Avoid inflicting the prescribed punishment as much as you can, and if there is any way out, let a man go, for it is better for a leader to make a mistake in forgiving than in punishing' (Tirmidhi, 1011), the updated Sharia will lead to Islam being truly called a religion of peace and compassion. Then, unfortunate incidents such as the one in which a 25 year-old mother of five was stoned to death on charges of adultery filed with a local panchayat in Pakistan by an influential landlord might not occur. Earlier, the victim had reportedly rebuffed the landlord's sexual advances. Her husband was apparently abducted to enable the assailants to implement the 'punishment' in her home in the small hours of the morning. And in western countries, for example in the US, where 13 states have banned the use of Sharia in judicial deliberations because of its 'cruel and misogynist character', Sharia bans will become non-issues and Islamophobia, gripping the US and several European countries, might also gradually disappear. The true spirit of Islam as a religion of peace and compassion unfolds beautifully when we read the Quran and hadith keeping in mind the context and chronology of revelation. • The writer is the author of *Islam: A Religion of Peace?* and president of the Honolulu-based Pacific Institute of Islamic Studies.



Freedom of expression

RECENTLY, disturbances erupted throughout the Muslim world against the film *Innocence of Muslims* which was deliberately made to hurt the religious feelings of Muslims. President Obama refused to ban it or take any action against its makers citing the American law on freedom of expression. Obama said that as long as this law exists in America, he cannot take any action against the producers. Also, it is election time in America and President Obama's opponents can exploit any slight mistake on his part to reduce his chances of being re-elected. This should be understood and appreciated. It is what it is. Of course the violence against Americans has to be strongly condemned. But the situation has given rise to an important question: can such a right be absolute as American law makes it out to be? Should it have any limits or not? According to this law, there is no limit and religious sentiments do not count. Even outright and wilful blasphemy cannot be barred or punished. For example, in a number of New York subway stations posters were recently put up which said, 'In any war between the civilised man and the savage, support the civilised man. Support Israel. Defeat Jihad.' The relevant court also upheld the ad as permissible according to American law. Rick Jacobs, a Jewish scholar, commented on the ad thus: 'What is the message of this ad, directed at the multitude of subway riders of countless faiths and ethnicities?' Mr Jacobs then continues, 'By using the term 'jihad' in the context of war against savages, the ad paints Islam as inherently violent, evil and bent on overthrowing the Western democracies and their key ally in the Middle East, Israel.... This ad implicates all Muslims as wagers of jihad in the sense of war, though hardly a handful of extremists indulge in this and millions of other Muslims take jihad as a spiritual struggle against selfish desires, greed and lust for power. But it is quite legitimate according to American law. Interestingly, an Arab activist who spray-painted one of the posters was arrested. Perhaps we have to understand why such a law was made by America's founders. Those who came to America after its 'discovery' were mostly persecuted Protestants from all over Europe. The Catholic Church was persecuting them for defying its authority. They did not want its repeat in America and hence they wanted a law which allowed them absolute freedom from all such persecution in the name of religion. And so this law was made. There is another factor which must also be taken into account to understand the American law. At the time when this law was made America had mostly Protestant Christians and no other religious groups had yet migrated to the country in significant numbers. In their eyes this law was not only justified but greatly needed so that no one used religion for the persecution of others. Had there been a plurality of religions as is the case today, such a law perhaps would not have been enacted. This law gives full freedom to any individual to defy, to blaspheme or to ridicule one's own or others' religions. First we must understand what freedom of religion means. Religion is a system of belief and belief is rooted in one's conscience. In any democracy, or even non-democratic system, freedom of conscience is a very important freedom which cannot be tampered with. The Quran also greatly respects this freedom of conscience when it says 'There is no compulsion in religion...' (2:256). This right to freedom of conscience or religion can certainly allow a serious critique of certain religious or cultural practices as long as the motive is philosophical. Yet this freedom cannot allow ridiculing or attacking other religious belief systems just to humiliate one's opponent, either by a powerful majority or minority. So in all multireligious and multicultural societies the freedom of expression should be qualified by other laws not to offend others' religious feelings. If a law on freedom of expression is not so qualified, it may lead to serious law and order situations in multi-religious societies. It also needs to be seen in a political context as to which religious group or part thereof wants to misuse this freedom to attack religious beliefs or practices of other religious groups for political purposes. The same situation arose when Salman Rushdie published his novel *The Satanic Verses* and the West defended it in the name of freedom of expression. This publication also led to violent demonstrations in the Muslim world and threats to Rushdie's life. In multi-religious societies and with political power struggles between different religious communities, such laws have to be duly qualified through other laws. But such laws should not curb genuine freedom of expression and that is always for the courts to decide. Freedom of expression, then, is a very delicate matter, not to be taken lightly on either side. The law on freedom of expression has to be quite balanced. While it should allow genuine freedom of expression it should not be made absolute so as to enable certain mischievous groups to attack others' beliefs. The situation in America has now greatly changed. It is no longer a uni-religious or mono-cultural society. Perhaps the earlier America modifies its law the better it would be for that country.

Importance of cleanliness By Muhammad Ali 28, September 2012

THE significance of cleanliness and hygiene cannot be overlooked by any society. Every faith and civilisation stresses the importance of cleanliness. Historically, cleanliness has been considered one of the important factors by which to judge a civilisation's or society's development. Islam places great emphasis on cleanliness and purity, both physically and spiritually. In Islam, spiritual purity is linked to physical cleanliness and purity. More importantly, cleanliness is termed an indispensable fundamental of faith. However, this fundamental and powerful tenet of our faith, unfortunately, is not reflected in our society practically. Serious reflection is required on our individual as well as collective practices in order to make this valuable principle of Islam part of our lives. There are many verses in the Holy Quran which reflect the importance of cleanliness. For example, Allah says `...Truly, Allah loves those who turn to Him constantly and He loves those who keep themselves pure and clean` (2:222). In the Quran worship and seeking Allah's love is conditioned with cleanliness and purity as the Holy Book says `...In it [mosque] are men who love to clean and to purify themselves. And Allah loves those who make themselves clean and pure` (9:108). Furthermore, in one of his sayings the Holy Prophet (PBUH) has termed cleanliness as half of faith. The above few examples from the Holy Quran and sayings of the Holy Prophet reveal that without cleanliness of our body and environment, one cannot receive the proximity of Allah spiritually and most importantly, faith cannot be completed in the absence of cleanliness and purity. Much is said rhetorically about cleanliness in our society but practically its application is missing. A quick observation can reveal how insensitive a culture we have developed regarding cleanliness and hygiene. Throwing garbage in the streets, roads or parks has become a common practice in our society. In public places dustbins are seldom found. Even if dustbins are installed, people do not use them properly. Rather, they prefer to throw garbage outside them. It is also observed that people clean their homes and shops and throw the garbage on the street without considering its implications. It is evident that even students of elite schools throw garbage on the ground even in the presence of garbage bins. This shows our attitude towards cleanliness and hygiene. Another habit that is commonly found in our society is spitting openly. People spit paan from running vehicles without considering the pedestrians walking on the road. This practice not only affects the environment but is also an eyesore. Another area that needs consideration is the horrible condition of public toilets. The shortage of public toilets is a big challenge, hence people are compelled to use open spaces to answer the call of nature. The toilets that do exist are in such pathetic condition that one cannot use them. There are many other examples which can be cited to indicate the pathetic condition of cleanliness and hygiene in our society. Hence, conscious efforts are needed to tackle this issue. There is a dire need to educate and sensitise people about the importance of cleanliness in light of our faith. In this regard social institutions such as educational institutions, the media and religious institutions can play a vital role. It is essential to provide civic education in order to train the younger generations of a society. In Pakistan, the education system needs to transform its practices. Teaching and learning material regarding cleanliness and hygiene should be included in the curriculum and textbooks. Educational institutions should demonstrate cleanliness in their premises. To train young people schools should involve students in cleaning their schools, homes and environment and highlight proper sanitary practices. The use of dustbins should be strictly followed in the school premises. Secondly, the media can be a powerful source to educate and sensitise the masses about the importance of cleanliness and disadvantages of an unhygienic way of life. It should focus on both the good as well as unhygienic practices in our society. Thirdly, religious institutions such as mosques and madressahs can also play their part in educating the people about the importance of cleanliness in the light of Islamic teachings. Furthermore, the role and commitment of the government cannot be overlooked in maintaining cleanliness and hygiene in society. The government's will is very crucial in making policies and implementing them at the grass-roots level. The government can play an important role in cleaning areas, installing dustbins, collecting garbage and enforcing laws against littering etc. The importance of cleanliness cannot be ignored in individual as well as communal life. On one hand it is an important factor for human health and spiritual development; on the other hand it is essential for environmental development. By adopting a clean and hygienic lifestyle, a valuable amount can also be saved where health issues are concerned. A clean and healthy life helps in refining the culture of a society and reflects in every aspect of life such as art, architecture, food, music and so on. Ultimately, it leads towards a

higher level of civilisation. Islam has put unique emphasis on the importance of cleanliness by making it a part of faith. Hence, there is a dire need to make conscious efforts in educating the people about the importance of cleanliness. In this regard, serious steps are required at multiple levels to make this precious value of our faith part of our individual and collective lives. • The writer is an educator.

The assault on coexistence y M.J. Akbar 21, Sept 2012

WHAT is common between the criminal complaint against Rabbi David Goldberg for circumcising Jewish boys in Hof, Germany; the ban on minarets in Switzerland; the continual attempts by some European publications to offend Muslims; the attempt to convict a young Christian in Pakistan for blasphemy she did not commit; an attack on a mosque in Missouri, US; or, most vicious of all, the recent film that injects lies and malice into public discourse through veins nourished by hatred? Each one is not designed to destroy the existence of the `other`. Their purpose is to poison coexistence, the fundamental basis of civilised living. Anger is not always illogical, but there is no rationale that can justify each of these instances. Rabbi Goldberg was not trying to circumcise Christians; he was practising his own faith. To target minarets as a cultural crime in an age of skyscrapers is manifest prejudice, of the sillier sort. Provocative European publishers are not defending freedom of speech, which is their much-advertised explanation, since nowhere in the democratic world does the right to publish include the leeway to libel or defame, particularly when a lie can lead to public disorder. The Pakistani child was a victim, not a perpetrator of fanatics who wanted to punish her and her kin for protecting Christianity in their theocratic environment. The bilious film about the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) was not made by a filmmaker, but by a bigot determined to provoke a violent reaction that would confirm in many innocent or naïve minds the image of Islam as a fountainhead of violence rather than what the word actually means, which is peace. The barbarians who killed four American diplomats in Libya duly obliged: hatred breeds hatred in an escalating cycle. Even the most dramatic example of pure, unadulterated terrorism, the destruction of New York's twin towers on 9/11, was initiated not to destroy America's existence, which is impossible even within the mindset of a maniac, but to breach an emerging international order founded on mutual respect, and the equality of nations. The planes that headed towards the White House and Pentagon were not ferrying troops who had been ordered to conquer Washington. Their purpose was to generate fear, hostility and war between the two largest religious communities in the world. They succeeded, but to an extent far lower than the expectations of terrorist masterminds, and yet far more than the young 21st century could stomach. The price has been high. The Mumbai terrorist attacks in November 2008 had a dual objective: to warp the India-Pakistan engagement, as fragile as it might have been; and to incite violence in India between Hindus and Muslims. It is satisfying to report that the second wish failed spectacularly because Indians understood that such discord would mean a victory for terrorism. The most interesting aspect of this worldwide shadow war is that both the self-appointed commanders and their terrorist troops are almost wholly civilian. We are witnessing a rare phenomenon: people outside the power structure, working largely (but not always) on their own, can do more damage to social harmony than powerful regiments led by dictators, presidents or prime ministers. There are governments, of course, who are tempted to dip their hands in the sewer for political gain; and you can never rule out the unintelligent intelligence agency which believes in a strategy of destabilising civilian populations. But governments have not, exceptions apart, been in the forefront of these battle lines. Whatever their nature, despotic, democratic or in-between, governments know that fomenting terrorism debilitates the personal and institutional advantages of being in power through blowback damage. Even when legitimate armies are put on the field, governments calibrate the conflict. When governments fall into the grip of radical ideologues who have left common sense at the club bathhouse, the damage is startling, as was evident during president George Bush's Iraq war. The most dangerous of today's conspiracies are being manufactured in small rooms lost in the labyrinths of a big city by men who will not become internationally infamous unless they succeed. We do not know how many 9/11s or Mumbai attacks have failed, but just the thought is sufficient for a shudder. Failure is not any hindrance to fanatics. They are now being lured by the siren outreach of a miraculous technology that continues to breed new tools by the day. Prevention is the fulltime job of innumerable police forces, while no one has any real clue about what might constitute a cure. This war has to be fought where it is being

incubated, on the street, and in the mind. We cannot afford politicians who seek votes from a sewer. This is a malaise, an infection, a plague, a crisis that demands leaders who maintain the sanity of good doctors in the face of havoc. Violence can begin with a word, and every word must be chosen with care. • The writer is editor of The Sunday Guardian, published from Delhi, India on Sunday, published from London and editorial director, India Today and Headlines Today.

Learning from life Amin Valliani 14, September 2012

HUMAN life is a great and noble gift from the Almighty with a purpose to be realised. life provides us many opportunities to interact with others. During these interactions, one comes across many problems and difficulties. They occur every day for everyone around the world. It is nature's way of imparting lessons to human beings till one learns the meaning and discovers the purpose of life. Nature does not overburden anyone beyond his or her capacity. The Quran says that Allah burdens not a person beyond his scope.... (2:286). In present-day society, we face numerous problems. In fact, facing problems and challenges makes us strong, courageous and opens doors for our development.

The solution of problems depends on the mindset of an individual. Some tackle problems emotionally on the spur of the moment while others prefer the use of the intellect. Those who resort to emotions to solve their problems are mostly sentimental people. Emotions are part of the human make-up; they arise spontaneously. Therefore, the wise do not consider emotions to be the right guide to solving problems unless rightly trained, properly managed and correctly used. There are a number of verses in the Quran which hint at the emotions latent in human behaviour. For example, the Holy Book says that man is ever more quarrelsome (18:54). A person quarrels when he is overwhelmed by uncontrolled emotions, which he regrets later. Similarly, the Quran says that man is ever hasty (17:11). Haste and knee-jerk decisions are the distinctive features of a sentimental person. However, at the same time, man is also a rational being. Islam appreciates those who solve their problems by using their intellect. They think over and negotiate all the circumstances adequately, correctly and with Allah's help arrive at a just solution. They have recourse to their past experiences, knowledge and suggestions from others. We have ample examples from the life of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) who preferred the use of intellect to find solutions to problems. At the outset of every crisis, whether it was the battle of Badar or of Uhud, he discussed the issue at length with his companions before taking a final decision. The Quran mentions the story of Hazrat Ibrahim's nation, which disputed with him on their practice of idol worship. Yet Hazrat Ibrahim dealt with the situation intelligently and with Allah's blessing and guidance (6:80). These are some of the examples inviting us to use intellect in seeking solutions to problems. We are here on earth for a limited period. We cannot escape the troubles of material life. But we can avoid emotional outbursts, especially when confronted with problems. Encountering problems, facing challenges, assessing situations and responding to crises requires rational thinking. This entails calmness, flexibility, creative thinking and generating ideas, breaking deadlocks, forming strategies and going for lasting solutions. We live in a turbulent society where the crime rate is extremely high and threatens the very fabric of society. Many crimes, such as 'honour' killing, acid throwing, vandalising others' properties etc., are the direct or indirect result of negative emotions. They ruin peoples' lives. Therefore, what is needed, along with the enforcement of the law, is a serious change in society's attitude. It must embark upon embracing rationality — a core element of Islamic teachings in all spheres of life. Last year, a fire engulfed a big market in Karachi where a number of shops were burnt to ashes. It was a devastating blow for all those who had shops in the market. Their future presented a bleak scenario. However, everyone whose shop was burnt did not respond to the challenge in the same manner. One shopkeeper arranged for money to restart his business after renovating the shop while another closed down his business. Similarly, one of the shop owners fell seriously ill as a result of stress. Others adopted the route of litigation and ultimately gave up. Thus everyone went his own way. But the question is: what is the best course of action to adopt in a worst-case scenario? The answer lies in fluidity rather than rigidity. Let pragmatism govern our life rather than emotions in such situations. Our education system does not prepare students to tackle problems rationally, nor does the home environment involve children in reason-based problem-solving. One can observe fraught situations in playgrounds, streets and neighbourhoods where children get into altercations while playing. In some cases,

parents involve themselves in their children's wrangling. Demonstration of emotions in such a situation makes matters worse and creates permanent hostility. The Holy Quran is very emphatic in this connection. It says: "O you who believe! Ward off from yourselves and your families a Fire (Hell) whose fuel is men and stone...." (66:6). Therefore, it is important that parents should provide essential education, training and a good home environment to their children where reason takes precedence over petulance. Life is a bumpy road with many ups and downs. It can be peaceful at one point and troublesome at another, and it has many faultlines and grey areas. Therefore, it is the responsibility of parents to make their children aware of the vicissitudes of life. It is not a bed of roses all the time, but we have to live our life to the full. Living fully means that we have to learn from the lives of all peoples — present and past — as everyone's life provides many points to learn from. But we must remember the Quranic words in which Allah says, "Do not be weak and ask (others) for peace.... Allah is with you and will never decrease the reward of your good deeds" (47:35).

The Allure of Sufism By Asghar Ali Engineer 07, September 2012

Some friends often ask why I so strongly support Sufi Islam when many Muslims not only disapprove of it but even call it deviation from Islam. My simple answer is that Sufis love Allah, not fear Allah. Love is the central doctrine for them. Sufis like Muhiyeddin Ibn Arabi who espoused the school of Wahdat al-Wujud demolished all walls of separation between one faith and another and made love of all human beings the base of their religion. Ibn Arabi went to the extent of saying "hubbi deeni wa shari'ati" i.e. love is my religion and my Sharia. It is a very meaningful statement for those who believe in humanity and want to build human civilisation on love, not hatred. Love not only leads to tolerance but also demolishes all movements based on extremism and exclusive truth. One who loves all of humanity always adopts an inclusive approach and feels the truth cannot be the monopoly of some exclusive group. Sufis in that sense are far more democratic with their pluralist approach. They feel Allah has created diversity and we must respect diversity as Allah's creation. One who has a doctrinaire approach believes in exclusivity and disparages diversity as for him diversity negates the concept of exclusive monopoly of truth by one group. And if the truth is not an exclusive monopoly, no one community can be privileged as possessor of the truth. Moreover, Sufism is based on a deep spiritual approach and on looking into one's inner self. Spirituality is like an ocean and narrow identities are like small rivers bounded by banks and their course predetermined. Spirituality is therefore far more inclusive. In fact it is inclusive of several rivers which all merge into oblivion. Only the ocean remains. Maulana Rumi, when asked what his identity was, replied "love" as love is inclusive of all identities. Now the question arises, what is love? Often we think we possess the one whom we love. In fact such sense of possession is the very negation of love. We must respect the dignity and integrity of the one we love and that is possible only when we concede full freedom to that person. Where there is a sense of possession we deny freedom to that person. Thus when a man thinks he loves a woman his love cannot be genuine unless he allows her full freedom and respects her dignity and integrity. For Sufis too, love of humanity is based on these principles and they respect the dignity and integrity of all faiths which are sincerely held by any human being or a community of human beings provided these faiths are sincerely held. Also, love cannot be genuine unless it is pure and purged of all traces of selfishness and personal desires. All selfish desire has to be renounced to make love genuine and hence Sufis talk of tark (renunciation) and the highest degree of this is described as tark-i-tark (renunciation of renunciation). Thus a Sufi renounces his material comforts and selfish desires for the sake of Allah whom he/she loves intensely. Sarmad Shaheed was beheaded by Mughal emperor Aurangzeb as he would not recite the Islamic kalima, La ilaha il lallah (there is no god but God) but only La ilaha (there is no god). Before his beheading he was asked why he didn't recite Il lallah (except one God). He replied "how can I say Il lallah when so many gods of desire are still in my heart?" In so doing, Sarmad maintained that when so many idols of desire were still in his heart, how could his love of Allah be sincere and genuine? Hence a true believer or lover of one God has to purge all idols of desire installed in one's heart. The lowest degree of love is one which is polluted by selfish desires and the highest degree is one which is purged of all desires. Thus great Sufi saints who renounced all desires (though living in this world and involved in all its affairs) managed to achieve the purest form of love. Some people reject Sufi Islam saying they disapprove of invoking Sufi saints for achieving some personal desire and overcoming troubles. But I am

not concerned with this invocation or intercession. I accept Sufi Islam for its adherence to love in its truest form and selfless love of entire humanity in all its diverse cultural manifestations. Invocation of Sufi saints or seeking their intercession can be seen as a human weakness. In fact Sufi saints believe that total submission to Allah — the beloved — is part of their love of Allah. They also call it tawakkul i.e. total trust in Allah as He does whatever He does, for the good of His servant. A lover has to accept the will of his/her beloved having full faith in the latter. One may say there is a contradiction here. Well, human behaviour has to bring about reconciliation in what appears to be a contradiction. Submission here does not mean submission without efforts. Amal (action, effort) is a vital part of human existence and one has to make constant efforts to overcome contradictions and conform to the fundamental values of one's faith. One has to make constant efforts to uphold values and curb desire, anger and greed. It is an absolute requirement of love and of relating to the beloved. The writer is an Islamic scholar who also heads the Centre for Study of Society & Secularism, Mumbai.

A New Approach to Islamic Learning By Akhtar Ahmed Siddiqi August 31, 2012

IF we wish to understand the true meaning of Islam and its application in a modern context, we have to opt for a new approach that might be termed the three dimensional approach or 3D approach. The three dimensions are: (1) the surrounding universe (the cosmos and its physical phenomena, system and revelations along with its social and human context); (2) the textual/ scriptural deliberations revealed to the prophets and messengers and the modes of their implementation at various times; and (3) the contemporary human intellect combining the heart and mind. This is the core message I could extract from a recently published book, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation* written by Dr Tariq Ramadan, a professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Oxford. The first two dimensions are described by Dr Ramadan as two separate revelations. The signs (ayat), either in the cosmos or in revealed scriptures/texts, both quite autonomously reveal their meaning to human intelligence. Adding human intelligence to the two revelations, the 3D approach establishes an autonomous and mutually collaborative status for each dimension and has the potential to fundamentally change our traditional perception of Islamic learning. The conventional paradigm of Islamic learning reflects a one-dimensional approach that presents the image of divine revelation as consisting only of predefined orders. Humanity is placed at the receiving end and has no role except to receive, believe in and obey readymade revealed orders. The conventional paradigm may be called the paradigm of divine commands and human obedience, and almost all the religious sciences in Islam during the mediaeval period of Muslim history developed under the impact of this conventional paradigm. The same paradigm eventually nurtured religious dogmatism in Muslim societies and bestowed a special position on textual scholars (ulama/fugaha) as the sole interpreters of divine commands mentioned in textual sources. Although some space was occasionally created by textual scholars for the expansion of religious law through the exercise of methodological reasoning (ijtihad), such efforts always remained minor adjustments responding to a pressing need or to difficulty in the exact implementation of the inherited traditional religious law. In almost all Muslim societies today, religious authority and legitimacy are still theoretically held by textual scholars while the implementation of religious law itself has practically shrunk or become almost non-existent, at least in the major areas of contemporary practical life. This has resulted in the decline of the applied religious ethics of Islam and has transformed it into a defensive, passive, behind-the-times and isolated ethics. The 3D approach puts the real onus on human intelligence and its capacity to discern meaning. It makes every human being individually, and all of humanity collectively, responsible (mukallaf), demanding that they read and understand the meaningful phenomenal signs and indications (al-ayat ul-kauniyah) that humans, as intellectual animals, face almost everywhere in the open book of the universe. The same approach demands that humans reflect on the descriptive formulations (al-ayat ul-bayyinah) mentioned in the revealed scriptural sources. The specific reflections involving human intelligence may rightly be called, in the words of Dr Ramadan, mirror reading. This mirror reading establishes a new relationship of humankind with divine revelation, either in scriptural sources or in the book of the cosmos that, through this new approach, should not be perceived as merely consisting of predefined commands which are to be blindly obeyed. Instead, it will involve human creative, analytical and critical capacity during the process of searching for the truth through

studying the context of the surrounding cosmos, including its social and human context. The role of revealed narratives in this process therefore would be to economise human intellectual effort through providing guidance (huda) and corrective reminders (dhikr), uplifting the human conscience (taqwa/tazkiyah) and, finally, showing man the right path (sirat-i-mustagim). Hence, through this 3D approach, a new paradigm of Islamic learning develops that, against the conventional dogmatic attitudes, must initiate and promote intellectual activism. This new paradigm may be called the paradigm of human curiosity in search of truth and of voluntary human obedience and willful surrender to its demands and obligations that is the real spirit behind the meaning of the terms `iman` and `islam`. The 3D approach may potentially change the centre of gravity of religious authority and legitimacy from textual scholars to scientists who, at the same time, should also be well-versed in revealed textual sources. However, during the transitory period until scientists of such calibre can be produced, the gap may be filled by combined councils of both types of specialists in various areas of knowledge without assigning any privileged or sacred position to either group. Meanwhile, this approach may change the conventional make-up of Islamic religious thought, which had veneered or glossed over inner content during the medieval ages, and should eventually enable Muslims to liberate themselves from the narrow bounds of national, regional, pan-Islamic or binary approaches such as dividing the globe into two territories of war and peace (darul harb and darul Islam). Through this radically reformed approach, Muslims in a pluralistic and global scenario would be able to develop a visionary, committed and open ethics that would be able to question the world, its order, its achievements and its lapses and then be able to devise concrete modalities to transform the fundamentals of the applied ethics of global human society. The writer is the former dean of the faculty of Islamic Studies at Karachi University.

Redefining Islamic finance By Tariq H. Cheema Friday, 24 August 2012

OPTIMISTS will hail the fact that finally, after a mushroom growth in Pakistan of Islamic and other banks offering Sharia-compliant services and products, a debate has finally been generated about the viability and genuine adherence to religious teachings of these products and services. An indicator of how this very important debate has begun to enter the mainstream was published in this newspaper some time ago in which the legitimacy of the interest-free financial instruments proffered by these banks was questioned. It was argued that an economic transaction would be considered *riba* (interest) free if it avoids the multiplier mode of moneymaking, profit-taking and capital creation.

But the questioning of claims made by financial institutions, Islamic or otherwise, which purport to offer interest-free banking and products apparently styled according to the Sharia is not a phenomenon confined to Pakistan. With the Islamic finance sector termed as the fastest-growing segment of the global finance industry, religious and financial experts, in tandem, are making more and more queries about the authenticity, according to religious scriptures, of the financial services on display. A widely held view is that since the Sharia dictates pure Islamic values and provides direction to religious goals, perhaps if Islamic banks were to adhere to these basics they could end up playing a much bigger role in the new frontier of banking and finance.

The generic term here becomes `contextual` banking but, in reality, the bigger picture appears to provide for a healthy future for Islamic finance, if, of course, its basic principles are followed, in the key markets of the future: Africa, Asia and the Far East. Some experts are of the opinion, though, that the issue plaguing Islamic finance today is not that the industry is not realising its ideal (*tappib*) but the concern that even the *halal* is being diluted. They point out that, just as in conventional finance, Islamic finance also sees many cases where the transactions claim to be legitimate but may be considered unethical. The key here would be the creation of a business model that is truly Sharia-based not merely tagged as `Sharia-compliant`. But the problem may not rest entirely with financial institutions. A widely held belief questions why individual governments do not endorse holistic frameworks designed to help the Islamic finance industry expand in a sustainable manner. Some blame is also apportioned to politicians and policymakers with critics questioning if they even understand the true meaning of Islamic finance. Even within the world of Islamic finance, many inconsistencies in the legal, accounting, regulatory and fiscal frameworks have been pointed out by experts, who point to a heavy industry reliance on exemptions which they term as being *ad hoc*. Additionally, most

Islamic banks appear to function in a tax-free environment and regulators have sometimes been thought to be influenced by political agendas, or by the presence of dignitaries acting as directors. In market-driven countries, say experts, Sharia governance can be an issue and that across the board there is a need for some regulatory oversight for Sharia governance. Unfortunately, most Sharia boards appear to only have a role limited to certifying certain products; they still do not have industrywide standards. This would appear to be particularly true in Pakistan where the line between so-called Sharia-compliant banking and products and conventional financial options has become increasingly blurry. Islamic finance experts across the world ask a very relevant question concerning this state of affairs. Does the Islamic finance mission need to be restated? In order to achieve this a completely new strategy would have to be devised. A more transparent Sharia-governance structure could lead to a more forward-looking corporate approach for Islamic financial institutions. And this could, in turn, help this sector to clearly define corporate targets for social responsibility. There could be a concerted effort to ensure that these targets are completely aligned with Islamic principles and that the integrity of these principles is not compromised. Unfortunately, as appears to be evident from the current state of affairs, most Islamic financial institutions seem bent upon trying to justify their actions through what can only be termed sketchy Sharia guidelines tailored to suit their needs. No thought is given to the important concepts of personal social responsibility or corporate social responsibility both key and indispensable components of Islamic teachings. And no planning seems to have been put in place to attempt to overhaul the state of affairs. Perhaps if the Islamic finance sector worldwide were to evolve a definite vision that truly focuses on the socioreligious implications of its financial instruments, it would help to create definitive change not just in the Muslim world but far beyond. After all, this sector has no shortage of funds. A recent report by the Deloitte Middle East Islamic Knowledge Centre states that Saudi Arabia, one of the main contributors to the global Islamic finance industry, has an estimated \$94bn in Islamic finance assets. According to the report, these Saudi assets represent 26 per cent of total GCC Islamic finance assets and 8.2 per cent of global Islamic finance assets. So there is no question about the lack of finances. But in order to bring about the kind of lasting change that the Islamic finance sector aspires towards, these statistics will need to be backed up by genuine dedication and the will to design, create and implement this revolution. • The writer is the CEO of the World Congress of Muslim Philanthropists.

EVOLUTION OF RELIGION By Nilofar Ahmed, Friday; August 17th 2012:

MANY western Orientalists considered Islam to be a syncretic religion and that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) had tried to reconcile some points from older religions with some of his own, to form a new configuration. But Muslims believe that only one religion was revealed in instalments through a long chain of 124,000 prophets from Prophet Adam to the Holy Prophet. With the advent of every prophet, some new information was added for that prophet's ummah and that particular time and place, continually moving towards perfection. Finally, the Prophet and the Quran completed all messages and gave the new concept of a common vision of one Creator, one humanity, one cosmos, and a universal consciousness for all times and places. Muslims need to remember that Islam is an anti-racial, nonhierarchical, all-embracing universal religion which confirms and unites all revealed religions. The Quran is addressed not only to the believers but innumerable times to humanity at large with the words, 'O people!' (35:3). All other scriptures were meant for a particular time, place and people. But the Quran transcends time and place, even though it has historical narratives and teachings from the time of many prophets. In the Quran, many prophets are reported to have said that they are Muslim: one who believes in and is obedient to the one God and the last Prophet of his time. In Surah Bagarah the Prophet is told that the pious are, '...those who believe in that which was revealed to you and that which was revealed to those before you...' (2:4). The Prophet made it incumbent on every Muslim to believe in and respect previous revealed religions, their books and their prophets. The Prophet was instructed, 'Say, 'We have come to believe in God and whatever has been revealed to us and what has been revealed to Ibrahim and Ismail and Ishaq and Yaqub and their descendants, and what was given to Musa and Isa and what was given to other prophets from their Lord. We do not discriminate between any of them. And we are Muslims, surrendering to Him'` (2:136). In Surah Aal Imran it is said, 'Ibrahim was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was an upright Muslim, who surrendered completely to God' (3:67). Surah Hajj says, '...(It is



the path of your father Ibrahim. He (God) gave you the name Muslim earlier and even in this (Quran) (22:78). Prophet Nuh said to his people, '...My reward is with none but God, and I have been asked to be one of the Muslims, surrendering to Him' (10:72). Hazrat Musa said, 'O my people, if you have come to believe in God, then trust in Him alone, if you are Muslims' (10:84). Surah Aal Imran says, 'When Isa sensed disbelief among them, he said, 'Who will help me in God's way?' His disciples answered, 'We are helpers (in the way) of God. We believe in God, and you are our witness that we are Muslims, surrendering to Him.' (3:52). In this process of evolution Prophet Isa said that he had come to make lawful part of what was forbidden (3:50), to lighten their burden. He made the meat of camels, the fat of beef and mutton and hunting and fishing on the Sabbath lawful. This process continued. Surah A'raf says about the Prophet, '... He lightens from them their burden....' (7:157). The Prophet said that he had been given preference over other prophets in five things: He was made victorious by awe, the whole earth was made a mosque and a source of ablution for him, the spoils of war were made permissible for him, he was given the right of intercession and was sent as a prophet to all creation (Bukhari). He also did away with monasticism, restricted the Sabbath to the time of Friday prayer and gave women legal rights and an equal spiritual status. The coming of Prophet Muhammad, the final prophet, was foretold in the previous revealed scriptures of the world and according to some scholars some of it can still be found in the Zoroastrian, Hindu and Buddhist texts as well as Jewish and Christian scriptures extant today. The Quran says about those who believed in the Torah (Old Testament) and the Injeel (New Testament): 'They recognise him the way they recognise their sons' (2:146, 6:20), because the Prophet was described clearly in their books. The Old Testament states, 'And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, 'Read this, I pray thee': and he saith, 'I am not learned' (Isaiah, 29:12). These are the words that the archangel Jibrail and Prophet Muhammad exchanged at the time of the first revelation (96:1). The New Testament says, 'And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another comforter, (so) that he may abide with you for ever' (John, 14:16). According to Muslim belief, the Prophet will continue as the appointed prophet till the end of time. On the occasion of Haj in 10AH, it was revealed: '...Today, I have perfected your religion for you and have completed upon you My blessing, and have chosen for you Islam as your faith....' (5:3). With the Prophet the process of the evolution of the monotheistic, revealed religion was completed and reached perfection. Hence, Muslims believe that Islam will continue to fulfil the spiritual as well as worldly needs of people, transcending space and time.

Basis of good governance By Qasim A. Moini

THE multi-faceted personality of Hazrat Ali has attracted mystics, seekers of knowledge and the truth for different reasons over the centuries. Some have been awed by his valour on the battlefield, others by his eloquent oratory and others still by the strength of his character, a reflection, as it is, of the insan-i-kamil (the perfect man) in light of Quranic standards and the Holy Prophet's (PBUH) example. Yet while all these attributes of Hazrat Ali are no doubt praiseworthy, today, as we observe his martyrdom anniversary, we should also reflect on Hazrat Ali's views on what good governance should be, as enunciated in his celebrated letter to Maalek Al Ashtar, his governor-designate to Egypt. This is all the more important in the current age, when much of the Muslim world is ruled by unrepresentative autocrats who do not fail to use brutal methods to crush their own people. And even in countries such as ours where the democratic project stumbles along, good governance or the lack of it is a perpetual concern. While many theorists over the ages have issued treatise on statecraft, many of these are not underpinned by any moral and ethical anchors, while some are plainly motivated by the lust for power and control. Hazrat Ali's instructions issued 14 centuries ago during his caliphate on the other hand, combine the spiritual with the temporal, imbuing the art of governance with a gnostic outlook. He addresses issues as varied as welfare of the people, organisation of different branches of government, appointment of judicial officers, tax collection, guidelines for traders and merchants as well as military organisation. The overriding theme of the letter is justice and the fact that governance is a divine duty and that failure to conduct the affairs of state in an ethical, judicious and compassionate manner will require an explanation both in this world and the next. Perhaps this is why Hazrat Ali's letter to Maalek should be required reading for all Muslim heads of state, government and lawmakers as well as the citizenry. Among the first instructions to Maalek is the fact that a ruler must treat the people with kindness. 'You must create in your mind kindness, compassion and love for your subjects. Do not behave towards them



as if you are a voracious and ravenous beast and as if your success lies in devouring them` Whilst today many Muslim countries, including Pakistan, are being consumed by the fires of sectarianism and interreligious hatred, Hazrat Ali advised Maalek Al Ashtar to recognise the plurality of the citizenry and deal with citizens on the basis of humanity. `Remember, Maalek, that amongst your subjects there are two kinds of people: those who have the same religion as you have; they are brothers to you, and those who have religions other than that of yours, they are human beings like you.... Let your mercy and compassion come to their rescue and help in the same way ... that you expect Allah to show mercy and forgiveness to you`.Politics today is patronage-driven, with many of those in power working hard to enrich themselves, their relations and their cronies. However, Hazrat Ali warns that nepotism is sure to lead to tyranny. `So far as your own affairs or those of your relatives and friends are concerned, take care that you do not violate the duties laid down upon you by Allah and do not usurp the rights of mankind. Be impartial and do justice to them because if you give up equity and justice then you will certainly be a tyrant and an oppressor`.Pointing to the roots of internal dissensions, Hazrat Ali advises Maalek to work towards mediating disputes between different groups. `Do not give cause to the people to envy each other (man against man, tribe against tribe or one section of the society against the other). Try to alleviate and root out mutual distrust and enmity from amongst your subjects`.When selecting ministers and officers, he advises that `select honest, truthful and pious people as your companions.

Train them not to flatter you and not to seek your favour by false praises because flattery and false praises create vanity and conceit and they make a man lose sight of his real self and ignore his duties`.Regarding the rights and welfare of the disabled Hazrat Ali says `then comes the class of the poor and the disabled persons. It is absolutely necessary that they should be looked after, helped and well-provided for`.At another point Hazrat Ali emphasises the rights of the poor when he says: `Therefore, be very careful of the welfare of the poor.... Do not be arrogant and vain against them.Remember that you have to take particular care of those who cannot reach you ... and whom society treats with disgust....You should be a source of comfort, love and respect to them`.While the relationship between taxation and representation was highlighted much later in history, Hazrat Ali spoke of the rights of the taxpayer. `A state really lives upon the revenues collected from the taxpayers. Therefore, more importance should be attached to the fertility of land than to the collection of taxes.... The ruler who does not pay attention to the prosperity of his subjects and fertility of the land but concentrates only on collection of revenues, lays waste the land and consequently ruins the state. Despite the passage of 14 centuries, these words remain as relevant as ever and provide the basis for a just socio-political order

Child marriage and islam by Asghar Ali engineer

RECENTLY, the Legal Affairs Committee of the Majles (the Iranian parliament) has told the press that they regard the law that prohibits girls below the age of 10 from being married off as 'un-Islamic and illegal.'Reports indicate that in Iran, more than 75 female children under age 10 were recently forced to marry much older men. It is indeed very strange how child marriage can be deemed Islamic in any sense of the word. How can it be un-Islamic not to permit child marriage at the immature age of eight?This is probably more cultural than religious. After all, any law bears footprints of culture and cannot completely get rid of cultural influences. While Islamic laws are very progressive, cultures in Islamic countries are still feudal or semi-feudal.Also, there has been debate among the ulema, as pointed out by the spokesperson for the Majles, about the age of puberty. Many ulema think that girls attain the age of puberty by or before age 10 while others think by the age of 15. But for most 10 is the age of puberty.This has happened in Iran, where women's participation in the revolution was so genuine and enthusiastic that they voluntarily took to wearing the chador as a symbol of their Islamic identity and a New York Times correspondent — seeing a sea of women in black chadors in 1979 — wondered how daughters of those mothers who had cast off their veils could take to the chador again. He perhaps did not realise that these daughters were wearing the chador as a symbol of their Islamic identity and to show solidarity with the leaders of the Islamic revolution. However, their experience right from the beginning was not very pleasant and their expectations of liberation

were not fulfilled. Gradually, the Islamic regime began to tighten its grip over women's liberty, especially after the death of Imam Khomeini, who was a great visionary and believed in using persuasion rather than coercion. The revolutionary leadership began to quarrel for power in the post-Khomeini period and unfortunately the conservatives won. And in the Islamic world whenever conservatives win, the first to be affected are Muslim women. Recently in Libya, when Qadhafi was defeated and his opponents — conservative Muslims — won, one of their first declarations was to legalise polygamy, as if their revolution was all about polygamy. In Iran too women came to be under increasing control of the conservative clergy. A few years ago a woman, who was married with children, was accused of adultery and was sentenced to death by stoning, though human rights activists maintained that adultery charges were not proved. And there was no punishment for her alleged adulterous partner. Coming back to child marriage, there is nothing Islamic about it; if anything it is un-Islamic. It is well-known that marriage is a contract in Islam and the Quran calls it a 'strong covenant' (mithaqan ghaliza) (4:21). It does not require a lot of argument to conclude that such a covenant cannot be entered into by children of the age of eight, that too a strong contract. A child does not even understand what a covenant is.

It is also well-known that both parties, i.e. husband and wife, can stipulate conditions, without fulfilling which the marriage will not be valid. Can a child stipulate conditions? Marriage is a lifelong partnership and a child cannot be expected to have the experience or intellectual ability to choose his or her life partner. Thus child marriage can in no case be Quranic or Islamic. What is, then, the origin of child marriage in Islam? It is simply cultural and was not uncommon among the Arabs. The jurists can hardly escape the influence of their culture and cultural ethos. Though the Quran did not permit it, they allowed it because it was widely prevalent around them. They also tried to find justification for it in the Prophet's (peace be upon him) Sunnah. Most Muslims believe that the Holy Prophet married Hazrat Ayesha when she was simply seven years of age and consummated the marriage when she was nine. Firstly, this hadith appears about 300 years after the passing of the Prophet and in-depth research by many scholars clearly shows that Hazrat Ayesha's age at the time of marriage was not less than 17 or 18 and at the time of consummation of marriage about 19 or 20. I have seen this research and there are very good reasons to believe it. Since marriage is a contract in Islam, Imam Abu Hanifa, while allowing child marriage for sociological rather than religious or Quranic reasons, also had to make a provision for what is called option of puberty (khiyar al-bulugh) i.e. the girl, on achieving puberty or the age of proper understanding, could accept or reject the marriage and her guardian (usually father) also cannot force her to accept the marriage if she is unwilling. Imam Abu Hanifa had to make this provision because he knew the guardian is not an absolute authority to give the child away in marriage. Religion should prevail over culture and not culture over religion. That is why most Islamic countries have now prescribed 18 as the age of marriage and have made child marriage illegal. Thus the Iranian clergy would be better advised not to legalise child marriage. I am sure the women organisations of Iran would surely resist this measure on part of the government, if at all it takes this regressive step defying the Quranic concept of marriage as a strong covenant.

Faith-based education By Muhammad Ali 7 July 2012#

GENERALLY, faith-based communities have been con-scious in educating their young generation in their faith, values and practices. Like many other communities, the Muslims also have a long and diverse tradition of educating their children in their faith and values. Today, rapid changes in human knowledge and society have posed critical questions about various aspects of religious education such as its scope, approach and relevancy. Keeping the emerging challenges in view, a serious reflection is needed on the practices of religious education in order to forward educative responses. Historically, in Muslim societies diverse traditions and practices of religious education can be traced. For the Muslims, the Holy Quran and the teachings of the Prophet (peace be upon him) have been the major impetus for acquiring knowledge and for intellectual discourse. It was because of this motivation that Muslim societies started striving for education in the formative period and created a comparatively encompassing education system by balancing between faith and the world. This process of encompassing education reached its climax in the 9th-10th century, when Muslim societies excelled in different fields of knowledge by nurturing highly dynamic individuals such as Al-

Kindi, Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and many more. These personalities were not only well-educated in their faith but were also authorities in philosophy, science and social issues. During this period, Muslim societies established some highly vibrant learning centres like the Bayt-ulHikma in Baghdad, Jami AlAzhar in Cairo and institutions in Cordoba. However, in the later centuries a decline was observed in the intellectual and social aspects of Muslim societies. The education system continued through madressahs and other institutions without a sharp dichotomy between religious and secular education. Yet such a dichotomy was observed in the colonial period, particularly with the Muslims of the subcontinent. It was then that the notion of scientific education was introduced with a secular outlook. As a result, the gap between the concept of religious and secular education started widening. Today, as a legacy, it is evident in our country that schools, colleges and universities are considered responsible for secular education and on the other hand madressahs and other religious institutions are viewed as responsible for religious education. Scholars are agreed that an encompassing and inclusive kind of religious education leads toward broader perspectives and a harmonious society. On the other hand, a stiff and exclusive approach towards religious education leads to rigid perspectives and conflict. A number of scholars believe that meaningful religious education is significant for different reasons. Firstly, religious education is viewed as helpful in the process of meaningmaking for a human being. This process helps a person to connect himself/herself with the Creator, their fellow human beings and with the environment. Secondly, identity crisis has become one of the major challenges of modern society. In this regard faith-based education is seen as helpful in developing self as well as a communal identity. Thirdly, a moderate religious education helps people to develop a positive attitude towards others and the environment created by God. Finally, the ethical principles of faith help followers to choose and decide in their personal as well as social life. Hence, religious education is viewed as fruitful in terms of meaning-making, living a purposeful life, identity development and for ethical guidance. On the other hand, faith-based education has been critiqued for different reasons. First, some have viewed it as a cause of division in society. It has been criticised for increasing the gap between different communities that leads towards disharmony and intolerance in society. Second, according to some educators religious education is difficult to define and set educational goals. It is, therefore, complex to assess the outcome of such education. Third, faithbased education is considered incompatible with modern scientific development. Therefore, its relevancy has been questioned by many scholars. Furthermore, the teaching-learning approach of religious education is criticised for promoting rote learning which does not help students develop in various areas of life. Finally, the curriculum of religious education is considered less capable to address contemporary issues. Keeping the challenges and demands of the times in view, serious steps need to be taken by educators and scholars to move towards balanced and encompassing religious education. First of all, serious reflection is needed on determining the scope and purpose of religious education. Today, we are living in a global, diverse society. Therefore, the scope and purpose of religious education should have the potential to enable followers to maintain their identity as well as to be able to live harmoniously with diverse people. Secondly, the curriculum needs to be designed in such a way that it can address different aspects of faith. Along with the theological aspect, the cultural and social aspects need to be incorporated in the curriculum in order to address different dimensions of human life. Finally, there is a need to reflect on the teaching approaches of the institutions which provide religious education. Memorisation should not be the only focus. Rather, understanding, application, analysis and evaluative approaches should be encouraged during the teaching-learning process by incorporating a variety of teaching methods. In short, religious education has serious implications for society. Therefore, rigorous studies are needed on different aspects of religious education such as curriculum, teaching approaches and assessment etc. to make it more relevant and meaningful for individuals as well as for society.



Spirit Of Fasting By Ali Murtaza Zaidi | 7/20/2012

IN today's world, the value of just about anything is measured not through logical thought, but through its positive impact on life in general. This valuation is particularly important in the acceptance of Islam. If the true spirit of Islam were alive, there would seldom be any need to prove the attraction of the faith. The obvious benefits of following Islamic values would have been enough to attract people towards it. Hence, the need of the time is to revive the spirit of religion. In this regard, fasting is especially unique. Unlike other pillars of Islam, it involves absolutely no physical movement of any kind. On the face of it, a man who is fasting is no different from any other man. Yet, it is the intention and the spirit of fasting that makes it so significant and so important that it was made mandatory for all the nations that existed even before the arrival of Islam and to dedicate a whole month to its performance. Clearly, if we lose the essence of fasting its effects would disappear and in that case, fasting would be little more than an exercise in starvation. Unfortunately, this is the prevalent trend in Pakistan and to change it, we need to concentrate and understand the basis and spirit of fasting. The soul of fasting lies in control. Perhaps in all the teachings of Islam there is none more important than control. When a person sacrifices his most innate desires of food and water merely on the command of Allah, it trains him in the art of putting the will of the Creator before his own. In essence, if humans can learn to control their desires, their path to perfection and towards the ultimate objective of life becomes easier. However, the common practices today deliver a message completely opposite to the true message of control. Our emphasis today is on using Ramazan as an opportunity to satisfy our material desires of taste and rest, which has destroyed the concept of enhancing control through fasting. The act of ignoring one's body provides an opportunity to concentrate on the soul. When we are liberated from the daily routines of material life, we venture ahead and ponder over facts greater than matter and the material world, realities like God, spirituality and the greater good. This ever-elusive need of a spiritual connection exists in all of us, in every religion, whether it is the concept of soul-searching in Christianity and Judaism or deep meditation in search of Nirvana for the Buddhist, or even arts and music for spiritual satisfaction in non-religious people. Fasting is one such process which allows the individual to concentrate, to meditate, to discover. This is the reason why the concept of worship is glorified in the month of Ramazan by specific prayers and supplications. This is the perfect time to plan and concentrate on the greater objectives of life. Perhaps this is one of the wisdoms behind the practice of Aitekaf, when believers seclude themselves and dedicate themselves to prayer and worship. Ramazan is not limited to the development of an individual; it plays a vital role in the progress and advancement of the society as a whole. The key to the development of any society is interconnection of emotions and feelings between each and every member of society. Fasting plays an important role in binding the whole society together. It helps those who have wealth and material luxuries to understand what goes on with those that do not. Furthermore, as the whole society collectively abandons the most basic need, it creates this unique sense of brotherhood that invariably, we are all fighting the same battle, worshipping the same God. Invariably, we are all one and the same. It is one of the reasons why acts of charity are so abundant during Ramazan. People want to help others once they realise what the problems of society actually are. However, the problem today lies in the maltreatment of fasting. Due to this, its true spirit has almost ceased to exist. It seems that Ramazan has turned into just another target for mass consumerism. Aren't these glamorous and luxurious iftar and sehri parties pushing aside the true essence of Ramazan and portraying its sacredness and piety as something obsolete and dreary? In the absence of control and concept of obedience to Allah and spirituality, gradually, the holy month of Ramazan is losing its sacredness and turning into little more than a mere cultural event. The situation has gotten so out of control that it is not uncommon to see banners at various malls advertising products with the line 'the true spirit of Ramazan'. It is imperative now, more than ever, that we break this pattern of decadence and destruction. We need to revive the original spirit of Ramazan and the key to that lies in control and spirituality. Conceptual clarity behind the wisdom of fasting is the first step towards the revival of Islamic values. This Ramazan, let us not divulge in unnecessary luxuries and let us concentrate all our thoughts and struggles on control, spirituality and obedience to Allah so that this holy month can shower on us its true and most sacred bounties and blessings. • The writer is a religious scholar.



Evolution of human society By Syed Haider Riza July 13, 2012

MAN is a social animal. This adage is not inspired by religion at all. Instead, the concept has its roots in the Darwinian theories of origin and evolution of the species that also include human beings, or more precisely 'homo sapiens'. Why should the concept be worthy of our consideration? It shouldn't be, but unfortunately those at the helm with respect to present-day humanity think and act very much on the same lines. It should be mentioned that in the current intellectual landscape Muslims only exist at the periphery with the mainland and core position occupied by those who consider the end of all means and efforts to be the fulfilment and satisfaction of animal desires. If one asks them why it should be so, the prompt answer would be because 'man is a social animal'. The concept of man being a social animal tends to view humans as creatures dominated by animal instincts and desires, while also interested and inclined to build societies and live gregariously. Development and evolution of societies, with all the intellectual activities too, converges at the ultimate purpose of satiating carnal desires, albeit at another level. The fruits of such erratic and flawed thinking are clear for all of us to see and witness. Unbounded lust and greed for material wealth, usurpation and trampling upon the rights of the weak and the poor and an aimless crowd of men and women drifting into nothingness are the glaring features of modern societies. Evolution of a society includes development and progress not only on material grounds but more importantly in respect of human values. Values come from inculcating meaning and purpose in the material life. The deciding authority for values can be no one except the Creator Himself, who has taught us the meaning and purpose of life through the canons of religion. There can be little doubt that the religions of the world have been polluted by greed and deceit, but objectively approaching religion with an open mind still leads the inquirer to the pastures of true knowledge and wisdom. Quite evident is the fact that the inherent message and true objective of all religions in general and Islam in particular has been to educate humans about the meaning and purpose of life for subsequent development and evolution. The meaning of life lies in its origin while its purpose is rooted in its ultimate goal. The Quran is the textbook of Islam and encompasses all the concepts that are endowed upon humanity through revelation (wahi) and expressed through the noblest tongue of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Holy Book explicitly declares that human beings, through their creation, possess an innate meaning and purpose. For comprehending such concepts, we have to travel a bit deeper into the verses of the Quran. The Holy Book describes humanity as the possessor of two faculties, as can be inferred from the verses of Surah Hijr: 'And when your Lord said to the angels, 'Surely I am going to create a human (bashaar) from the essence of black mud fashioned in shape. And when I have made him complete and breathe into him My Spirit, fall down prostrating [to] him' (15:28-29). As described in the Quranic text, there are two dimensions of existence for the life of a human being. One is terrestrial, obtained from essence of soil and water and the other dimension relates to the metaphysical and derives directly from the spirit of Allah. The terrestrial aspect provides the necessary tools and equipment for humans to act in this world and accumulate their mundane and after-life benefits, while the metaphysical dimension imparts meaning, direction and purpose to the life of this creature. It is the light within that inspires humans to yearn for truth and present sacrifices for noble and lofty ideals. Thus the rule for prosperously evolving is to cultivate the spiritual within the domain of the corporeal. Strict adherence to this rule is the guarantee for humans, be it individuals or society, to evolve towards the ultimate goal, that is nothing but the proximity of Almighty Allah and to enjoy a blissful life in this world and the hereafter. But as soon as the spiritual aspect is neglected, no matter under which pretext, the process of decline and disintegration begins simultaneously. There are many examples quoted in the Holy Quran of societies that made giant strides in material progress, but were totally heedless of their connection with and duties towards their Lord. Insistence on such sort of behaviour led to their emaciation on earth in less than a generation's lifetime. One group of verses from Surah Fajr can be quoted as evidence: 'Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with Aad, the people of Iram, possessors of lofty buildings, the likes of which were not created in other cities; and (with) Samood who hewed out the rocks in the valley; and with Pharaoh.... Those who created great digresses in the cities.... Therefore, your Lord let down upon them the whip of chastisement, most surely your Lord is watching. What needs to be expanded is the concept of a meaningful life in the context of human society to strengthen the notion that individual and communal life always evolve on the basis of spiritual values so beautifully taught by our noble religion. The writer is a freelance contributor.



Rigidity of Ulema By Asghar Ali Engineer 06, July 2012

A FEW days ago we had organised a discussion on codification of Muslim personal law in a way that could be acceptable to all the sects of Islam in India. We did so in consultation with the ulema, Muslim intellectuals, lawyers and women activists. Also, this codification is strictly within the framework of the Sharia that is the Quran and Sunnah. We had a few consultations before we finalised certain proposals and we had also kept in view the codification done in many Muslim countries like Pakistan, Jordan, Egypt and others. Our draft codified law addresses the question of misuse of polygamy, triple talaq, inheritance, custody of children etc. The orthodox ulema, who have constituted the Indian Muslim Personal Law Board (MPLB) since the 1970s, hardly do anything to stop misuse of these provisions, with the result that a large number of Muslim women suffer; they are arbitrarily divorced, their lives and those of their children ruined forever. Many men, taking advantage of the provision for polygamy, leave their first wife and marry another. Under unregulated Muslim personal law today khula cannot take place without the consent of the husband. Our proposed codification is chiefly meant to stop such abuses and restore the law's focus on justice and gender equality. Though we have finalised proposals we, by no means, consider it perfect and so have kept it open for consultation and further perfection. We organised one such consultation at Lucknow, which is a centre of Islamic learning, and invited ulema from Nadwatul Ulama and Farangi Mahal, two great seats of Islamic learning in India, besides other ulema, intellectuals and women activists. Though we are aware that it is by no means easy to get such proposals accepted by orthodox ulema or the Muslim Personal Law Board, we continue to discuss with them and persuade them to accept these proposals in the interest of the Islamic spirit and justice to women. We also wish to have dialogue with the MPLB, preferably its chief Maulana Rabe Hasani. In this consultation we requested that the MPLB should depute some representative to have at least preliminary discussion with us. A maulana was deputed and from Farangi Mahal its chief Maulana Irfan Siddiqui himself came. The consultation was a great disappointment and proved how rigid our ulema are. One of the reasons why Islam appears to be so rigid to non-Muslims and rationalist Muslims is chiefly because of this attitude. Right at the beginning the maulana from Nadwa said we were undertaking very 'dangerous' work. He also alleged we were trying to change the meaning of the Quran. I asked him to first go through the proposals and then point out why they are 'dangerous' and how they amount to changing the meaning. We again reiterated that our proposals are strictly within the framework of the Quran and Sunnah; all we are doing is regulating and preventing the misuse of polygamy, triple divorce, etc. We have proposed, for example, that a man should not be allowed to marry another wife unless he is permitted to do so by the marriage council (or Sharia court) presided by a qazi and his first wife after thorough inquiry, which could include the need for a second wife and his capacity to do justice. Both the Quranic verses on polygamy (4:3 and 4:129) stress justice, not numbers, and justice is primary in the Islamic value system. The maulana then said it is Hindus who marry more than one wife more of ten than Muslims. I told him we are here discussing Muslim personal law and not Hindu law or violation of Hindu law. We must understand the magasid al-sharia (intentions of the Sharia) and should not go by formal law as formulated by early jurists. In fact, early jurists also had kept justice in mind and even tried to define justice, but soon the concept began to be misused by men and justice became quite secondary. Similarly, triple divorce in one sitting is not mentioned in the Quran and the holy book has clearly prescribed the method also and requires two witnesses at the time of divorce (65:1-3), and yet among Hanafi Muslims triple divorce in one sitting has become the only form of divorce in India. The Quran also makes provision for arbitration before divorce (4:35), which is also avoided today. Thus the Quran becomes secondary when it comes to men's domination. The maulana asked that if he proved the Prophet (PBUH) had allowed triple divorce would I accept it. I said surely I would and asked him to quote the source. He could not and then I quoted the hadith in which the Prophet had strongly denounced triple divorce. The maulana had no reply but again he said very few Muslims divorce their wives. One alim even said none of us present here had divorced his wife. I said we are not going by numbers but quality and intent of law, not how many Muslims divorce their wives. I know of several Muslim women whose lives have been ruined because of triple divorce. The maulana, when rendered speechless, adopted tactics of munazarah (debate) in which the matter is twisted rather than giving a solid reply. He at last left in a huff rather than giving any constructive suggestion. I was very much pained that our religious leaders are so rigid and have lost the true spirit of

Islamic legislation. The writer is an Islamic scholar who also heads the Centre for Study of Society & Secularism, Mumbai.

Economic disparity (6/22/2012)

IN all societies and in all epochs, human beings have been confronted by disparity. This can be observed in every aspect of life. One can see disparity in economic and social spheres and also in educational or intellectual spheres. But the most stressful is disparity at the economic level. Every society consists of the haves and have-nots. Some people are born rich, with a silver spoon in their mouths while others strive to become rich. Similarly, there are people who are weak financially and desperate to make ends meet. The Quran recognises such a nature of society and declares it as God's will. The Holy Book says `...It is We who portion out between them their livelihood....` (43:32). Thus a society is like a human hand whose five fingers are not equal, but they are part of one hand and their strength lies in their unity. However, the gap between rich and poor should not be too wide. A wide gap tends to precipitate unrest and peace is threatened. The peaceful coexistence among different segments of society is possible if all of us think of humanity as one and adopt certain values ourselves such as caring and helping each other. The rich class should realise the hardships of the poor and share a portion of its wealth to uplift the poorer class. All world religions, through their teachings, try to minimise the gap between rich and poor and exhort the well-off to help the less fortunate so that they may also lead a life of dignity. Islam, too, encourages its followers to be generous. Helping others and providing succour to the needy is regarded as one of the cardinal principles of Islam. The Quran declares that society has a right and stake in whatever the affluent possess. This is in contrast to the western notion which upholds the individual's right of ownership over his or her wealth. The Quran says `And in their wealth there is the right of the beggars and the deprived`. (51:19). The Quran uses different terms such as zakat, khairat, infaag, sadaga and garz-ihasana etc for spending in the way of Allah. All these terms imply a notion that one should be generous enough to share one's wealth material and non-material with others and try to create harmony in society. Zakat is considered to be an obligatory contribution that all affluent Muslims need to pay and provide for those who are in need. Its Arabic root signifies the purifying aspect, for it cleanses the giver of greed and excessive materialism, promoting, at the same time, the general level of well-being and happiness in society. Regardless of disparity, Islam considers all Muslims equal in the eyes of Allah; there is no privileged class in Muslim society. However, keeping the human inclination of preferring one's parents and relatives over others in view, Islam allows that man's first charity should be to his or her family members, if in need. They should consider their parents and relatives first if they be in need of financial help, followed by other segments of society. Despite these principles, in our present-day Pakistani society, one sees widespread poverty. With every passing year, poverty continues to increase. Millions of people slide into poverty because of the ongoing economic crisis. Begging has become common; the number of homeless persons continues to grow; migration from rural to urban areas in search of livelihood continues unabated. Crime and suicide rates are high in our country. This grim situation brings one to the conclusion that this society has failed in many ways. In order to redeem the situation, we need to wage a war against poverty. Islam has provided us multiple ways of spending on the poorer segments to uplift them. Help should not make the poor even poorer and dependent on aid all the time. In other words, money should not be doled out; rather, people should be helped in a way so as to enable them to stand on their own feet, to earn their livelihood and later contribute to society. To paraphrase a popular saying, if one gives a man a fish, he will have one meal. However, if a man is taught to fish, he will have meals for the rest of life. It is stated clearly in the Quran that all that is created on the earth is for humankind; it is for man to use the same for humanity's collective benefit. Man's mission would be incomplete till he uses God's blessings beneficently. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) has also set such examples. Poverty cannot be eradicated in one go; it needs a well-thought-out plan in which education has a vital role. Education should be made life-oriented; people should not only be literate but skilfully trained to earn their livelihoods. Every year, thousands of students pass their examinations but are unable to find jobs. They must be encouraged to acquire skills in various trades, take initiatives in the field of their choice and start serving society. All fields are open, it is for man to sow the seed and reap the fruit. There are some NGOs that serve free meals to the needy on a regular basis. This is good,



but the best way to serve society is to train unemployed youth and engage them in some fruitful service. Similarly, in each locality there should be a bureau tasked with searching for opportunities in new fields, training unemployed youth and engaging them.

The importance of 'mehr'

MARRIAGE in Islam is a legal contract between two parties and not a holy sacrament. Many terms and conditions in the marriage contract are obligatory, while others can be set and agreed to at the time of marriage. The gift or dower given as a mark of respect to the wife at the time of marriage by the husband is obligatory and is referred to as mehr. It is the legal right of the wife. It can be in cash or kind. The amount is variable and should be agreed to by both parties. One of the words used in the Quran for this purpose is sadaqah (4:4), meaning the gift that is given in good faith and as a good deed, out of generosity, without meaning to aggrandise oneself. The other word used in the Quran is ajr (33:50). This word means a reward and is also used to denote wages. It is given as a gift to the woman who is going to leave her family and the security of her home, and is risking adjustment in a new and unknown set-up. No one is exempt from paying the mehr. Even the Prophet (PBUH) has been told, "O Prophet, We have made permissible for you the wives whose dower you have paid..." (33:50). When Hazrat Ali came to the Prophet to ask for the hand of Bibi Fatima, the first thing the Prophet asked him was, "Do you have anything to give as mehr?" He said he had a horse and a saddle. He sold his saddle for 480 dirhams and brought it to the Prophet. The immediate needs of the bride and the new household were met with this amount. The concept of jahez, or giving endless amounts of household goods and gifts by the bride's family, does not exist in Islam. In some countries this legal requirement has been made a mockery of, either by fixing an unrealistically large amount and then not paying it, or fixing a ridiculously small amount, which there is no need to pay. The widow is sometimes asked to forgive her husband at his deathbed. The mehr remains a debt on the husband throughout his life and after his death the heirs inherit this debt and are bound to pay it. The mehr is the sole property of the wife and neither parents nor any other relatives have any right over it. Sometimes male relatives illegally take away the mehr without the woman setting eyes on it, making it look like a sale. Depending on the mode of payment, there are two kinds of mehr: the mu'ajjal, or prompt, and the muwajjal, or deferred. The deferred payment is allowed in the case of those who might be expecting remittances at a later date. But delaying the payment unnecessarily is not being true to the contract. Some people, in trying to be pious, say that they are willing to fix the mehr of their daughters at the rate of the sharai mehr, which some elders have worked out to be the unbelievable amount of Rs32.25! It is difficult to say where they got this figure from. The Sharia, or Islamic law, has not fixed or even recommended any amount which could be called the sharai mehr. If inflation over the centuries could be calculated, the purchasing power of this amount would be found to have been reduced several thousand times. There is the well-known case of an old Sahabiah who questioned Hazrat Umar in the mosque when he suggested putting a ceiling on the upper limit of mehr. According to some scholars, even if the mehr is not mentioned in the nikahnama, the mehr would still be an obligation and the law will award it on the demand of the wife. The amount, in this case, would be determined by the mehr of the females of her class or of her father's family, known as mehr misl, or the financial position of the groom, the social status of the bride, the prevalent custom of the time and place and the agreement that the bride and the groom can reach over the amount. There is no upper limit on the amount of the mehr, but the amount should be a realistic one. It can be from a "heap of gold" to anything that the parties agree to and is non-refundable. In Surah al-Nisa, it is said, "Give to the women their agreed dowers [willingly]...." (4:4) and, "...as an obligation...." (4:24). According to Imam Malik, if the parties agreed that there would be no mehr then the nikah would not be valid. But according to Imams Abu Hanifa, Shafi'i and Ahmed the nikah would be valid, but the mehr would still remain an obligation. It is an obligation even in the case of the women of the "...People of the Book...." (5:5). According to Maulana Umar Ahmed Usmani, the labour of the groom cannot be accepted as mehr, because the mehr has to be an amount paid to the bride. These days, marriages are being conducted with great pomp and show in which a great deal of wealth is squandered. If, instead of spending so much on unnecessary items, top priority is given to the payment of mehr, it would mean fulfilling a religious obligation. It would also be more in line with the Quranic injunctions and the example of the Prophet, and could provide

some security to the bride, especially if she can invest the amount profitably. The writer is a scholar of the Quran and writes on contemporary issues.

Women and faith
By Asghar Ali Engineer |

6/1/2012

LAST year, I had gone to Afghanistan for a series of lectures on women's rights. I also spoke on this subject in a gathering of distinguished ulema and one of the issues which came up for discussion was about women being naqisat al-`aql (short of reason) and naqisat al-iman (short of faith). I asked if these definitions were in the Quran, as I did not find them anywhere in the holy book. When I asked if they were in the hadith, the answer was yes. However, I pointed out that any hadith which goes against the Quran cannot be accepted as authentic. All the ulema agree that the Quran gives equal rights to men and women and both enjoy equal dignity. Then how can a woman be short of reason and faith? An alim who was insisting on women's shortcomings was unable to reply and instead murmured and sat down. Recently I was going through a book written by Maulvi Nazir Ahmed, a great scholar of Islam with somewhat liberal views, where he discusses the story of the creation of Adam (AS) and his being expelled from paradise for eating the forbidden fruit. Maulvi Nazir Ahmed mentions that though Satan could not mislead Adam as he was firm in his resolve not to eat the forbidden fruit, he succeeded in misleading Hawwa (Eve) as she was short of reason and she persuaded Adam; both ate and were expelled from paradise. It is highly surprising that a scholar of the stature of the Maulvi did not bother to consult the Quran, which nowhere says that Satan succeeded in misleading Hawwa. The Quran directly blames Adam for being misled and thrown out of paradise. In Ayah 121 of Surah Ta Ha it is said 'And Adam disobeyed his Lord and went astray.' Here Adam is directly being blamed for allowing himself to be misled and going astray, while Hawwa is not mentioned. Despite this, Maulvi Nazir Ahmed and most of our ulema blame Hawwa for yielding to temptation and persuading Adam to eat the fruit of the tree. The evidence of the Quran is totally ignored and the ulema rely on hadith. Why did it turn out this way? The reason lies in our anti-women attitude and thinking in general, which dictates that women are inferior to men and that men are the rulers. Where does this attitude come from? Naturally from the patriarchal values which are prevalent in society. We would continue to think this way and quote prominent ulema without understanding that our ulema were products of certain periods and were prisoners of their time. In other words, we have to adopt a socio-cultural approach to religion. What we call Islam is not merely based on the Quran and Sunnah but also our social and cultural values. The social structure of that time was not only patriarchal but the prevalent patriarchal values also deeply penetrated our understanding of the Quran and our theology, though we consider our theology divine. Women in the past feudal and patriarchal structure of society were subjected to severe restrictions including the denial of any public role. The segregation of women from men also became part of our treatment of women. During the Prophet's (peace be upon him) time women played active roles, took part in various public debates and even accompanied the Prophet to the battlefield. However, all this changed once Islam entered the era of monarchy and a feudal culture became the ruling culture. The monarchs maintained large harems and made women their prisoners to be guarded by eunuchs. It was in this environment that women lost the rights that they had been given in the Quran and Sunnah. Men were now projected as their superiors, totally ignoring what the Quran had to say. The Quran gave equal rights to women in every respect (see verses 33:35 and 2:228). The holy book did not use words such as husband and wife but used zawj or zawja instead (zawj or zawja means one of the couple). Thus the husband and wife are referred to as zawj and our ulema, later on under the influence of the feudal and patriarchal culture began to quote a hadith that had prostration (sajda) been allowed for man, I (the Prophet, peace be upon him) would have ordered the wife to prostrate before her husband. The Quran also avoided using the word ba'al as in Arabic it signified a deity. The Quran uses the word ba'al only three times and that too for narrating stories of the past; otherwise, it uses the word zawi for 'husband'. The use of the word ba'al was avoided lest it be misinterpreted. The husband in Islam is no more than one half of the couple, signifying the equality of both husband and wife. Yet our ulema privilege the husband over the wife. Since women were confined to their homes and their role reduced to that of a housewife, they lacked experience of the outside

world, while parents thought that a person destined to be a housewife did not need any higher education. The woman thus usually remained illiterate and could acquire no experience of public life outside the home and hence came to be described as naqisul `aql (short of reason). Today, conditions have changed drastically; women are working in every field of life and have become great achievers. In fact, they have proved themselves to be superior to men in several fields. To describe them as naqisul `aql is to display one's own self as being short of reason. E The writer is an Islamic scholar who also heads the Centre for Study of Society & Secularism, Mumbai#

A test for parents #y Amin Valliani/25/2012

IN building society, parents have a special duty. They are to nurture their children in such a way so that they become responsible and committed to serving humanity. The Quran describes children as a test for parents. In Surah Anfaal (8:28) and Surah Taghabun (64:15) Allah says that `your possessions and your children are but a trial. Therefore, they are to be brought up with a full sense of responsibility so that they become true assets of society and a source of constant happiness for their parents. Parents rightly consider their offspring their chief support especially in old age and attach high hopes to them. They wish for their children to gain respect and dignity in society thus they are nursed, nurtured and loved in childhood. While providing the best care for children, parents sacrifice their rest, sleep and other interests. They desire that their children listen to them and honour their words. Also, respect for parents is a basic requirement of society. But our present-day society is characterised by an intergenerational gap. Traditional values are under pressure in the modern age. Children, on reaching the stage of adolescence, become more independent and sometimes ignorant of their parents' needs. They develop their individualistic nature and chalk out their own patterns of life. Many youngsters do not obey their elders but express their free will. They differ with their parents in many areas and declare them outmoded. This requires parents to act sensibly with patience and forbearance. If children are trained properly in their formative years, with deep understanding of the correct principles in their hearts, they will stay with them for their entire life and they will perform wonders. Therefore, parents need to take great care during childhood by helping, guiding and encouraging their children and by participating in their educational and other healthy activities. At times, due to various reasons, young children seem engrossed in juvenile activities, and become overambitious and aggressive in their attitude. They go overboard and do not comply with their parents' wishes. This creates tension and stress within families and family bonds become shaky. Children find their parents' demands excessive and intrusive while parents complain that their young children do not heed their advice. In this situation, both sides need to be more mindful; they must understand each other. Parents are to realise that they are under trial. They must take lessons from the religious traditions that even many prophets had to face such situations. Prophet Yaqoob had 12 sons, the majority of whom were not happy with him. Similarly Prophet Nuh was not happy with his son. Surah 29 asks `Do people think that they will be left alone because they say: we believe and will not be tested? And indeed We tested those who were before them....` 29:2-3). According to a hadith, the hardest tests were given to the prophets, thereafter the saintly people were examined and then those who were below them in rank. Thus every person is subject to tests and trials in this earthly life. Though parents and children are biologically connected, this does not mean that they are to impose their will on each other. Dialogue and creating mutual understanding are the best ways to tackle cumbersome situations. Both have to take care of each other and contribute to the well-being of each other. Adolescents need their own space to move freely. They are full of energy, ideas and emotions. All parents desire that their children should remain obedient, loyal and devoted. But to achieve these objectives, parents have to provide a spiritual environment in their homes where children spend most of their time. At the initial stage, they should take utmost care in their religious formation by setting examples of honest living.

Children are to be nurtured and looked after in accordance with Islamic teachings. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) has said that the best gift a parent may give to children is education. He loved his grandsons Hazrat Imam Hasan and Hazrat Imam Hussain and thus set an example for Muslims to follow. Children are to be taught that life is competitive; it is not a bed of roses but is made up of problems, trials and tribulations. But one must strive for good and not lose hope. We should teach our children that there is pleasure in contributing to the welfare of others and life is in the long run a series of events which involve the idea of give and take. In case

youths turn rebellious, parents should use their intellect rather than emotions to deal with the situation and try to bring the youth towards the right path. They should also invoke Allah's help, seeking His guidance to overcome difficulty, like Prophet Yaqoob prayed intensely, which resulted in the easing of his difficulties; all his recalcitrant sons asked for forgiveness at a later stage (12:9798). Pakistan is at a crossroads as its majority population consists of youth. Figures show that more than 60 per cent of the total population of Pakistan is below age 24. This burgeoning youth population can be a huge asset if properly nurtured, carefully trained and guided towards their full potential. They possess strength, will and grit. Therefore, they are to be engaged in productive activities. All stakeholders need to be alert to make this soaring number of young people social assets for Pakistan. •

Free will and predestination

AFTER creating Hazrat Adam God asked all the angels to perform sajdah, or prostration, before him (2:34). Being the first human being, he represented all of humanity. Iblis, or Satan, was a jinn who had been so pious that he was placed in the company of angels, at which he became proud and refused to prostrate before Adam. His argument was that he had been created from fire and, therefore, he was superior to Adam who had been created from clay (7:12). Why was Adam given such a high station? The answer can be found in the accounts of Adam and Eve in paradise, when they are given the freedom to eat and drink whatever they desired, from wherever they desired and however much they desired, except for the fruit of one tree (2:35). This forbidden fruit was placed within their grasp, making it a possibility for them to eat it, and for Satan to tempt them, symbolising the fact that of all the creatures in the universe, human beings and jinns enjoy a certain amount of freedom of choice. Having no choice the angels bowed to Adam. But Satan showed his defiant attitude and did not comply. It is this choice that gives human beings and jinns the potential for a high station. All the other creatures have a fixed path and a fixed destiny. Surah al-Ahzab says, 'We offered this trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains but, being afraid (of breaking the trust), they refused to bear it. But man accepted it. Indeed, he is unjust and ignorant' (33:72). The 'trust' offered was the responsibility accompanying choice and free will. But the others were afraid of this heavy burden and of inclining towards transgression rather than obedience. Human beings accepted 'free will' and its accountability, but continue to betray the 'trust' that accompanies it. Humans were created in ahsan-i-taqweem, or 'the best of form', given qualities of imagination, invention and mercy. But they can also become the asfala safileen, 'the lowest of the low', capable of self-centeredness, injustice and destruction. The 'trust' therefore, requires responsibility towards humanity, all creation and one's inner self, based on rightful belief. According to the Sufis, the human being has the best capability to bear this trust and must struggle to make his station purer. Through the logic of the intellect and the burning of the veils by the fire of love, he is able to experience the gnosis of the Essence of the Divine Being and to progress to higher spiritual stations. One third of the Quran speaks of accountability, the Day of Judgment and Heaven and Hell, leading one to think that one will be judged by one's belief and actions. If life is governed by laws, then where lies freedom of choice? Since God is omnipotent (2:20), how much blame do human beings deserve for their deeds? One also believes in naseeb, or destiny, and yet the successful person is lauded and the unsuccessful person is looked down upon. What is the relationship between the will of God and the will of human beings? This question was asked and deliberated upon by many people in the early years of Islam. Soon two distinct schools of thought, the Jabariyah and the Qadariyah, emerged. Jabar means to enforce, or that helpless state of human beings in which they are forced to act in a particular manner. The Jabariyah school believed that all creation is under an absolute decree, which cannot be changed. They held God responsible for the actions of human beings. Qadar means power. The Qadariyah school believed that human beings had absolute power and freedom and that there was no such thing as predestination. They felt that man's actions were imperfect and, therefore, could not be attributed to God. The others felt that the Qadariyah seemed to have taken away the power of God and, in a way, assigned partners to Him. Hassan al-Basri, one of the most renowned tabieen, jurists and scholars of the eighth century, developed Qadari leanings. He thought that a belief in predestination should not be an excuse for inactivity or negative activity. He stressed individual moral responsibility which, he felt, was balanced by God's mercy and His final control of man's destiny. The Qadariyah school later found a balance between the omnipotence of God and the need for personal moral

effort. The truth has to lie somewhere between absolute decree and absolute choice. The answer is to be found in a hadith of the Prophet (PBUH), who asked a man who came to visit as to what he had done with his camel. The Bedouin replied, 'I have left it in the care of God'. The Prophet said, 'First tether the camel and then leave it in the care of God' (Tirmizi). Human beings have been given a certain amount of ground for action. It is their duty to first do their best within that ambit and then attribute it to one's destiny. As one progresses spiritually, one's will becomes aligned to the will of God. Perceived contradictions become dissipated and one's will diminishes in inverse proportion to one's submission to His will. There is a hadith, 'Nothing can change the divine decree except dua' (Ahmad), that is, supplication can change destiny, hence the emphasis on prayers. Allama Iqbal said, 'Raise your khudi, (nafs, or spiritual self), to such a height that God would ask before every decree, 'Say, what is your desire?'

Independence of judiciary#

y Syed Imad-ud-Din Asad | 5/11/2012 MTHE notion of judicial independence and impartiality has always been an integral part of Islamic law. Regarding the administration of justice, the Quran declares: 'Surely, We have revealed the Book to you with truth so that you may judge between people by means of what Allah has taught you. And be not one pleading the cause of the dishonest.' (4:105) It is agreed that the occasion of the revelation of the abovementioned verse was a dispute between a Jew and a Muslim. The Muslim, supported by his tribe, had falsely accused the Jew of theft. Based on the evidence the Prophet (PBUH) decided against the Muslim. At a time when help was sorely needed for the defence of Islam, such a verdict meant the loss of that tribe. But such considerations did not carry any weight with the Prophet and he cleared the Jew of the charge. Thus, the verse lays down that dishonesty must be punished, and the balance of justice must be held equal between friends and foes and between Muslims and non-Muslims. Muslim judges are required to be upright and not to be swayed by ties of relationship or by considerations of fear or favour. The Quran says: 'O you who believe, be maintainers of justice, bearers of testimony for Allah, even though it be against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives whether one be rich or poor....' (4:135); '... And not let hatred of a people keep you from acting equitably....' (5:8); '... So judge between men justly and follow not desire....' (38:26) The Prophet was known for his fair and impartial administration of justice. He strictly implemented the Quranic instructions regarding equality before the law, and never made any distinction between litigants on the basis of faith or relations. Besides Muslims, non-Muslims would also come to him for the settlement of their disputes and he would adjudicate in accordance with their laws. Most importantly, instead of claiming any legal immunity, he laid down the rule that even the head of state may be challenged, in both official and private capacities, in a court. His following statement demonstrates it all: 'Verily, those who were before you were destroyed because when a man of stature from among them committed theft, they passed no sentence on him. The successors of the Prophet also ensured the implementation of judicial independence and impartiality. Caliph Umar once went to a judge for the settlement of a dispute. The judge, on seeing the caliph, rose in his seat as a sign of respect. Hazrat Umar, considering this act as an unforgivable weakness, immediately dismissed him from office. Another example that shows how just and impartial the Islamic judiciary must be is when Caliph Ali went to court regarding a piece of armour in the possession of a Jew. As the evidence submitted by Hazrat Ali was apparently insufficient, the judge gave his verdict in favour of the Jew. The Jew was so impressed by the fairness of the Islamic justice system that he immediately returned the armour to Hazrat Ali and embraced Islam. The following portion of a letter, written by Hazrat Ali to one of his governors, eloquently explains the status and role of the judiciary in Islam: 'Select as your chief judge one from the people who by far is the best among them; one who is not obsessed with domestic worries; one who cannot be intimidated; one who does not err too often; one who does not turn back from the right path once he finds it; one who is not self-centred or avaricious; one who will not decide before knowing the full facts; one who will weigh with care every attendant doubt and pronounce a clear verdict after taking everything into full consideration; one who will not grow restive over the arguments of advocates; one who will examine with patience every new disclosure of facts; one who will be strictly impartial in his decision; one whom flattery cannot mislead; one who does not exult over his position.' But it is not easy to find such men. Once you have selected the right man for the office, pay him handsomely enough to let him live in comfort and in keeping with his position, enough to keep him above temptations. Give him a position in your court so high



that none can even dream of coveting it, and so high that neither backbiting nor intrigue can touch him. Thus, we see that Islam provides for an independent and impartial judiciary. As law in Islam stands at the apex of social organisation, those who administer the law must likewise be elevated and kept independent of executive control. Also, it is the duty of the judges to stand firm for justice, though doing so may become detrimental to their own interests. Unfortunately, judicial systems in many present-day Muslim countries rarely show the independence and impartiality required by Islamic law. This is not due to some inherent fault in the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah. A dishonest government never prefers an efficient judiciary and, therefore, competent persons are never appointed to judicial posts. And when a competent person somehow does get appointed, his actions are neither supported nor encouraged. Of course, an upright and capable regime has nothing to fear and does not need to resort to such tactics. •

Fatwas can be changed

Asghar Ali Engineer Dated: 04th may, 2012. RECENTLY a conference of the Muslim Personal Law Board in India saw a huge crowd of 200,000 Muslims from all over Maharashtra. The chairman of the board, Maulana Rabe Hasan Nadwi, made a highly emotional speech and said that Sharia is divine and no change in it can be made; even if the whole Islamic world changes Sharia, Indian Muslims will not allow any change and will keep traditional Sharia close to their hearts. How appropriate is this stance? Today many women are agitating for certain necessary changes to issues such as triple talaq and unregulated polygamy which cause suffering to them. Some concerned people, including myself, have taken the initiative to codify Muslim personal law so as to minimise its misuse and give relief to Muslim women. To what extent Sharia can be misused can be judged from the fact that a well-known Islamic university in Hyderabad Deccan allowed a man to marry two young girls simultaneously on the assumption that Islam allows polygamy. All this is based on books written and fatwas issued hundreds of years ago. Our ulema do not want to deviate from these written texts. Whenever any question is asked they simply consult these texts and issue a fatwa and again, like court judgements, these fatwas become a precedent for subsequent edicts and are treated as universally applicable. Lay Muslims do not know that these fatwas are merely opinions expressed by a mufti and are not binding. Should fatwas issued by eminent ulema be treated as unchangeable? Or can they be changed with time and place? Generally, Sharia is thought to be divine and immutable and no human being can make any changes in it. In fact, Sharia laws have been developed by eminent imams like Abu Hanifa and others to meet the requirements of their time and place. Thus Sharia can be described as a sincere human approach to divine intention. It is well known that when Imam Shafi'i shifted to Egypt, he changed his opinion on several fiqhi (jurisprudential) matters. Recently I saw a book by Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a well-known scholar highly respected in the Arab world. It is on the subject of fatwas and the necessity for changes in fatwas. Yusuf al-Qaradawi has invoked the principle of ijtihad in Islam to justify changes in fatwas. The sheikh even maintains that Sharia cannot be useful for the ummah unless ijtihad (he indicates several forms) is exercised from time to time. Sharia, it is important to note, must remain dynamic and relevant to the time and place where it is applied. Fundamental principles and values on which Sharia is based cannot be changed, but the laws based on these principles and values should and must change from time to time to keep them relevant and useful. That is why in most Islamic countries traditional Sharia laws have been changed or codified to make them as useful as they once were. Al-Qaradawi has given 10 grounds on which fatwas can be changed; all these grounds are highly relevant. First, he gives four grounds on which fatwas should change i.e. change in time, change in place, change in conditions and change in what he calls 'urf (social practices or traditions). The Quran also uses the term ma'ruf in this sense. Then he gives six more grounds for desirability of change which are: change in knowledge; change in needs of people; change in capabilities of people; spread of calamity (when some acute problem becomes common); change in collective political or economic condition and change in opinion or thought. These 10 grounds, in fact, capture all possible changes which can take place in a given society. This makes it amply clear that Islamic jurisprudence is by no means static or immutable as commonly thought but it has enough space for change. It is altogether another matter if our ulema are rigid or incapable and try to hide behind the divinity of Sharia. In fact, if any law remains static it cannot meet the

requirements of society. Today personal laws — as developed during the mediaeval ages — need many changes. It is also well known that Sharia law during that period had incorporated many Arab customs and traditions as ma'ruf, and triple divorce was among them. The Prophet (PBUH) had denounced this particular practice as the Quran intended to empower women and give them equal status and no one practised it during his time. However, it was later on reintroduced for certain reasons. Today, women are highly aware of their rights and such practices are against the principle of equality, which is more fundamental than any Arab custom. Still, it is practised in countries like India and even thought to be divine. Similarly, polygamy is much misused and also thought to be a man's privilege. It has to be regulated and should not be allowed to be used as per one's whim. No woman would accept it today as they did in the past. Mediaeval formulations in respect to personal laws were also influenced by patriarchal values and today patriarchal values are being challenged, especially by women. Polygamy should be allowed only in cases where it is very necessary. Similarly, other personal laws could also be reviewed if needed. It would greatly benefit the ummah if our ulema kept the abovementioned 10 grounds in mind while giving their opinion in matters of Sharia. The writer is an Islamic scholar who also heads the Centre for Study of Society & Secularism, Mumbai.

Is riba-free banking possible?

Ahmad Raza Friday, April 27, 2012

ISLAMIC banking has grown reasonably fast in the last decade in Pakistan. People invest religiously trusting the fatwa of the so-called Sharia boards of these banks. Are these financial instruments really riba-free (interest-free)? Do these instruments conform to the juristic and ethical frameworks laid down by the Quran, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and the imams of the leading schools of thought? If the analysis shows otherwise, then why not do 'modern' banking instead of labelling riba-infested products as 'Islamic' and selling them as halal and riba-free? The theoretical problem arises out of our inability to comprehend the meanings of two words 'riba' and 'ba'ah' used in the Quran to strictly prohibit the former and clearly permit the latter. There are two verses in the Quran which deal with the concepts of riba and ba'ah and adjudicate reasons for their subsequent prohibition and permission. The Quran clearly refers to the inherent psychological nature of men, which ordinarily thrives on boundless greedy profiteering and moneymaking without personal labour and effort. So the Quran clearly describes in a verse this human weakness and declares that those who approve of riba are "possessed by Satan" (2:275). It is strictly forbidden and instead one should engage in ba'ah which requires personal labour and effort. The second verse of the Quran explains the economic rationality of riba and declares that it is forbidden because it leads to profiteering and moneymaking in a multiplication mode of economic exchange (3:130) which does not involve labour and effort by the owner of the economic resources. Therefore, one should engage in socially and ethically permissible economic activity of ba'ah. On the other hand, the practice of riba leads to unprecedented social and economic inequalities which create an unjust society, which the Quran and the Prophet disapprove of in manifest words. Ba'ah is permitted because it is based on rational, ethical and mutually agreed contracts of economic exchange, sharing risks, benefits and liabilities and profit (land, labour, capital, commodity or intellect). The law of riba and ba'ah applies equally and universally to both tangible and intangible economic resources. In simple terms, riba is an irrational, exaggerated, labour-less and unethical accumulation of wealth in a multiplication mode, while ba'ah is a rational and socially and ethically agreed economic exchange of labour and money. The actual labour and work done by a person is weightier and considered a sacred trust, for according to a hadith the worker is a friend of God. Now let us illustrate by an example to show what it means to accomplish a riba-free economic exchange. I own one acre of land and I give it for cultivation to a peasant on mutually agreed terms. A riba-free land-tilling agreement between me and the peasant would be something like this: the owner of the land should provide the water, seed, fertiliser and protection in case of natural calamity hitting the crop and distribute ushr forthwith. The peasant would cultivate the land with honest labour, take care of the field, protect the crop against dangerous animals, sell it at a fair market price and distribute the profit equally with the owner of the land. This land modaraba and the transaction thereof will be a completely riba-free economic activity. The peasant shall be duly compensated for his labour in case he opts out of the transaction

before the maturity of the crop. Let us now analyse a so-called Islamic financial product offered by Islamic banks in Pakistan. The product is known as 'car modaraba'. The Islamic financial product is a nomenclature shift from the routine banking sector offering the same product as 'car-leasing facility'. All terms and conditions of the modaraba contract are analogous to the car-leasing agreement, favouring the Islamic bank rather than the end-user. It is a misnomer to call it modaraba because the Islamic bank is not the first owner (in this case the car maker/manufacturer is the true owner). The Islamic bank thus does not fulfil the qualification of ownership required to enter into a ba'ah with the buyer (in this case end-user of the car). The bank is not a seller in principle, rather a supplier of the car as a middleman and making profit in a multiplier exchange mode from a product which is produced by another party in the first place. Now this Islamic bank imposes all sorts of conditionalities to secure this so-called modaraba contract with the car buyer — in fact a consumer of the car, not a worker as per Islamic framework. This includes car price, car rent (another term for mark-up), takaful (name change for insurance), processing fee, binding contract and capping on further usage of the car. Is this modaraba transaction fair to the parties, free of multiplier mode of economic exchange, sharing liabilities and benefits? The answer would be an emphatic 'no'. An economic transaction would be considered riba-free if it avoids multiplier mode of moneymaking, profit-taking and capital-creation. According to Islamic economic rationality, labour is mightier than capital because it creates economic value. On the contrary, Anglo-Saxon liberal economics rests on the reverse proposition (adhered to by banks in Pakistan, both 'Islamic' and 'modern'), which holds that capital creates value and therefore the worker must lay in bondage to capitalistic domination. The vicious cycle of capital accumulation is perpetuated by multiplier mode of economic exchange. No sector of the economy is exempt from this multiplier effect and hence infested with all the attributes of riba.

Of parents and promises

S.G. Jilane Friday, April 20, 2012

DUTY towards parents and sanctity of the given word are among the values held in high regard from time immemorial, especially in eastern traditions, philosophies and religions.

Not only do the Abrahamic faiths, i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam, place due emphasis on duty towards parents and keeping to the promises made or agreements signed, faith systems such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, also embrace these finer human values. Take, for instance, the emphasis placed on obeying, respecting and attending to the needs of parents as illustrated in the Ramayana, which narrates stories of devotion to parents, especially in their advanced years. Here is a particularly touching episode: A young boy, Shraavan Kumar carried his blind, old parents on his shoulders from one pilgrimage to another. Like scales of a balance, he put each in an open basket. He hung the baskets with a rope at each end of a long flat bamboo, which he carried on his shoulders. It was during one such journey that Rama's father, King Dasrath of Ayodhya, accidentally killed Shraavan as he was filling his pitcher from a stream in the jungle. Covered by foliage he was invisible to Dasrath. The latter mistook the gurgle of water rushing into the pitcher for a deer drinking at the stream and shot an arrow. The shaft hit Shraavan. At his cry of pain, Dasrath rushed to his side. But, even as the young boy breathed his last, his thoughts were for his parents. Shraavan, requested the king to take the water he had collected, to his thirsty and helpless parents, and died. Similarly, when Abraham told his son Ishmael of having dreamt that he must sacrifice Ishmael and asked the latter's view, the son promptly told his father to go ahead with fulfilling his dream. "Father," said Ishmael "do that which you are commanded, God-willing you shall find me patient" (37:102). And Joseph "raised his parents high on the dais..." (12:100) as a mark of reverence when they went to Egypt. As to the importance of the given word, though there are anecdotes galore of how people would lay down their lives to stick to their promise, here is one, again, from the Ramayana to illustrate the point. King Dasrath once promised his third and youngest, wife, Keykeyi that he would grant her two wishes. After many years, when the time came to nominate his successor Dasrath decided to choose his eldest son Rama from his first wife Kaushilya. At this point Keykeyi decided to cash in on his promise and named the two boons; one that her son Bharat be nominated as the successor to the throne and, two, that Rama be sent for 14 years in exile. Dasrath was devastated, because Rama was his most beloved son. But having given his word he was not one to back out. Bharat was appointed

to succeed him and Rama was exiled. When some people counselled Rama to refuse going into exile, he answered that it was the tradition of his Raghuvangshi dynasty that a life may be lost but a given word must not be retracted (Raghukul reet sada chali aayee/ Pran jaye varu vachan na jaye). A similar example is in Abraham's prayer to God seeking forgiveness for his father, who was an idolater. He prayed because he had told (promised) his father; "Peace be on you. I will pray to my Lord to forgive you" (19:47). Islam takes these noble values to celestial heights by sanctifying them as divine injunctions. Believers are 'enjoined' to give respect to their parents and be kind to them. Time and again they are reminded of the travails their mothers suffer in bearing them and giving them birth. "And We have enjoined upon man concerning his parents — his mother bears him in weakness upon weakness..." says Allah (Luqman:14). In Al Ahqaf:15 the message is repeated: "We have enjoined on man kindness to his parents. His mother bears him with hardship and brings him forth with hardship..." Sura Al Asra lays down filial duties in greater detail: "Your Lord has decreed ... be kind to parents. If one or both of them attain old age with you, do not say to them a word of contempt, nor repulse them and speak to them a gracious word. And out of kindness lower to them the wing of submission and say, 'Lord, bestow on them thy Mercy even as they cherished me in my childhood'" (17:23-24). The message is that if parents are infirm and their voice is frail, the offspring should bow (if required) in order to hear them properly. As to fulfilling promises, Surah Al Maeda, begins with the words, "O you, who believe, fulfil your pledges" (5:1). Next, in Sura Al Asra, there is the command "Keep the covenant", followed by a warning about accountability. "Surely every covenant will be inquired into" (17:34). In Al Mominoon the injunction adopts a hortatory note to induce believers to abide by their promises; "Those who faithfully observe their trusts and covenants ... these will ... inherit Paradise (23:8; 10-11). But abiding by covenants and adhering to the word given is not all. Even contradiction between word and deed is strongly deplored. "O you who believe, why say you that which you do not," says Sura Al Saff. The essence of the message in the Quranic verses cited is that frivolous conduct, where pronouncements have no value, is conduct unbecoming in one who aspires for the office of Allah's vicegerent on Earth.

On the fate of nations

By Amin Villani 13th April 2012

ONE of the important themes in the Quran is the fate of earlier nations. In many verses Allah enjoins us to travel around the world to see the ultimate fate of those who went before. Many Prophets mentioned in the Quran had travelled a lot during their lives. Thus the Quran makes it incumbent on every generation to travel around the earth and see the glory of Allah, the majesty of His nature and learn how nations rose and went down. The land bears testimony to the fact that many nations have emerged, raised and reached the heights of civilisation but ultimately they went down and lie buried under the earth. Similarly, history is also evident that the world witnessed many rulers, dynasties and nations that touched the zenith at one point in time and then slid into oblivion. Many warriors conquered vast lands, enslaved weaker nations, ruled over them and then their successors faced decline and met their fate. A nation which reaches the pinnacle of its height and a nation which falls to its lowest ebb have both left marks for the coming generations to ponder upon and learn from the causes of their rise as well as their downfall. The Quran also mentions the vicissitudes of some nations like of those of 'Aad, Hud and Saleh, etc. for drawing lessons. It directs the Prophet (PBUH) to relate such stories so that his followers may reflect. The narrations indicate certain core values upon which a nation can stand and grow and also warn us to abstain from such vices that cause downfall. From verses in the Quran, it can aptly be derived that there are aspects that can derail a nation from the road to human development. These can include excessive materialism, abuse of power and use of intoxicants, for instance. A nation engrossed in excessive materialism tends to ignore higher spiritual values, human rights and sense of equality among its members. It falls into corruption and goes haywire. The Holy Prophet (in one of his sayings warned that excessive love of the world (materialism) was the root of all wrongs (Ibn Majah). Similarly, disregard of human rights promotes lawlessness, violence, crime and use of intoxicants make a nation drift towards catastrophe. Therefore, every nation needs to guard its lines against such vices. Human history provides ample proof that the great dynasties that ruled over nations for hundreds of years fell just because they sold their souls. In Indian history, the Mughals' was one such dynasty which ruled India from 1526 to



1857 but it fell because of negligence of eternal verities. Many Mughal princes were involved in excessive drinking, infighting for succession and pursuing acrimonious policies. Among the core values, the following of which is fundamental for a nation to touch its zenith, is education. In Islamic teachings, acquiring education is made obligatory. The Prophet is reported to have said to acquire education even it be in China. In Muslim history, we see education has played an important role in the uplift of the nation. Muslims founded educational institutions such as Jamia Al-Azhar in Cairo during the Fatimid rule in 969CE and Madressah Nizamiyyah in Baghdad during Seljuk times in 1067. The role of the Aligarh Muslim University in India cannot be ignored. It enabled Indian Muslims to achieve the desired status in society. Such efforts supported Muslims to develop; however, when they stagnated, they started facing decline. In Pakistan, the education sector faces a dismal situation. The issue pops up every now and then and every government has been aware of it. As per government-approved curriculum, we teach Islamiyat in our schools. But many schools are unaware of its importance; they teach Islamiyat as a formality while its real purpose is to build character and inculcate a sense of fear and presence of the Almighty in the individual's heart and mind. Everyone lives, moves and has his being under the watch of Allah and is accountable for his/her deeds. Acquiring education in the Islamic context is not only for worldly improvement, but also to better understand Allah's creation. It has a role in developing a nation, helping a people to live ethically as rational beings. Further, it enables them to differentiate right from wrong. Education is essential to develop critical faculties among learners to think freely and challenge some of the negative stereotypes. Thus education is a core value to equip the people to realise their potential. Presently, the education sector is beset with untold problems. Every now and then we hear and read about ghost schools, ghost teachers and even unqualified people occupying teaching posts on the basis of their political affiliations. Such gross irregularities over time can make a nation's ship sink. Therefore, those who are charged with the responsibility of imparting and managing education, need to awaken their conscience and devise a system of monitoring and evaluation to check the ills. The curriculum needs strong and meaningful content. Though the present sorry state of affairs has led to polarisation in society to some extent it can still be argued that things can move towards betterment if we continue to straighten our directions in the light of the Quran's value system based on the knowledge of right and wrong. Our success lies in educating our children in letter and spirit because a nation that loses the sense of educating its people is well on the way to decline. *The writer is an educationist.*

The concept of justice

Asghar Ali Engineer Friday, April 06, 2012

LAST month in Vienna there was a seminar on multiculturalism and religious pluralism. Among other issues a discussion was held on the concept of justice. What is justice, it was asked, and participants gave their opinions. Among the participants were professors of philosophy, sociology, political science, as well as theologians and rights activists. It was an interesting discussion but there was no consensus as usual as to what justice is. I, too, gave my opinion and said that Plato had recorded for us the discussion Socrates had with his young disciples on justice and when no one could give a satisfactory definition, he (Socrates) concluded that justice is what the powerful think justice is and we have the famous saying 'might is right'. There has been no change till today in this definition of justice by Socrates as justice plays itself out on the world stage. Even in the 21st century it is the mighty who decide what justice is. America is the most powerful nation in the world today and if America decides justice lies in invading Iraq or Afghanistan, the whole world endorses it as a just action. Even the UN Security Council endorses it almost unanimously. Some whimpers of protest are naturally ignored. Our modern and civilised world has not gone a centimetre ahead of the classical definition and yet justice seems to be a most important value in the world today. But do we then have to live with Socrates' definition even today when we claim we have progressed so much? Weaker sections can only dream of getting justice; or will they ever get justice? In Islam, justice is a most fundamental value; it connotes one of Allah's names also. Allah's name is Aadil (Just). The Quran repeatedly emphasises justice and even goes to the extent of saying justice is closest to piety (taqwa) and so "do justice", it commands, as it is closest (aqrab) to piety. But many of our theologians think piety lies in offering prayers and fasting alone whether it results in just conduct or not. They say all Islamic laws are most just but then

differ, like others, on the definition of justice. Take for example, the question of justice and multiple wives. The Quran permits polygamy but verse 4:3 emphatically says, "If you fear you cannot do justice, then (marry) only one". It is a different thing that for our jurists the number (four wives) is more important than justice which the Quran actually emphasises. Generally when a man takes more than one wife the only inquiry made is whether he has less than four wives and not whether he would be able to do justice between them. Also, if at all inquiry on this line is made, the question arises what is just treatment amongst wives? Generally it is thought giving equal maintenance and allotting equal time to all wives constitutes 'justice'. But there is no unanimity on this concept. The Mu'tazila theologians (who are considered rationalists) maintain that equal maintenance and equal time cannot constitute justice and going by verse 4:129 equal love is also necessary which is not humanly possible. In doing justice, the context also plays a role. It could be social, political, economic and also depends on the kind of social structure one has. For example, in a tribal society equal retaliation is considered meeting justice. The Quran calls it qisas (retaliation in equal measure) and since Arab society was tribal in structure it declared al-hayat fi'al-qisas) i.e. life consists of retaliation (in equal measure). Many theologians ignore the context and declare it as an eternal principle of justice. If we ignore the context, justice may become injustice. Today, when human rights and dignity are of great importance, such tribal retaliation would be unjust. We should not be under the impression that the Quran pronounces retaliation as an eternal principle of justice. Not at all. Many Islamic scholars assert that it was in the context of that tribal society, and as an accepted (ma'ruf) principle that the Quran had approved of it; otherwise it considered pardoning as a higher principle and instructed believers not to insist on qisas. Most Islamic countries have since abolished the law of retaliation and adopted other forms of punishment more in keeping with the principles of human dignity today. Thus it will be seen that context plays a very important role in dispensing justice. It is for this reason that while principles and values remain unchanged, the law must constantly evolve so as to be as close to these eternal principles and values as possible. Many tribal societies of yore have changed into modern democratic societies today and so laws framed for tribal societies cannot remain static and if one insists, as many theologians often do, they will result in injustice violating the very fundamental principles of the Quran. And this is what is causing widespread gender injustice in many Muslim societies today. Principles and values are much more fundamental than the laws framed in the past when the concept of justice was very different from what it is today. In the past weaker sections of society were treated very differently to meet the ends of justice but today it would be considered undignified and against the principle of human rights and human dignity. Today if we want to do gender justice many old laws will have to be re-examined as they have become unjust by today's standards of justice. Thus the concept of justice evolves with time, though the most powerful may think even today that what they believe is justice is, in fact, justice.

Of life after death

Nilofar Ahmed 30th March, 2012

THE concept of accountability and those of sawab-i-jariah, isal-i-sawab, the Day of Judgment, and Heaven and Hell play an important part in Islamic theology. There is an interesting link between all of these concepts and that of the period immediately following life after death, i.e. barzakh (a purgatory of sorts). The literal meaning of barzakh is 'barrier'. The term barzakh is applied to three aspects of life after death: the time during which the body rests in the grave, the interim period between death and resurrection, and the place in which the soul, now the main instrument of existence, will abide during this time. This period forms a barrier between this life and resurrection, when the dead will be raised again (23:99-100); judgments will be passed and intercession will take place. When the angel is commanded to draw out the soul of a person, the door to asking for forgiveness is now closed (4:18). If the person in the throes of death is a good believer, then the angel is instructed to convey the greeting of God to him (33:44, 36:58), and the soul leaves the body with great facility. The soul also meets close relatives who come to greet him, hears and replies to the greeting of the visitor to the grave and informs the old inmates about the latest developments in the world. After burial, or its equivalent, the soul will be returned to the body temporarily, to face those questions, the answers to which will determine the future, permanent abode of the soul. The Prophet (PBUH) said that whoever is

successful in the first, most difficult stage of the grave, will find the later stages to be easy (Tirmizi). Two angels appear and ask questions like, "Who is your Lord? What is your faith? What is your opinion about the man (the Prophet) who was raised up amongst you? And, how did you come to know about all this?" When all the correct answers are given, it is proclaimed from the heavens, "Lay out the carpet of Paradise for him and dress him in the robe of Paradise and open a door for him in the direction of Paradise". A door is opened through which enter the fragrant breezes of Paradise and its pleasant sights become visible (Abu Dawud). The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Your deeds are presented to the prophets and to your parents on Friday. They are pleased by the good in them and the brightness of their faces increases. So fear God and do not give pain to your dead" (Tirmizi). A person asked the Prophet (PBUH) as to what was due to his father after he had died. The Prophet replied: praying for him, sending istigfar (asking for forgiveness), honouring his promises and keeping in touch with his relatives (Abu Dawud). Some of the most highly elevated souls will be those of the martyrs, of whom there are two categories: those who have succumbed to certain ailments and calamities, and those who have died fighting actively in the cause of God. For example, those who died due to a plague, intestinal ailments, drowning, being trapped in a collapsed building, or in self-defence, family, possessions or guarding the faith, or fighting for his rights and a woman who died in childbirth, are all martyrs (an-Nasai). They will be rewarded in the Hereafter. The martyrs who died in the cause of God, have a unique spiritual status in barzakh. The Quran says, "... they are alive and with their Lord is their provision." (3:169). There is the belief that after a person dies, his destiny cannot be changed because the door for any further deeds, good or bad, is now closed and his record book is sealed. But one cannot ignore the concepts, mentioned in several hadiths, of sawab-i-jariah and isal-i-sawab. The former is an act done during one's lifetime, which merits continuous reward, such as digging a well, planting a tree or building a school or a mosque, or imparting knowledge. It can also be the good deeds, taught by a person to someone, if they continue to perform them and spread their benefits. Isal-i-sawab is doing any good act with the intention of sending its benefit as a gift to a dead person. Reciting istigfar is the best gift. It can also be the prayers said for a dead person by family, friends or the spiritually elevated. In all these ways, one's record can be bettered and one can reap these benefits till the end of time. The believers will be forgiven a great deal of their sins because of the prayers of the living. Ibn Sireen said that the soul resides in the house of truth therefore, whatever it relates in a dream, is true. Muhammed Zauqi Shah in his book, Barzakh, says that the grave-dweller will repent that he did not give more importance to his deeds than to his relatives, friends and worldly wealth. If the sole pleasure of the soul in this world was remembrance of God, then barzakh will be blissful. Zauqi Shah says that it does not make sense to sacrifice the immortal soul for the pleasures of the mortal body. Barzakh is also the time during which some benefit can still be reaped from what one did in the world and also from the gift some people would like to send to the dead. It is also like a waiting room in which the persons concerned will get a foretaste of what is in store for them in eternal life. The writer is a Quran scholar who writes on contemporary themes.

Minding social ethics

Amin Valliani 23rd March, 2012

EVERY human being is connected with Allah spiritually. However, in this material world, we also get ourselves connected with other entities, such as parents, family, kin, community, society, country etc. As time goes by, new connections are added at every new stage of life. The ethics of connectivity with others has deep spiritual roots in religion. Its understanding makes our lives happy and more comfortable. We live, move and have our being among these relationships and sometimes our existence depends partially or fully upon them. Our day-to-day condition, happy or otherwise, is also subjected to the interaction with these relationships. Every entity or relationship with which we are connected entails certain rights and responsibilities. We are to fulfil these to maintain cordiality in relationships. The teachings of Islam encompass the whole life; they guide us first to fortify our spiritual bond with Allah. This is fundamental and at the core of Islam's overall message. Every individual is supposed to strengthen the spiritual link with Him by continuous remembrance of His existence. One has to keep one's mind and thoughts towards Allah to earn His blessings. Similarly, Islam encourages us to maintain happy relationships with other fellow beings. It urges civility, humility, tolerance and straight dealing with fellow beings. These values subordinate the self

and emphasise the others, and are essential for cordial and peaceful coexistence in society. Islam is a religion of peace which can only be realised when an individual has happy relations with others. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) likens Muslim brotherhood to a building composed of bricks. Every brick is joined and connected with other bricks, thereby fortifying the building. The Prophet (PBUH) started his mission of preaching Islam by inviting his relatives to it first. Though his relatives did not respond positively, his invitation indicates the weight he gave to relatives. When he established himself in Madina, he tried to conclude peace agreements with many tribes, such as those of the Jews of Madina, the Christians of Najran, and also the Makkans at Hudaibiya. He dispatched emissaries to the rulers of far-off lands such as Rome, Persia and Abyssinia inviting them to peace and good relations with the emerging Islamic state. We come across a number of verses in the Quran, directing us to fulfil the obligations to those we are connected with. The Quran says "...And do not forget liberality between yourselves. Truly Allah is all-Seer of what you do" (2:237). Verse 4:36 also enjoins to worship Allah and join none with Him, do good towards parents, kinsfolk, orphans, the poor, neighbours, strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer and those slaves whom your right hands possess. Verily Allah does not like such as are proud and boastful, it concludes. There are a number of factors that can imbalance relations in society and Islam forestalls them. Greed for material wealth is one such impediment that causes fissure among close relatives. A greedy person usurps the other's property unjustly; therefore, Islam directs us "...And eat up not one another's property unjustly" (2:188). Another factor that likely affects good relations is differences of opinion. Sometimes we have differences with people around us, but these should not be made a matter of ego and waiting for the other party to take an initiative to normalise a relationship. We must understand that coming to terms quickly after differences brings us peace and serenity. Islam allows diversity of opinions; there existed diversity of opinions among the Prophet's companions. Friction among close relatives is part of human nature but one needs to be watchful that these do not reach a point of no return. Islam does not give importance to differences of ethnicity, caste, status and language etc. As all such factors cause cracks in happy relations in society; they are insignificant in the scheme of Islamic teachings. A balanced approach in maintaining worldly relations is the right course. Unnecessary intrusion in the affairs of others also affects relations and sometimes backfires. Nobody likes meddling behaviour; therefore, one must be careful to not overreach. Over-engagement and unnecessary intrusion in the affairs of others are portents of a darker scenario. Presently, we face a situation that can best be described as being stuck between the devil and the deep sea. We give importance to material wealth, a palatial life and social status. Our modern culture has promoted isolated living. We live sealed behind closed doors with least interaction with neighbours, relatives and other members of society. Everyone has become individualistic, focused on self-interest alone most of the time. It is generally observed that residents of, say, an apartment block do not care for others when they park their vehicles and block common passages. Some throw trash from their balconies and others do not pay their monthly maintenance charges regularly. Similarly, a teacher who is supposed to build the future can be found involved in self-service. A student who will manage future society is unaware of his responsibilities. A doctor who is to assure his patient's health can be found making money alone. Thus few think of their social responsibility towards others, and this negligence can lead to fissures and unbalanced situations in society. For a human being as a social animal it is important to feel a close connection and mutual empathy; however, this seems to be on the decline due to the excessive materialism and self-centred approach of modern urban living. In order to achieve a worthy lifestyle, we have to follow the teachings of Islam, i.e. treating well those with whom we are connected. Everyone should feel responsive and respectful towards the rights of others.

Dreams and spirituality

By Nilofar Ahmedriday, Mar 16, 2012

DREAMS are a fascinating experience of daily life. Psych-ologists, in trying to understand the symbolism and meaning of dreams, have come up with various theories. The first question we must try to answer is: what exactly is a dream? Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory of dreams in his book, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, was based on the premise that repressed aggressive and sexual instincts find an outlet into the conscious mind through symbols, and hence find fulfilment. He also established a link between dreams and insanity. His theory popularised dream interpretation. Carl G.Jung, broke away from Freud and the Psychoanalytic Society, started a more humanistic approach to psychology, saw dreams as part of a natural process of healing and explored the meaning of dreams through mythology, symbols etc., that connect to our imagination and soul. However, when one looks at the Quran and hadith, one finds that dreams are a serious part of Muslim belief. During sleep the soul is supposed to leave the body temporarily and roam around in different spheres. Its experiences are seen and felt by the body in the shape of dreams, which sometimes convey information from the unknown. The more elevated the soul, the higher its sphere of spiritual experience. In Surah Al-Ana`m, the Quran says, 'He is the One who takes up your souls at night, and knows what you earned during the day, then raises you from it (sleep), so as to complete the time fixed (for you to live)' (6:60). Surah Al-Zumr says, 'God captures the souls at the time of death as well as those whose time has not yet arrived, in sleep. Then He keeps back those whose death has been decreed and sends back for an appointed time, the others' (39:42). In Islam, the soul leaves the body in sleep but remains connected to it so that, at the slightest stimulation, it jumps back into it. When God decrees a person's death, the soul is held back permanently, causing the physical body to die, while the soul lives on eternally. Dreams are mentioned several times in the Quran. Prophet Ibrahim dreamt that he was asked to sacrifice what he loved most. Knowing that this was God's command, he spoke to his beloved son Ismail, a prophet-to-be, who consented to be sacrificed. Prophet Ibrahim was successful in his trial and the boy was replaced with a ram (37:100-108). Prophet Yusuf saw a dream as a child: 11 stars and the sun and the moon prostrating before him (12:4). The meaning of the dream was made evident after decades when his stepbrothers and parents joined him in Egypt. The king of Egypt also related his dream in which seven lean cows devoured seven fat cows (12:43-44). The king was impressed by Prophet Yusuf's gift of dream interpretation and made him the minister in charge of the treasury. His planning, based on his interpretation of the king's dream and his own wisdom, saved Egypt from famine.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) started seeing true dreams before receiving revelation (Bukhari). The Prophet said that after him nothing would be left of prophecy, except for a true dream. He also said that dreams are one in 46 parts of prophethood (Bukhari) and, 'Whoever sees me in a dream has truly seen me, for the devil cannot impersonate me' (Bukhari). One of the greatest desires of a true Muslim is to see the Prophet. The Prophet saw the conquest of Makkah in a dream (48:27) in 6 AH, two years before it happened. The Prophet said there are three kinds of dreams. Firstly, meaningless dreams from one's nafs or ego, secondly from Satan and thirdly, prophecies of good news from God (Bukhari). Prophet Muhammad would listen to his followers' dreams after fajr prayers (Bukhari) and would interpret them. The Prophet taught that dreams should be recounted only in front of a person who loves you or a person who is wise and has some knowledge of their interpretation (Bukhari). The Companions of the Prophet used to confide their dreams to the Prophet or to Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddique (Bukhari). The walis, or saints, were also given the gift of the interpretation of dreams as well as spiritual guidance through them. Abdul Aziz bin Umar reported that he asked his deceased father in his dream which of his deeds did he find to be most sublime (or useful). The father replied, 'Istighfar (asking for forgiveness)' (Zaugi Shah). Abdul Wahab Shirani saw Imam Ghazali in his dream after his death and asked him how his Lord had treated him. Ghazali replied that He had forgiven him because of his patience in his act of writing. If a fly came and started sucking the ink from his pen he would wait until the fly had flown away of its own accord (Zauqi Shah). Contrary to the common concept that one goes to sleep at the time of death, Prophet Muhammad said that human beings are asleep in this world and at the time of death they will wake up (Ibn Al-Arabi). The life of this world might well be a dream. The life to come might be the reality that is hidden from us and will become apparent on awakening in the hereafter.

On commodifying humanity

By Ahmad Raza Friday, Mar 09, 2012

THERE were times when seals and insignias were used by the Indus valley and Babylonian people to demonstrate the pomp and prosperity of their civilisations. This scenario has now changed, as objectmaking and commodity-making have moved beyond civilisations and cultures. The commodified global culture and the lifestyle embraced by it is no more sacred and revered by consumerist human beings. There are three historical forces that have transformed the notion of commodity beyond all bounds of imagination today. These are free market economy, electronic capital and information junk. Take the case of free market economy first. There were times when charity was part of almost all known human societies in the world. It was an act of magnanimity and generosity and performed for its intrinsic human value. Today the case is reversed. Charity is now marketed by huge organisations engaged by the social corporate sector. The acts of charity add value to the balance sheets of the social corporate regime. Awards, scholarships, loans and all sorts of monetary contributions are marketed by marketing agents of the mighty social corporate conglomerates. They also perpetuate a global commodified worldview and a power regime, which is unjust and morally corrupt to the core. No local economies and/or worldviews can withstand the barrage of this global domination of the social corporate sector. Thanks to the inherent nature of the free market economy there are mechanisms to commodify every act, whether tangible or intangible, including charity and philanthropy.

Electronic capital is another glaring force of the commodified global culture today. There were times when gold coins standardised economic and religious exchanges. People were unaware of words like inflation, price-hike and stagflation, GDP, GNP and ERM. Electronic capital has changed all this. Now capital moves impersonally in huge cycles of electronic exchanges between agents who even do not know each other's identities and origins. The capital continuously moves to high ebbs of profit and accumulation of monetary benefits. It has facilitated the marketing of almost everything under the sky; from human bodies to human souls, from sex to music, from religious beliefs and convictions to political agendas. Those on the lower side of the ebb who cannot do much about it must continue to suffer. If one cannot make intelligent decisions and cannot market one's neurons-capital effectively, one is subjected to utter frustration and suffering. There is no way and there is no modern human society that can escape the commodified electronic capital and the reign of commodified global economic domination of neurons-capital. If you can play effectively with the global cycles of electronic capital, by whatever means, you are successful. The age of neuro-capitalist society has become dominant and those who still muse over some kind of socialist or moral revival are mistaken and need to take a refresher course in social history. The third significant aspect of commodified global culture is the Troy of information junk. We witness on the Internet and on social networking websites a mammoth display of information junk. There were times information was considered a sacred trust to be shared amongst human and humane societies. People would die guarding this sacred trust of information. Now we face a different case. If for one month one monitors the Internet information junk sites on the World Wide Web, one can discern a social pattern in the usage of Internet and social networking websites. The pattern includes hate-preaching of all sorts, ethnic, religious, political, sexually gratifying stuff, followed equally by religious and political hate consumption materials. Knowledge and its dissemination no more constitute a sacred trust. A globally commodified storm of information rages of use and abuse. An overwhelming number of people no longer connect with each other personally and spiritually. We are now linked by social information networks of use and abuse. In the process, human beings have lost their most precious asset; their identity based on quest of knowledge. Humanity may thus become an object of ridicule as we exist in a perpetual flux of information-grounded hate literature of all sorts. There were grand stories and storytellers during the classical age. They believed in honour, self-respect and alms-giving out of sheer responsibility towards the fellow needy. Today the contemporary commodified global information junkyard has made one just an information consumer and generator. We do not thrive on the pleasure of great storytelling of moral values anymore. Instead we thrive as insects of a market of information junk. We consume beliefs, we consume justice, we consume freedom, we consume democracy, we consume terror, we consume sex and finally we consume violence. There is no escaping this harsh reality of commodified global culture.

Either we are part of it or else we must perish in pain and solitude. The information junkyard has taken away from us a decent sense of being human. We connect with each other as information consuming beings driven by either self-interest or a profit-loss logic. We are irreversibly tattooed with symbols of this information junk. The global anti-Christ of commodified pleasure, profit making and consumption has led to the alienation of man from the centre of his being. He has become oblivious of his destiny on earth. He no more likes to engage in a discourse of knowledge, wisdom and mortality. Like Shylock in the Merchant of Venice, everyone is after 'a piece of flesh from Antonio's heart'. For this precise reason, one may even have to sell one's commodified soul in order to satiate the body's hunger and thirst. The writer is a social scientist who teaches at the School of Business and Economics, University of Management and Technology, Lahore.

On interfaith dialogue

By Asghar Ali Engineer Friday, Mar 02, 2012

THE world is highly diverse. There is not a country which is without diversity. Though in the past too diversity existed but colonisation, scientific progress and communications have increased diversity in the world; globalisation has further added to its intensity. Today people seek jobs and education in far-off countries across continents. Also, it is Allah's will to create diversity among His creation. The Quran says: 'And if Allah had pleased He would have made you a single people, but that He might try you in what He gave you. So vie one with another in virtuous deeds' (5:48).

Thus, diversity is Allah's will and it is a trial for us if we can live in peace and harmony with one another other despite our diversity. Also, Allah wants us not to assert our superiority but to vie with one another in good deeds only. But the fact is that if there is diversity there are likely to be misunderstandings and misconceptions about one another. This can and often does lead to conflict and breach of peace. Such conflicts apply to both the faiths themselves and the interfaith communities. Interfaith conflict is also widespread amongst Muslims like between Shia and Sunni or Bohra or non-Bohra Muslims or between Sunni Barelvis and Deobandis. The only way to remove these misconceptions is to have a dialogue with one another. Thus the three 'Ds' become quite important: democracy, diversity and dialogue. Democracy and diversity are complementary; although many people think homogeneity is a strength, it is really not in the modern age. Homogeneity can whereas diversity becomes a lifeline for democracy. Experience shows that greater diversity results in a stronger democracy. But diversity also poses a challenge and this challenge has to be met through proper understanding by one community of believers and the other through dialogue. The latter, it should be noted, is not a modern or contemporary concept, and that includes interfaith dialogue. In India, in the mediaeval ages Sufis and yogis often used to have a dialogue. Also, Sufis, Christian mystics and Jewish saints, had dialogues. Some of them spent years understanding other's religious traditions. Dara Shikoh, for example, had a thorough knowledge of the Hindu traditions. He translated the Upanishads from Sanskrit into Persian. (I have seen its manuscript in Darul Musannifin at Azamgarh, India). He also wrote a book titled Majma'ul Bahrayn ('Meeting of Two Oceans'). It is a great book of dialogue between Hinduism and Islam. However, there are some rules to be observed if dialogue has to succeed and produce results. The very first requirement is that none participating in the dialogue should have an attitude of superiority. It goes against the very spirit of dialogue. Secondly, dialogue should be on certain concrete issues, like women's rights or war or non-violence, etc. Today, there is a great misunderstanding on such issues. Most non-Muslims, especially westerners, think that Islam gives no rights to women and subjugates them, owing to certain practices among Muslims from the hijab to polygamy to honour killings, and so on. Similarly, there is widespread misunderstanding about the concept of jihad because of certain fatwas or statements issued by Osama bin Laden and his deputies, justifying the 9/11 attacks as jihad. And there is a great misconception among Muslims and Muslim ulema on issues like polygamy and jihad. Thus the need for dialogue amongst them too. There is much more that needs dialogue with non-Muslims. A meaningful dialogue should include religious functionaries, scholars who have in-depth knowledge of the issues, journalists (who spread

misconceptions) and lay people who are often victims of misconceptions. Secondly, one should have the requisite humility to learn rather than to only argue on the basis of conviction and not knowledge. Participants must also have the right to raise questions to remove their doubts. Thirdly, one must be firmly rooted in the traditions of one's own faith and should be able to explain the reasons for certain practices or offer the rationale for a certain teaching. Any doubt or ignorance may harm the spirit of dialogue. Also, one should be able to remove all doubts raised during discussion through one's own thorough knowledge, arguable conviction and clarity of thought. Fourthly, one should have tremendous patience and the capacity to listen to and understand the other side's opinion without trying to silence the opponent through debating skills or use of polemics. Such tactics can destroy the very idea of having a dialogue. There is a fundamental difference between a debate and a dialogue. While being firmly rooted in one's own faith's traditions, one also has to accept the other's without being critical. A dialogue is to promote understanding and not to reject the other's faith or find fault with it. A dialogue should never be directed at converting the other side but at understanding it. Both or multiple partners in a dialogue should throw light on the issues concerned in the light of one's own faith's traditions and handle the questions with the tact and delicacy they deserve. A dialogue so conducted can work wonders in promoting understanding about one's own faith while understanding others' views. I have been a part of a dialogue process for more than 40 years and can say with confidence that dialogue plays a very important role in a diverse society. Knowledge, conviction, clarity and appreciation for the other's point of view are very useful tools for a dialogue to be valid. •

PHILANTHROPY,

in simple words, signifies acts done for the welfare of mankind. Every religion has philanthropic components to it. Islam is no exception; in fact, Islamic injunctions make acts of charity obligatory. However, for many in the West, the concept of philanthropy is not a feature that is likely to be associated with Islam. Instead of kindness, compassion, mercy, generosity and love of mankind, ordinarily westerners tend to characterise Islam by such features as violence, terrorism, intolerance, authoritarianism, oppression of women, etc. There are two reasons for this grave misconception: their ignorance of the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet (PBUH); and the irresponsible attitude of certain Muslims. In fact, Islamic texts contain numerous injunctions to perform good deeds and to serve fellow humans. The Quran says: 'But righteous is the one who... gives away wealth, out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask, and to set slaves free' (2:177). 'So give to the near of kin his due, and to the needy and the wayfarer. This is best for those who desire Allah's pleasure' (30:38). Similarly, there are various sayings of the Prophet describing the significance of philanthropy: 'You shall not enter Paradise until you have faith; and you cannot attain faith until you love one another. Have compassion on those who are on earth, and He who is in heaven will have compassion on you. God will show no compassion to him who has no compassion towards all human beings.' 'Doing justice between two persons is alms; and assisting a man upon his beast, and his baggage, is alms; and pure words, for which are rewards; and answering a questioner with mildness is alms; and every step which is made towards prayer is alms; and removing that which is inconvenience to man, such as stones and thorns, is alms. Philanthropy, in Islam, is of two kinds: obligatory and voluntary. Obligatory philanthropy consists of zakat and zakatul-fitr or fitrana; whereas, voluntary philanthropy includes the institutions of sadaga and waqf. Zakat is the share or portion of wealth that is obligatory upon a Muslim to give to fixed categories of beneficiaries, if the value of his assets is more than a specified limit. The beneficiaries of zakat are mentioned in the Quran: '(Zakat) charity is only for the poor, and the needy, and those employed to administer it, and those whose hearts are made to incline (to truth), and (to free) the captives, and those in debt, and in the way of Allah and for the wayfarer' (9:60). In an Islamic state, the government is responsible for the collection and administration of zakat. Zakat-ul-fitr or fitrana is the charity which every Muslim, having a certain amount of wealth, pays at the end of the month of Ramazan. Zakat-ul-fitr is mandatory on every Muslim not only on his own behalf, but also on behalf of all the persons he is in charge of. Sadaga not only means charity in the form of money or food, but includes every act done for the benefit of fellow men. The Prophet said: 'Every act of goodness is sadaga'; and 'there is a sadaqa due on every Muslim. If he cannot give because he has no money, let him work so he can support himself and give charity; if

he is unable to work, then let him help someone in need of his help; if he cannot do that, let him adjoin good; if he cannot do that, then he should not do evil or harm others: it will be written for him as a sadaqa. Waqf is the permanent dedication, by a Muslim, of any property for any purpose recognised by Islamic law as religious, pious or charitable. Waqf causes the transfer of ownership, of the thing dedicated, to God. But as God is above using or enjoying any property, its profits are reverted, devoted, or applied to the benefit of mankind. Any property can be the subject of waqf. The validity of a waqf is determined by the possibility of everlasting benefit being derived from it by any form of dealing of which it is capable, or by converting it into something else. It is only where the subject matter is totally unfit for being turned into profitable use that its dedication fails. The Islamic institution of waqf has a wider scope and purpose than that of a trust in the English law. The institution became so popular and important in Islamic countries that, in most of them, a special ministry was established to deal with the administration of waqf properties. Islam lays great emphasis on supporting the destitute. The Quran and Sunnah declare in clear words that it is the responsibility of the wealthy to look after the deprived sections of society. Muslims are not only instructed to do good to fellow humans, but are also told to treat animals well and to protect the environment. Though other religions too preach and encourage philanthropy, Islam takes a step further by making it compulsory in the form of zakat. Islam has made it the responsibility of the Islamic state to ensure that people perform this obligation. Thus, a non-payer of zakat not only incurs the displeasure of God, but can also be proceeded against by the state. In other words, philanthropy has been made a legal duty as well. The writer is a graduate of Harvard Law School and the director of School of Law and Policy, UMT, Lahore.

Of Aisha's age at marriage

It is said that Hazrat Aisha was six years old when her nikah was performed with Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in Makkah, and nine years old when she moved in to live with her husband in Madina after Hijra. This piece of misinformation has led to the wrong view that child marriage has the sanction of Islam. It must be noted that establishing the authenticity of hadiths, the narrators' circumstances and the conditions at that time have to be correlated with historical facts. There is only one hadith by Hisham which suggests the age of Hazrat Aisha as being nine when she came to live with her husband. Many authentic hadiths also show that Hisham's narration is incongruous with several historical facts about the Prophet's life, on which there is consensus. With reference to scholars such as Umar Ahmed Usmani, Hakim Niaz Ahmed and Habibur Rehman Kandhulvi, I would like to present some arguments in favour of the fact that Hazrat Aisha was at least 18 years old when her nikah was performed and at least 21 when she moved into the Prophet's house to live with him. According to Umar Ahmed Usmani, in Surah Al-Nisa, it is said that the guardian of the orphans should keep testing them, until they reach the age of marriage, before returning their property (4:6). From this scholars have concluded that the Quran sets a minimum age of marriage which is at least puberty. Since the approval of the girl has a legal standing, she cannot be a minor. Hisham bin Urwah is the main narrator of this hadith. His life is divided into two periods: in 131A.H. the Madani period ended, and the Iraqi period started, when Hisham was 71 years old. Hafiz Zehbi has spoken about Hisham's loss of memory in his later period. His students in Madina, Imam Malik and Imam Abu Hanifah, do not mention this hadith. Imam Malik and the people of Madina criticised him for his Iraqi hadiths. All the narrators of this hadith are Iraqis who had heard it from Hisham. Allama Kandhulvi says that the words spoken in connection with Hazrat Aisha's age were tissa ashara, meaning 19, when Hisham only heard (or remembered), tissa, meaning nine. Maulana Usmani thinks this change was purposely and maliciously made later. Historian Ibn Ishaq in his Sirat Rasul Allah has given a list of the people who accepted Islam in the first year of the proclamation of Islam, in which Hazrat Aisha's name is mentioned as Abu Bakr's 'little daughter Aisha'. If we accept Hisham's calculations, she was not even born at that time. Some time after the death of the Prophet's first wife, Hazrat Khadija, Khawla suggested to the Prophet that he get married again, to a bikran, referring to Hazrat Aisha (Musnad Ahmed). In Arabic bikrun is used for an unmarried girl who has crossed the age of puberty and is of marriageable age. The word cannot be used for a six-year-old girl. Some scholars think that Hazrat Aisha was married off so early because in Arabia girls mature at an early age. But this was not a common custom of the Arabs at that time. According to Allama Kandhulvi, there is no such case on record either before or after Islam. Neither has this ever been promoted as a Sunnah of the Prophet. The Prophet married off his daughters

Fatima at 21 and Ruquyya at 23. Besides, Hazrat Abu Bakr, Aisha's father, married off his eldest daughter Asma at the age of 26. Hazrat Aisha narrates that she was present on the battlefield at the Battle of Badar (Muslim). This leads one to conclude that Hazrat Aisha moved into the Prophet's house in 1 A.H. But a nine-year-old could not have been taken on a rough and risky military mission. In 2 A.H, the Prophet refused to take boys of less than 15 years of age to the battle of Uhud. Would he have allowed a 10-year-old girl to accompany him? But Anas reported that he saw Aisha and Umme Sulaim carrying goatskins full of water and serving it to the soldiers (Bukhari). Umme Sulaim and Umme Ammara, the other women present at Uhud, were both strong, mature women whose duties were the lifting of the dead and injured, treating their wounds, carrying water in heavy goatskins, supplying ammunition and even taking up the sword. Hazrat Aisha used the kunniat, the title derived from the name of a child, of Umme Abdullah after her nephew and adopted son. If she was six when her nikah was performed, she would have been only eight years his senior, hardly making him eligible for adoption. Also, a little girl could not have given up on ever having her own child and used an adopted child's name for her kunniat. Hazrat Aisha's nephew Urwah once remarked that he was not surprised about her amazing knowledge of Islamic law, poetry and history because she was the wife of the Prophet and the daughter of Abu Bakr. If she was eight when her father migrated, when did she learn poetry and history from him? There is consensus that Hazrat Aisha was 10 years younger than her elder sister Asma, whose age at the time of the hijrah, or migration to Madina, was about 28. It can be concluded that Hazrat Aisha was about 18 years old at migration. On her moving to the Prophet's house, she was a young woman at 21. Hisham is the single narrator of the hadith whose authenticity is challenged, for it does not correlate with the many historical facts of the time.

Understanding the Quran
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HOW to understand the Quran is an important question. Generally we pick and choose a verse to prove our point. Thus, many Muslims have different positions in understanding the verses of the Quran.

There is nothing wrong with different understandings but this should not lead to anarchy. There has to be a methodology so that the Quran, despite different ways of understanding it, should be understood under certain guidelines. There should be uniformity in the principles of understanding. I would like to throw light on how under a certain well-defined methodology one can try to understand the Quran so as to avoid arbitrariness. Taking one verse when there are so many other verses on the subject cannot yield a proper result, but this is precisely what is done by many theologians. Let us take, for example, the question of polygamy. Our ulema generally quote verse 4:3 to justify polygamy unconditionally. But there is another verse on this subject, i.e. 4:129; if both the verses are read together it would yield a different result. The second mentioned verse is so emphatic on the question of justice that taking more wives than one becomes secondary; justice becomes more important and yet our jurists and theologians hardly refer to 4:129. They keep citing verse 4:3 only. Though 4:3 also puts emphasis on justice, it also says that if you fear you cannot do justice then marry only one woman at a time. If both the verses are read together it becomes the duty of the qazi to make a rigorous inquiry as to why a person is taking another wife and whether the man really needs another wife. Also, in view of such a strong emphasis on justice definite rules will have to be laid down to define what would amount to doing justice by the wife. This has never been done by our conventional theologians. Another important question is of wife-beating, referring to verse 4:34, which is cited as Quranic permission to beat one's wife. But all other verses about women's rights and women's treatment contradict this. What is needed in this case too is to read all the verses on the treatment of women, and to read all verses using the word daraba (for beating) in the Quran; and the result would be very different. This would show that the Quran could never allow a wife to be beaten by her husband. First of all it should be noted that all the verses on women in the Quran emphasise their rights vis-à-vis their husbands, and all verses relating to men emphasise their duties vis-à-vis their wives. If it is so then how can the Quran permit the beating of one's wife? All verses on treatment of wife, or even after divorce, say that wives should be treated with ihsan and



maruf (i.e. good and morally approved behaviour). Then, the Quran also says that Allah has created love and compassion (mawaddat and rahmah) between husband and wife. If then husband is allowed to beat his wife, love and compassion have no meaning left between the two whatsoever. One can argue that beating is allowed in case of nushuz (rebellion, uprising) but then if nushuz is rebellion how serious is that rebellion to warrant a beating? The fact is that the Quran does not use any word with nushuz to show its seriousness in the matter. One of the theologians I had a discussion with said it amounted to extramarital relations on the part of the wife. But if it is so, it warrants perhaps a more serious punishment and that punishment cannot be meted out by the husband but by a court of law or a qazi. There are several other verses in the Quran which use the word daraba in several other meanings. Imam Raghīb, a 12th-century lexicographer of the Quran, points out that in pre-Quranic Arabic daraba ala meant a male camel going to a female camel to mate. If we take this meaning the verse would suggest that if she desists from her 'rebellion', the husband could go near her and this seems to be more appropriate, as the previous line of the verse advises the man to isolate his errant wife before resorting to any extreme action. It would mean that after reconciliation between the husband and the wife after she had been isolated, the husband should go near her. Thus, the verse would yield a very different meaning if we adopt a proper methodology of understanding the Quran. It makes all the difference. So far the theologians, using the pick-and-choose method, have concluded that the Quran permits wife-beating. This is in total contrast to another verse in Quran, 33:35. This verse equates man and woman in every respect and says both will be rewarded equally for their good deeds; hence the question of one exercising a blanket authority over the other does not arise. Also, one has to keep in mind that the Quran avoids using the words 'husband' and 'wife'; it uses the word zawj (spouse) for both, indicating that both are treated absolutely equally by God. These are illustrative examples and not exhaustive. If we use this kind of methodology to understand the Quran, many of our problems can be easily resolved; it would be easier to arrive at more comprehensive meanings of the Quranic verses, and many objections hurled at the Quran by non-Muslims can be easily dismissed. *The writer is a scholar of Islam, and also heads the Centre for Study of Secularism & Society, Mumbai*

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Many attributes of the Prophet

NEVER has so much been written by so many on the life of one human being, of any time, than on Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Eminent people from other faiths, too, have showered him with praise. Thomas Carlyle was not the only one to pay him tribute in his lecture on 'Hero as a Prophet', choosing him over all those mentioned in the Old Testament, from Adam through Abraham, to Moses and Jesus. Napoleon Bonaparte in Bonaparte et Islam is quoted as saying: "Moses revealed the existence of God to his nation. Jesus to the Roman world, Muhammad [PBUH] to the old continent.... Arabia was idolatrous when, six centuries after Jesus, Muhammad [PBUH] introduced the worship of the God of Abraham, Ishmael, Moses and Jesus." "The Aryans ... had disturbed the tranquillity of the East by agitating the question of the nature of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Muhammad [PBUH] declared that there was none but one God who had no father, no son.... I hope the time is not far when I shall be able to unite all the wise and educated men of all the countries and establish a uniform regime based on the principles of the Quran which alone are true and which alone can lead men to happiness." And this from George Bernard Shaw: "If any religion had the chance of ruling over England, nay Europe, within the next hundred years, it could be Islam. I have always held the religion of Muhammad [PBUH] in high estimation because of its wonderful vitality. It is the only religion which appears to me to possess that assimilating capacity to the changing phase of existence which can make itself appeal to every age. I have studied him, the wonderful man, and in my opinion far from being an anti-Christ, he must be called the Saviour of Humanity." "I believe that if a man like him were to assume the [leadership] of the modern world he would succeed in solving its problems in a way that would bring it the much-needed peace and happiness: I have prophesied about the faith of Muhammad [PBUH] that it would be acceptable to the Europe of tomorrow as it is beginning to be acceptable to the Europe of today." Muslims everywhere, too, shall pay the Prophet special tribute in this month of Rabi-ul-Awwal to celebrate his birthday. Many will rejoice, as there will be illuminations, particularly in the mosques. Religious scholars will



recount anecdotes from his life, highlighting his character and achievements, and recalling his sayings on different aspects of human life before gatherings of devotees. Naat recitations and milads (sessions singing praise to the Prophet) will be held everywhere. Scholars will dwell upon his attribute of Rahmatilil Aalemeen ('Mercy for all the worlds' —including those of the birds and beasts, of insects and worms, etc.), because a Muslim is enjoined to not hurt any living being except in the way of God. Scholars will explain what the Prophet said to his followers about how to treat women, how to interact with people of other faiths and how to carry oneself in one's everyday life. Yet, unfortunately, many will forget the profound and inspired discourses as they leave their respective congregations. A few of those who may be swaying in ecstasy at the mention of the Holy Prophet's name would go back to indulge in sectarian hate and killing, as we have been witnessing in Pakistan. As Rahmatilil Aalemeen, the Prophet gave protection to Christians through a covenant signed in 628 CE, when a delegation from St Catherine's Monastery visited him seeking his protection. (The monastery, located at the foot of Mount Sinai, is the world's oldest, and a treasure house of rare manuscripts, icons and Christian history.) The covenant's words are as follows: "This is a message from Muhammad ibn Abdullah, as a covenant to those who adopt Christianity, near and far, we are with them. "Verily I, the servants, the helpers, and my followers defend them, because Christians are my citizens; and by Allah! I hold out against anything that displeases them.

"No compulsion is to be on them ... Neither are their judges to be removed from their jobs nor their monks from their monasteries. "No one is to destroy a house of their religion, to damage it, or to carry anything from it to Muslims' houses. "Should anyone take any of these [belongings], he would spoil God's covenant and disobey His Prophet. Verily, they are my allies and have my secure charter.... "No one is to force them to travel or to oblige them to fight. Muslims are to fight for them. "If a female Christian is married to a Muslim, it is not to take place without her approval. She is not to be prevented from visiting her church to pray. "Their churches are to be respected. They are neither to be prevented from repairing them nor [barred] the sacredness of their covenants. "No one of the nation is to disobey the covenant till the Last Day (of Judgment)," It is important to remember that this covenant was made binding on all Muslims for all times, past, present and future, till the Day of Judgment. How this covenant has come to be violated in some Muslim countries, including Pakistan, should shame anyone who claims to love or follow the Prophet of Islam.

Here, they have ransacked and burnt churches; they have killed not only Christians, but also Muslims — for instance, for sympathising with an oppressed Christian as in the case of Asia Bibi. It's time we took stock of such violations of the Islamic code of respectful coexistence amongst faiths.