



ISLAMIC
AWAKENING

WITHIN REJECTION & EXTREMISM

YUSUF AL-QARADAWI

THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT

Islamic Awakening Between Rejection and Extremism

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Between Rejection and Extremism

YUSUF AL-QARADAWI

With an Introduction by
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A New Edition Edited by
NANCY ROBERTS



THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT
LONDON • WASHINGTON

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ISBN 1-56564-428-X paperback

ISBN 1-56564-429-8 hardback

FIRST EDITION 1987

SECOND REVISED EDITION 1991

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Typesetting by Shiraz Khan, Cover design by Saddiq Ali
Printed in the United Kingdom by Biddles Limited, King's Lynn

CONTENTS

| | <i>page</i> |
|--|-------------|
| <i>Foreword</i> | ix |
| <i>Preface to the Second Edition</i> | xi |
| <i>Preface to the First Edition</i> | xv |
| | |
| INTRODUCTION | I |
| | |
| CHAPTER 1: EXTREMISM: THE ACCUSATION AND THE REALITY | 8 |
| • Islam's call for moderation and its warning against extremism | 8 |
| • Defects and harmful consequences of religious extremism | 12 |
| • The concept and basis of religious extremism | 15 |
| • Two important observations | 16 |
| • Manifestations of extremism | 20 |
| • Imposing on the general populace what God has not required of them | 21 |
| • Uncalled for austerity | 24 |
| • Severity and harshness | 25 |
| • Thinking ill of others | 29 |
| • Falling into the abyss of <i>takfir</i> | 31 |
| | |
| CHAPTER 2: THE CAUSES OF EXTREMISM | 35 |
| • The causes and motive forces behind extremism | 35 |
| • An integrated view of the causes behind extremism | 35 |
| • Lack of insight into the true nature of <i>din</i> | 36 |

| | |
|--|--------|
| • The literalist trend in the understanding of texts | 38 |
| • Preoccupation with side issues | 43 |
| • Excessive prohibitions | 45 |
| • Misconceptions | 47 |
| • Emphasis on allegorical texts at the expense of definitive ones | 54 |
| • Beware of getting your facts from the unqualified | 58 |
| • Why Muslim youth have turned away from scholars | 59 |
| • Lack of insight into history and God's ways in the universe | 64 |
| • Two important divine <i>sunan</i> | 69 |
| • Everything in its time | 71 |
| • Islam: A stranger in its own land | 72 |
| • Political situations and events as perceived by Muslim youths | 77 |
| • Expropriating the freedom to call for a comprehensive Islam | 79 |
| • Resorting to violence and torture does not eliminate extremism – it creates it | 83 |
| CHAPTER 3: TOWARD A REMEDY FOR EXTREMISM | 86 |
| • Duties of society | 87 |
| • Muslim rulers must return to the law of God | 88 |
| • Relate to them in a spirit of fatherhood and brotherhood | 90 |
| • Beware of being extreme in one's depiction of extremism | 92 |
| • Open the windows to let in the breeze of freedom | 95 |
| • Beware of responding to <i>takfir</i> with 'counter- <i>takfir</i> ' | 97 |
| • Duties of young Muslims | 101 |
| • The varying categories of Islamic legal rulings and the ethics of disagreement | 107 |
| • Awareness of the values and ranks of actions | 121 |
| • Ranks of prohibited actions | 124 |
| • Ranks of people | 125 |
| • Sympathizing with others' abilities, limitations and circumstances | 129 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| • Knowledge and insight into God’s ways with His creation | 133 |
| • A dialogue on the laws and conditions of victory | 137 |
| CHAPTER 4: ADVICE TO MUSLIM YOUTH | 141 |
| • Toward constructive dialogue | 142 |
| a) Show respect for those with a specialization | 142 |
| b) Take counsel from people of piety and moderation | 146 |
| c) Make things easier, not more difficult | 148 |
| d) Adhere to the ethics of <i>da’wah</i> and dialogue | 153 |
| e) Live with common people where they are | 155 |
| f) Think well of fellow Muslims | 159 |
| <i>Endnotes</i> | 163 |
| <i>General Index</i> | 170 |

FOREWORD



Of knowledge, we have none, save what
You have taught us. (The Qur'an 2:32)

THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT is pleased to present this timely, as well as important work on *Islamic Awakening between Rejection and Extremism*. Originally published in 1987 as the second in the Institute's "Issues of Islamic Thought" series, the book attracted wide scale attention and informed debate on its publication. A second revised edition was published in 1991, and we hope this new edition will prove equally beneficial for readers.

The author, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, is a graduate of al-Azhar university, a prolific writer whose works have been translated into many languages, a well-known scholar and specialist in the field, and perhaps most importantly of all, a voice of experience, whose wisdom and sound scholarship attempt to realign the spirit of the Qur'an and Sunnah to the problems facing Muslim youth today and contemporary Muslim communities with a view to reawakening their confidence in, and deeper understanding of, Islam.

Perhaps more relevant today, given our troubled climate, than at any time in the past, the work introduces the English speaking readership to a subject of great significance and global ramifications. Looking for answers in a world marked by enormous volatility, pressure and political and economic corruption, Muslim youth are an easy target for extremist movements offering violent, quick-fix, and fast solutions. Qaradawi traces the complex roots of extremist views, and examines in depth the many causes of the path to intolerance, offering a variety of remedies and cures. In doing so, he refocuses, the reader's attention

onto the original and great vision of Islam, to bring peace, stability, and honor to humanity, and to treat one another with mercy, tolerance and respect. There is no reason, writes the author, to sink into a climate of fear or despair, for the great heritage and wisdom which has marked Islam's historical success can be ours again, but only if Muslims remain true to the spirit of the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

The IIIT, established in 1981, has served as a major center to facilitate sincere and serious scholarly efforts based on Islamic vision, values and principles. Its programs of research, seminars and conferences during the last twenty-five years have resulted in the publication of more than two hundred and fifty titles in English and Arabic, many of which have been translated into several other languages.

We would like to express our thanks and gratitude to the editor, Nancy Roberts. We would also like to thank the editorial and production team at the IIIT London Office and all those who were directly or indirectly involved in the completion of this book. May God reward them, the author, and the editor for all their efforts.

IIIT LONDON OFFICE, UK
Jumada I, 1427 AH / June 2006 AC

Preface to the Second Edition

TACKLING THE SUBJECT OF EXTREMISM is a very difficult enterprise, and one fraught with danger. Well aware of this fact, Yusuf al-Qaradawi once wrote about his hesitation to open a dialogue on religious extremism “for fear that what I write, especially these days, could be misinterpreted or even deliberately explained to serve purposes contrary to my intentions....” Unfortunately his hesitation was well founded, for there exist groups ready to use any such internal Islamic debate to protect or further their vested interest in the present period of post-nationalism. While reaction against such groups has helped to aggravate extremism in the last decade or so, the main reasons for extremism lie elsewhere.

In essence, extremism is the direct outcome of faulty thinking. Religious extremism is the antithesis of *da‘wah*, or the invitation to embrace Islam, and therefore should not exist under normal conditions. It has resulted from a deficient or distorted knowledge of the basic sources of Islam, a subject which al-Qaradawi discusses with great skill and insight. For a number of historical reasons, the cessation of *ijtihad*, or independent reasoning, resulted in the rise and eventual domination of *taqlid* (imitation and blind subservience to tradition), a very damaging and negative development which still afflicts vast areas of the Ummah in our own day. Muslims’ adherence to *taqlid* has led to a distortion of Islam’s mission, intellectual stagnation, and approaches to the Qur’an and the Sunnah which do not

take into account changes which have occurred due to the passage of time and evolving social conditions. It is in such a situation that the eternal validity of the Qur'an for all peoples is obscured, while opinions, interpretations, and decisions made on particular issues and under particular circumstances in the past are clung to and considered the solution par excellence for similar issues in our time. This type of rigidity discourages independent reasoning and encourages a concentration on minor issues at the expense of major ones, as well as divisions and strife.

Focusing on non-issues deprives Islam of its claim to be a viable and global alternative way of life, thus depreciating its real value in the eyes of humanity and engendering increased hostility towards Islam and Muslims worldwide. It was this intellectual deficiency and these mistaken attitudes which Yusuf al-Qaradawi's book sought to address when it was first published in the early 1980s. In fact, as far back as the 1970s, many Muslim thinkers who were aware of the need to reform Islamic thought engaged in concerted action which resulted in the establishment of the International Institute of Islamic Thought in 1981.

Convinced that the Ummah's problems are by-products of the prevailing malaise and that intellectual deviation and stagnation have impaired Muslim thought, the Institute has striven relentlessly to mobilize enlightened thinkers and to encourage research and production in the field of Islamic thought. This endeavor has already borne some remarkable fruits.

After the present book, al-Qaradawi wrote *Kayfa Nata'āmalu ma'a al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyah* (Methods of Understanding the Sunnah) while Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazali published the work *Kayfa Nata'āmalu ma'a al-Qur'an* (Methods of Understanding the Qur'an). For their part, Taha Jabir al-Alwani, Abdul Hamid Abu Sulayman, Imad al-Din Khalil, Muhammad Umarah, and many other scholars have produced books and regularly contributed papers on Islamic thought to the Institute's co-publications, the *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* (AJISS) and *Al-Muslim al-Mu'āshir*. *The Qur'an and the Sunnah: The Time-Space Factor* by Taha Jabir al-Alwani and Imad al-Din Khalil has been published in

the Institute's Occasional Papers series, and Taha Jabir al-Alwani's series of articles on *ijtihad* in AJISS are likewise original and timely contributions.

The second English edition of the present book appears in the wake of the second devastating Gulf war, whose far-reaching consequences threaten the Ummah's very fabric. This war laid bare the shortcomings and the shortsightedness of Islamic movements worldwide. Their deviations, contradictions, and divisions were translated into hasty, immature, desperate and even calculated stands and emotional attitudes. In a word, they proved to suffer from a clear want of intellectual and political awareness. Such shortcomings, which are the result of Islamic movements' failure to reconsider their educational and intellectual programs, were foretold in al-Qaradawi's book when it was first published in the early 1980s.

Although the first English edition of *Islamic Awakening between Rejection and Extremism* suffered from serious editorial problems, it proved very popular, especially among Muslim youth. As demands increased, the Institute decided to produce a new edition. It is hoped that the book will once again be of great benefit to young Muslims, especially those who are disappointed with the inadequate responses of many of the established Islamic movements and parties to the prevailing challenges.

They have also become concerned about such movements' and parties' internecine disputes and dissatisfied with many scholars' inability to keep pace with social change through an awareness of the time-space factor.

If rightly guided, Muslim youth will perceive the urgent need to adapt to the modern world while preserving and nurturing their civilizational and spiritual specificity. It is thus hoped that the older generation and leaders will also benefit from the book by becoming aware of their shortcomings and the critical stage through which the Ummah is currently passing.

Enlightened guidance of Muslim youth as well as the Islamic movements is urgently needed. Yusuf al-Qaradawi's warnings and recommendations, which may have been overlooked before, are bound to be heeded and appreciated in light of the current ominous

situation and in view of the difficult adjustments Islamic movements must undergo if they are to effectively serve their Ummah and solve its problems.

May all praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds.

IIIT, USA, Jumada II 1412 AH / 1991 AC

Preface to the First Edition

THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT and AMERICAN TRUST PUBLICATIONS are pleased to present this book to our readers in the English language. We have chosen it because of our concern for the future of the Ummah, Islamic thought, and Muslim youth. The author, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, is famous for his book *al-Halāl wa al-Harām fī al-Islām*, which was published in English by American Trust Publications under the title *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*. Al-Qaradawi has extensive experience in the field of *da'wah* and is recognized as an authority on Islamic doctrine and law.

God has entrusted this Ummah with a great mission, that is, to lead humanity to the path of truth, justice, and progress. It is unfortunate that Muslims have not been able to fulfil this mission for the last few centuries. God has given Muslims tremendous human and material resources, but they have not been able to mobilize them effectively enough to influence the flow of current events in the direction of peace and prosperity for mankind.

The extraordinary pressures, internal decadence, and challenges of the modern age have tried the patience of Muslim youth. The great Islamic vision has become blurred, and the socio-economic and political life of the Ummah has become fragmented and stagnant. Muslim youth have pride and confidence in Islam, but with their limited experience and knowledge they tend to take desperate and extreme courses of action. They are swayed by misdirected, short-

sighted, and superficial slogans. The suffering of the youth has thus inflicted suffering on the Ummah as a whole, wasted valuable energy, and undermined Islamic leadership.

Written by an outstanding scholar, educator and spokesman for Islam, the present work promises to help Muslim youth to construct an integrated picture of the history and the destiny of the Ummah. It deals with the Qur'an and the prophetic Sunnah in a balanced and comprehensive manner and provides a highly constructive approach by which Muslim youth can study and benefit from them.

This book offers a systematic and objective analysis of the crises faced by Muslim youth and presents the ways and means by which Muslims should seek solutions. In so doing, the book offers Muslim youth ways to develop suitable approaches to the challenges and pressures of the modern age in order to achieve Islamic goals and objectives. It is thus recommended reading for every Muslim youth, intellectual, and scholar.

IIIT, USA

AMERICAN TRUST PUBLICATIONS

Herndon, Virginia 1407 AH / 1987 AC

Introduction

IN RAMADAN AND SHAWWAL 1401 AH/1981 AC, *al-Ummah* magazine published a two-part article I had written on the awakening of Muslim youth.¹ In this study I suggested that we should have a dialogue with and show paternal sympathy toward these young Muslims, then channel their reawakening in a way which would strengthen Islam rather than impoverish it. The study was so well received throughout the Muslim world that it was translated into several languages. Furthermore, the youth in many Muslim universities studied my views with interest despite the fact that I was critical of some of them. In particular, I commend the attitude of the Islamic Group at the University of Cairo, who adopted my study during their ninth Islamic camp in the summer of 1981 and printed and distributed it to all those interested. This reflects a laudable awareness as well as a readiness to support moderation. There is no need to focus here on recent events in some Muslim countries which have involved serious and bloody confrontations between youth and the authorities, since I do not wish to exacerbate an existing problem. I also appreciate the fact that *al-Ummah* magazine has always catered to the whole Muslim Ummah² rather than any one particular group. What concerns us here is the prolonged and heated discussion which these events have aroused concerning so-called “religious extremism,” and in which not only learned people have participated but, in addition, people whose knowledge of Islam is limited and whose attitudes are

characterized by animosity, disdain, and cynicism. I was asked a number of years ago to write on the same subject by *al-‘Arabī* magazine. When the article appeared in the special January 1982 edition, some friends faulted me for contributing to an issue in which the truth, they believed, was being distorted in support of falsehood. Although my friends did not question the contents of the article, they were nevertheless suspicious of the motives and aims behind the campaign which had been launched against “religious extremism.” They were not convinced that the campaign genuinely sought to resist extremism or to guide extremists to the path of moderation. Rather, they believed its purpose was to crush the Islamic reawakening before it could become strong and popular enough to assume a significant political role. My friends noted that the authorities did not begin to pay attention to the religious youth until the latter had begun, on religious grounds, to oppose some of the government’s policies. This is supported by the fact that the people in power actually patronized certain religious groups which had demonstrated extremist tendencies in order to use them against other Islamic movements, then crushed the former when their appointed role had been fulfilled. This being the case, my friends insisted, the reasons behind the confrontation between the authorities and the Islamic groups could not have been merely the emergence of extremism. They further believed that the authorities in our Muslim countries consider the Islamic movement a dangerous enemy.

Such authorities have, in fact, made alliances with the extreme right and left, but never with the Islamic movement. Sometimes a temporary truce would be declared with this movement; at other times, the authorities would try to involve it in confrontations with their political and ideological opponents. Eventually, however, the authorities and their opponents discovered that they had more in common than they had realized, and therefore proceeded to unite against the Islamic movement. God says in the Qur’an, “Verily, the wrongdoers are protectors to one another, but God is the protector of the pious who fear Him and avoid evil” (45:19).³

Recent events support this Qur’anic affirmation. The emergence of Islamic groups in Egypt was characterized by extremism. However

they eventually began to demonstrate a temperate, moderate attitude thanks to the efforts of a variety of Muslim thinkers and proponents of Islam who managed to influence the thinking and the conduct of young Muslims in such a way that temperance and moderation became characteristic traits of the majority of them. Surprisingly, the people in power kept silent when extremism was dominant, but crushed these groups when moderation prevailed.

In light of these disheartening considerations, I began my article in *al-'Arabī* by saying that, "Despite my conviction of the noble aim which motivated *al-'Arabī* to open a dialogue on what has come to be known as 'religious extremism,' and despite my unshakeable belief in the importance of the issue and the gravity of its impact on our contemporary affairs, I will not conceal the fact that I hesitated at the beginning for fear that what I write, especially these days, could be misinterpreted or even deliberately exploited to serve something contrary to my intentions or to that of the journal itself." "Religious extremism" is currently in the dock and a target of accusations and criticism by both writers and orators. I do not like to side with the strong against the weak, and it is a fact that authorities are always in a stronger position than their opponents. Suffice it to say that an Islamist does not even enjoy the right to defend himself. There is no freedom of expression in the media, nor can he even use the platform of the mosque for this purpose.

My hesitation was strengthened by the fact that Islamists have for decades been inundated with accusations by their opponents. They are labelled as "reactionaries," "die-hard traditionalists," "bigots," and "agents" of enemy countries, although no observer can fail to see that East and West, right and left are united in their hostility to them and look for any opportunity to crush the Islamic awakening.

However, after much thought I concluded that the issue concerns the whole Muslim world and not a single country, that silence is not a solution, and that refusal to contribute is, like fleeing a battle, un-Islamic. I have therefore put my trust in God and decided to clarify the truth. The Prophet (SAAS)* said, "Deeds depend on intentions, and every person will receive his reward according to what he intended."⁴ Many writers, out of ignorance, bitterness, resentment

* (SAAS) *Ṣallā Allāhu 'alayhi wa sallam*. May the peace and blessings of God be upon him. Said whenever the name of Prophet Muḥammad is mentioned.

or the desire for material gain, have felt free to voice their opinions without the slightest insight into the nature of the issue. Such a situation should spur Muslim scholars to throw their weight behind the campaign and confront the issue in order to clarify the truth.

My determination was further strengthened by my long interest in the issue of religious extremism. A few years ago I published an article in *al-Muslim al-Mu'āṣir* entitled, "The Phenomenon of Excessive *Takfīr*."⁵ Another article, "The Reawakening of Muslim Youth", mentioned earlier, was published several months ago in *al-Ummah*. I have had the opportunity to meet many young Muslims face to face in camps and seminars, and also to speak with them about issues relating to the need for moderation and the dangers of extremism. However, what I wrote in *al-'Arabī* was restricted to the specific topic required by the journal as well as the limited space allocated for it.

For these reasons, I have felt moved for some time to return to the issue of religious extremism and to conduct an objective study of its nature, causes, and remedy within a genuine Islamic framework. My determination to go ahead will not be discouraged by those who seek to distort and exploit the issue. The Prophet said: "[The banner of Islamic] knowledge will be carried from one generation to the next by the moderates who defend it against the distortion of bigots, the claims of falsifiers, and the misinterpretations of the ignorant." This hadith defines the duty of the learned, which is to clarify rather than conceal the truth. However, the responsibility is also shared by various other parties who are concerned directly or indirectly with the issue under discussion.

It is neither just nor honest to blame only the youth for being excessive in thought or in conduct. Many others, especially those who have neglected their commitment to Islam and its teachings, share this responsibility, although they always try to exonerate themselves. Nominal Muslims, whether parents, teachers, scholars or others, have turned Islam, Islamists, and proponents of Islam into outcasts in Muslim lands. It is indeed strange that we readily disapprove of extremism among the young, yet fail to recognize our own extremism, our negligence, and our laxity. We ask the young to show

temperance and wisdom and to abandon extremism and excessiveness, yet we never ask the elderly to purify themselves of hypocrisy, lying, cheating, and all forms of self-contradiction. We demand everything of our youth, but we do not practice what we preach, as if we were naturally entitled to all the rights while the young must be burdened with all the duties. What we actually need is the courage to admit that our youth have been forced to resort to what we call "religious extremism" through our own misdeeds. We claim to be Muslims yet we do not follow the teachings of Islam. We recite the Qur'an but we do not apply its rulings. We claim to love the Prophet Muhammad but we fail to follow his Sunnah, that is, his example in word and deed. We declare in our constitutions that Islam is our official religion, yet we never give Islam its due place in government legislation or orientation. Our own hypocrisy and inconsistencies have alienated the young, who have sought to understand Islam without our assistance or guidance. They have found parents discouraging, Muslim scholars indifferent, rulers hostile, and counsellors cynical. Therefore, in order to rectify this situation, we need to begin by reforming ourselves and our societies according to God's decree before we can ask our youth to be calm, prudent and temperate.

It may be worthwhile here to draw attention to a point on which those in authority, as well as some writers, usually concentrate, namely, the duty of official religious establishments to eradicate extremism and guide the Islamic reawakening among our youth. Some hold these official religious establishments responsible for what has happened – and is still happening – as well as for all forms of extremism and deviation. It appears that despite their importance and deep roots, these establishments are now incapable of carrying out the mission entrusted to them unless the political authorities cease manipulating and exploiting them, using them as instruments of support and praise for official policies. The official religious establishments in the Muslim world could indeed play a positive role by giving guidance and genuine Islamic knowledge to the youth if they were free to manage their own affairs without interference from people in power. In the absence of such freedom, however, they remain little more than lifeless skeletons.

We must also remember that advice is meaningless unless the adviser enjoys the trust of the youth. In the absence of such essential mutual trust and confidence, any advice given is reduced to mere rhetoric. Our young people have no faith in these religious establishments or in their government-appointed leaders. A number of circumstances and causes have convinced youth that these establishments do not reflect the teachings of Islamic law and have become mouthpieces of the regime.

Therefore, such establishments can exert influence only when they put their own houses in order. They should refuse to enter the ever-changing, vicious circle of politics; rather, their activities should center on raising generations of Muslim scholars who are not only well-versed in Islam but who, in addition, have a keen consciousness and understanding of the problems of their age. Such scholars should be, in short, "those who convey the message of God, and fear none save Him" (Qur'an, 33:39).

Our modern contemporary societies urgently need righteous scholars of this caliber who are blessed with insight and who can instruct our young people in their faith and give proper guidance to channel the Islamic awakening taking place. Those who stand aloof and who are indifferent to the Islamic resurgence or who criticize it without sharing its sufferings, aspirations and disappointments cannot play a positive role in its guidance. One of our ancient poets wrote: "None knows longing but he who has suffered its pangs."

Those who do not live for Islam and its spread and do not share the suffering and the hardships that beset the Ummah are self-centered. Such people have no right to tell those who believe in Islam and live by it that they are wrong and should change; and if they seize that right by force, no one will ever listen to them.

In conclusion, my advice to all who undertake to counsel Muslim youth is that they abandon their ivory towers and their intellectual caves and come down to earth with the young. They should identify with their great expectations, warmth of affection, sincere determination, noble motivation, and good deeds. Furthermore, they must recognize not only their negative qualities but also their positive ones so that when they advise them, they may do so based on sound

insight and vision, and when they make judgements, whether for or against them, they may do so on clear evidence.

May God guard us all against excess and extremism and direct us toward the straight path.

YUSUF AL-QARADAWI

Shawwal 1402 AH / August 1982 AC

Extremism: The Accusation & the Reality

Logicians argue that one cannot pass a judgement on something unless one has a clear conception of it, because the unknown and the undefined cannot be judged. Therefore, we must first determine what “religious extremism” means before we can condemn or applaud it. We can do so by considering its reality and its most salient distinguishing characteristics. Literally, extremism means being situated at the farthest possible point from the center. Figuratively, it indicates a similar remoteness in religion, thought and behavior. One of the main consequences of extremism is exposure to danger and insecurity. As one Arab poet states,

*They were the protected center until they were overtaken
by misfortune and tottered on the brink.¹*

ISLAM’S CALL FOR MODERATION AND ITS WARNING AGAINST EXTREMISM

Islam recommends moderation and balance in everything: in belief, worship, conduct, and legislation. This is the straightforward path to which God calls us. Moderation or balance is an overall distinguishing characteristic of Islam and of the Muslim nation. The Qur’an says: “Thus have we made of you an Ummah justly balanced, that

you might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves..." (2:143).

As such, the Muslim Ummah is a nation of justice and moderation which testifies against every deviation from the 'straight path' in this life and in the hereafter. Islamic texts call upon Muslims to exercise moderation and to reject and oppose all kinds of extremism: *ghuluw* (excessiveness), *tanattu'* (nitpicking religiosity) and *tashdid* (strictness, austerity). A close examination of such texts shows that Islam emphatically warns against *ghuluw*. Let us consider the following: "Beware of excessiveness in religion. [People] before you have perished as a result of [such] excessiveness."² The people referred to above are the people of other religions, particularly 'People of the Book,' namely, Jews and Christians, and most notably the Christians. The Qur'an addresses these people thus:

Say: "O People of the Book! Exceed not in your religion the bounds [of what is proper], trespassing beyond the truth, nor follow the vain desires of people who went wrong in times gone by, who misled many, and strayed [themselves] from the even Way." (5:77)

Muslims have therefore been warned not to follow in their steps: he who learns from the mistakes of others is bound to live a happier life. The purpose of the above hadith is to alert us to the fact that *ghuluw* may crop up as an insignificant action which we then unwittingly allow to continue and develop into a menace. After reaching Muzdalifah during his last pilgrimage to Makkah, the Prophet asked Ibn 'Abbās to gather some stones for him. Ibn 'Abbās selected small stones, and when the Prophet saw them he said approvingly, "Yes, with such [you should stone Satan]. Beware of excessiveness in religion."³ This clearly indicates that Muslims should not be so zealous as to believe that using larger stones is better, thus gradually allowing excessiveness to creep into their lives.

Imam Ibn Taymiyyah argues that this warning against excessiveness applies to all forms of belief, worship, and transaction, and notes that since the Christians are more excessive in faith and practice than any other sect, God admonishes them in the Qur'an saying,

“Do not exceed the limits of your religion” (4:171). “The Prophet (ṢAAS) said, ‘Those who succumb to pedantry and nitpicking religiosity (*al-tanaṭṭu‘*) will perish.’ And he repeated it twice more.”⁴ According to Imam al-Nawawī, the people referred to here are those who delve too deeply [into matters of religion] and go to extremes in their words and actions. One notes, moreover, that this hadith and the one quoted immediately before it identify the outcome of excessiveness (*al-ghuluw*) and nitpicking religiosity (*al-tanaṭṭu‘*) as perdition, that is, destruction which is both material and spiritual. In other words, it is a loss more terrible than death. And what greater deterrent do we need than this?

Abū Ya‘lā relates in his *Musnad* on the authority of Anas ibn Mālik that the Messenger of God used to say, “Do not be overly strict with yourselves lest [God] be all the stricter with you. For you see what remains [of those who have done so] in the hermitages and monasteries. [As God states in the Holy Qur’an,] ‘But the monasticism which they invented for themselves, We did not prescribe for them’ (57:27).”⁵

Consequently, the Prophet resisted every tendency toward excessive religiosity and rebuked those of his Companions who overemphasized worship and asceticism to the point where they had exceeded the limits of moderation affirmed by Islam. The Prophet himself, thanks to Islam, struck a balance between the spiritual and the material, between the concerns of this world and the concerns of the world to come, and between the individual’s right to life and its enjoyment and the Sustainer’s right to receive the worship and service for which human beings were created.

Islam has instituted acts of worship which serve to purify the human soul and elevate human beings both spiritually and materially. At the same time, such acts of worship serve to elevate the entire community, setting it upon a foundation of brotherhood and solidarity without negating the human task of developing and populating the earth. For prayer, zakah, fasting and the pilgrimage to Makkah are both individual and communal acts of worship; as such, they do not isolate the Muslim from life or society. On the contrary, they strengthen the individual Muslim’s bond with life and with others

both in sentiment and in action. Consequently, Islam did not institute monasticism, which requires the individual to isolate himself or herself from life and its enjoyments and from working to improve and elevate the life of society. Rather, Islam views the earth as one huge prayer niche for the believer and life on earth as both worship and jihad⁶ so long as one's intention is sound and one abides by the limits which God Almighty has set out for us.

Islam approves of neither the pursuit of spirituality at the expense of material life, nor the tendency to "purify and elevate the soul" by depriving and punishing the body advocated by other religions and philosophies. Rather Islam has brought a balance in all these spheres: "Our Lord! Give us good in this world and good in the hereafter" (Qur'an, 2:201). And as the Prophet prayed, "O God, set right for me my religion which is the safeguard of my affairs; and set right for me the affairs of my earthly existence wherein is my living; set right for me my hereafter which is my place of return; make life for me [a source] of abundance for every good and make my death a source of comfort for me, protecting me against every evil."⁷ Likewise the Prophet declared, "Your body has a right over you."⁸ Moreover, the Qur'an disapproves of the tendency to prohibit the sources of enjoyment and means of adornment which God has provided for his servants. In a verse revealed in Makkah, God says:

O Children of Adam! Wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer. Eat and drink, but waste not by excess, for God loves not those who waste. Say: who has forbidden the beautiful gifts of God which He has produced for His servants, and the things clean and pure which He has provided for sustenance? (7:31-32)

In another surah, revealed in Madinah, God addresses the believers in the same way: "O you who believe! Make not unlawful the good things which God has made lawful for you. But commit no excess, for God does not like those given to excess. Eat of the things which God has provided you, lawful and good, but fear God, in Whom you believe" (5:86-88). These verses explain to the believers the true Islamic way of enjoying the good things in life while at the

same time resisting the excessive indulgence found in other religions. It is reported that these Qur'anic verses were revealed when a group of the Prophet's Companions decided to castrate themselves and roam the land like monks. Ibn 'Abbās also reported: "A man came to the Prophet and said, 'O Messenger of God, whenever I eat of this meat I [always] get the urge to make love. Consequently, I've decided to abstain from eating meat,'" in response to which these words were revealed: "O you who believe! Make not unlawful the good things which God has made lawful for you...."⁹

It is reported in Muslim's and al-Bukhārī's collections of authentic hadiths on the authority of 'Ā'ishah that,

A group of men came to the houses of the wives of the Prophet asking about what he would do in private, and when they were informed about this matter, they considered their own worship insufficient. Then one of them said, "I won't eat meat anymore!" Another said, "I won't get married." Another said, "I won't sleep on a bed anymore." When the Prophet heard what they had said, he declared, "What is this that I hear? So-and-so says [that he's going to do] such-and-such... However, I fast, and break my fast, I sleep and I rise. I eat meat. I also marry. And whoever who does not follow my example does not belong to me."

The Prophet's Sunnah signifies his understanding of the faith and its application; i.e., his duty toward his Lord, himself, his family, and the people around him, giving to each his or her due in a balanced and moderate way.

DEFECTS AND HARMFUL CONSEQUENCES OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

All these warnings against extremism and excessiveness are necessary because of the serious defects inherent in such tendencies. The first defect is that excessiveness is too disagreeable for ordinary human nature to endure or tolerate. Even if a few human beings could put up with excessiveness for a short time, the majority would not be

able to do so. God's legislation addresses the whole of humanity, not a special group who may have a unique capacity for endurance. This is why the Prophet was once angry with his eminent Companion Mu'adh, because the latter had led the people one day in prayer and so prolonged it that one of the people went to the Prophet and complained. The Prophet said to Mu'adh: "O Mu'adh! Are you putting people to the test?" and repeated it three times.¹⁰

On another occasion he addressed an imam sternly, saying "Some of you cause people to dislike good deeds...Whoever among you leads people in prayer should keep it short, because amongst them are the weak, the old, and those who have needs to attend to."¹¹ Furthermore, when the Prophet sent Mu'adh and Abū Mūsā to Yemen, he gave them the following advice: "Facilitate [matters for people] and do not make [things] difficult. Give good tidings and do not put [people] off. Submit to one another and do not differ [amongst yourselves]."¹² 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb also emphasized this by saying "Do not make God odious to His servants by leading people in prayer and so prolonging it that they come to hate what they are doing."

The second defect is that excessiveness is short-lived. Since man's capacity for endurance and perseverance is naturally limited, and since man can easily become bored, he cannot endure any excessive practice for long. Even if he puts up with it for a while he will soon be overcome by fatigue, physically and spiritually, and will eventually give up even the little he can naturally do. Or he may even take a different course altogether, going from excessiveness to complete negligence and laxity.

I have often met people who were known for their strictness and extremism; then I lost contact with them for a while. When I inquired about them after a period of time, I found out that they had either gone to the opposite extreme or, at the least, had lagged behind like the "hasty one" referred to in the following hadith: "He [the hasty one] neither covers the desired distance nor spares the back [of his riding animal]."¹³

The Prophet's guidance is likewise embodied in another hadith: "Do those deeds which you can endure, as God will never weary [of giving rewards] till you yourselves grow weary [of performing good

deeds]... and the work most beloved to God is the one which is done regularly, even if it is done in small increments.” Said Ibn ‘Abbās:

A female servant of the Prophet used to fast during the day and spend the whole night in prayer. The Prophet was informed of this and he said, “In every deed [or action] there is a peak of activity followed by lassitude. He who in his lassitude follows my Sunnah is on the right path, but he who in his lassitude follows some other [guidance] has [erred and] gone astray.”¹⁴

‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr said:

The Messenger of God was once told of some of his Companions who were exhausting themselves with worship. He said, “This is the upper limit of Islam and the activity it gives rise to. Every upper limit has a peak, and every peak is followed by lassitude... he whose lassitude is in tune with the Book [the Qur’an] and Sunnah is on the right path, but he whose lassitude leads to disobedience will perish.”¹⁵

What superb advice the Prophet has given all Muslims: not to overburden themselves in worship and to be moderate lest they be overcome by fatigue and, in the end, fail to persevere! He said:

Religion is very easy, but whoever overburdens himself will not be able to continue on the path. Direct your steps aright, strive for goodness, if not perfection, and announce good tidings [to those who persevere in doing good, if even in modest increments].¹⁶

The third defect is that excessive practice jeopardizes other rights and obligations. A sage once said rightly in this respect: “Every extravagance is associated in one way or another with a lost right.” When the Prophet knew that ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr was so absorbed in worship that he even neglected his conjugal duties toward his wife, he said to him:

“‘Abdullah! Is it true what I’ve been told concerning you, that you fast daily and offer prayers throughout the night?” ‘Abdullah replied,

“Yes, O Messenger of God!” The Prophet then said: “Rather, fast and then break your fast, worship during the night but also sleep. Your body has a right over you, your wife has a right over you, and your guest has a right over you...”¹⁷

A certain encounter between the eminent Companion Salmān al-Fārisī and his devout friend Abū al-Dardā' is another case in point. The Prophet had forged a bond of brotherhood between Salmān and Abū al-Dardā', and Salmān once paid a visit to Abū al-Dardā'. When he arrived, he found Abū al-Dardā's wife dressed in shabby clothes. He asked her why she was in this state, and she replied, “Your brother Abū al-Dardā' has no interest in the pleasures of this world.” Later Abū al-Dardā' arrived and prepared a meal for Salmān, who asked Abū al-Dardā' to eat with him, but the latter replied: “I'm fasting.” Salmān then said: “I won't eat unless you do.” So Abū al-Dardā' ate [with Salmān]. When night fell Abū al-Dardā' got up to pray, but Salmān told him to go back to sleep, so he did. Again Abū al-Dardā' got up and once again Salmān told him to go back to sleep. Toward the end of the night, Salmān told Abū al-Dardā' to get up, and both of them prayed. Salmān then told Abū al-Dardā': “Your Lord has a right over you, your self has a right over you, and your family has a right over you. So give everything its due.” Abū al-Dardā' related this to the Prophet, who said: “Salmān has spoken the truth.”¹⁸

THE CONCEPT AND BASIS OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

A correct, insightful definition of extremism is the first step toward outlining a remedy for the problem. There is no value in any judgement or exposition which is based not on genuine Islamic concepts and Islamic law, but on mere personal opinions. The Qur'an says in this respect: “If you differ on anything among yourselves, refer it to God and His Messenger, if you do believe in God and the Last Day” (4:59). Throughout the history of the Ummah it has always been agreed that referring differences among Muslims to God and His Messenger means referring them to the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the

Prophet. Without such authentication based on the law of Islam, Muslim youth who are accused of extremism will never pay any attention to the legal decisions issued by this or that Muslim scholar, and will deny any accusation of being 'extremist'. On the contrary, they will themselves accuse others of ignorance and falsification. It is reported that Imam Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī, a Sunnite, was once accused of being a Rejectionist.¹⁹ Outraged by this cheap accusation, he defiantly quoted a verse of poetry which stated, in effect: "If love for the Prophet's household is rejectionism, let the humans and the jinn bear witness that I am a rejectionist!" Similarly, after hearing that he had been branded a reactionary, a present-day proponent of Islam said, "If adherence to the Qur'an and Sunnah is reactionism, I hope to live, die, and be resurrected as a reactionary!"

It is of the utmost importance that we define accurately such common terms as "reactionism," "rigidity," "extremism" "bigotry", etc. since otherwise they remain ambiguous concepts which can be hurled randomly by one group of people against another, and can be interpreted differently by competing intellectual and social forces on the extreme right or left. Failure to define and comprehend "religious extremism," leaving the issue to people's whims, will only lead to discord among Muslims. The Qur'an says, "If the Truth had been in accord with their desires, truly the heavens and the earth and all the beings therein would have been in confusion and corruption!" (23:71).

TWO IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS

At this point I would like to point out two significant facts. First: The degree of a person's piety as well as that of the society in which he lives will affect his judgement of others as far as extremism, moderation, and laxity are concerned. A religious society tends to produce people who are averse to any deviation or negligence, however slight it may be. Judging by the criteria of his own practice and background, such a person would be surprised to find that there are Muslims who do not fast or worship during the night. Hence the saying by

Anas ibn Mālik to his contemporaries, “You do things you consider trifling. But during the time of the Prophet these same actions were seen as mortal sins!” Hence, when examining people’s deeds and practices, one finds that the nearer one gets to the time of the Prophet, his Companions and their immediate successors, the less worthy the deeds and practices of the pious among the later generations will appear by comparison.

The same attitude was expressed by ‘Ā’ishah, who used to recite a line by the well-known poet Labīd ibn Rabī‘ah in which he laments the disappearance of those people who provided exemplary patterns of righteous living, thus leaving people to the mercy of stragglers whose company is as contagious as a diseased animal. She always wondered how Labīd would have felt had he lived to witness the practices of a later generation. ‘Ā’ishah’s nephew, ‘Urwah ibn al-Zubayr, used to recite the same line also and wondered how both ‘Ā’ishah and Labīd would have felt had they lived in his age.

On the other hand, someone whose knowledge of and commitment to Islam is weak, or who has been brought up in an environment which practices what God has forbidden and neglects the law of Islam, is bound to consider even minimal adherence to Islam a kind of extremism. The further such a person is from his religion, the more surprised he will be at those who actually practice it and the more he will tend to criticize those who adhere to the religion’s strictures and who attempt to be conscious of God in all their actions by trying to ascertain whether everything they encounter is either permitted (*ḥalāl*) or forbidden (*ḥarām*). Some Muslims – those who are influenced by alien ideologies and practices – consider adherence to clear-cut Islamic teachings concerning eating, drinking, beautification, or the call for the application of the law of Islam and the establishment of an Islamic state as manifestations of “religious extremism.” For such people, a young Muslim man with a beard or a young Muslim girl wearing Islamic dress are both extremists! Even the commanding of the common good and the prohibition of evil are regarded as forms of extremism and interference with personal freedom.

Similarly, there are some who hold the opinion that those who do not believe in Islam should not be classified as *kuffār* (that is non-

believers) viewing this as a kind of extremism and bigotry, despite the fact that the basis of religious belief is that there exists a Truth known to the believer concerning that which is right from that which is wrong, a deeply important principle upon which we must never compromise.

The second fact is that it is unfair to accuse a person of religious extremism simply because he has chosen to adopt the hard-line juristic opinion of certain scholars of Islamic jurisprudence. If a person is convinced that his opinion is right and that he is bound by it according to the law of Islam, he is free to act on this conviction even if others think that the juristic evidence for his position is weak. He is responsible only for that which he thinks and believes even if, by so doing, he overburdens himself, especially if this due to his desire to seek God's pleasure through supererogatory acts as well as his discontent with adherence to the categorical obligations required of him. People naturally differ on these matters. Some take things easily and facilitate matters, others do not. This is also true of the Prophet's Companions. Ibn 'Abbās, for instance, facilitated religious matters, while Ibn 'Umar maintained strictness.

In view of all this, it would be enough for a Muslim to support his conviction by citing evidence from one of the Islamic schools of jurisprudence, or by a reliable interpretation based on sound evidence from the Qur'an or Sunnah. Therefore, should a person be labelled an extremist because he chooses to adopt a ruling derived by one of the four great jurists of Islam – al-Shāfi'ī, Abū Ḥanīfah, Mālik, and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal – and commits himself to it even though it may differ from that which various scholars, especially contemporary ones, expound? Do we have the right to suppress another's choice of interpretation, especially if it relates solely to his own personal life and behavior?

A great number of Muslim jurists contend that a woman should wear clothing that covers her entire body with the exception of her face and hands. The exception of the hands and face is based upon this Qur'anic verse: "...that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what [must ordinarily] appear thereof" (24:31). They further emphasize this by supporting it with prophetic hadiths,

events, and traditions. Many contemporary scholars of Islam, myself included, favor this point of view. On the other hand, a number of eminent Muslim scholars argue that both the face and the hands are unrepresentable and must be covered, and in support of this they cite evidence from the Qur'an, hadith literature, and established traditions. This argument is advocated by many contemporary scholars, particularly in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. They call upon every Muslim woman who believes in God and the hereafter to veil her face and wear gloves. If a woman believes in this and considers it part of the teachings of Islam, should she be branded an extremist? If a man persuades his daughter or his wife to abide by this, should he also be looked upon as an extremist? Do we have the right to force anyone to abandon what he/she believes to be God's injunction? Are we not, in this way, asking him/her to seek what they would consider to be God's displeasure in order to satisfy our whims and in order to avoid being accused of "extremism"?

The same could also be said of those who adhere to hard-line opinions pertaining to singing, music, drawing, photography, etc. These opinions differ not only from my own personal interpretation on these matters but also from those of many renowned scholars of Islam. However, such opinions do remain in line with the views of a number of early and contemporary Muslim scholars.

In reality, much of what we criticize as excessive in those whom we brand as "extremists," such as wearing a short robe instead of a shirt and trousers or refusing to shake hands with women, finds its origin in the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*)²⁰ and the traditions of the Ummah. On this basis they have been accepted, advocated, and propagated by some of our contemporary Muslim scholars with the result that some devout young Muslims have responded to this in the hope of God's mercy and in fear of His punishment. We should not, therefore, condemn the practice of any Muslim or accuse him of "extremism" if he adopts a hard-line opinion based on a juristic judgement through which he seeks God's pleasure. We have no right to force him to abandon his opinion or ask him to follow a line of behavior which is contrary to his convictions. Our duty is to appeal to him with wisdom, argue with him patiently and courteously,

and try to convince him by citing evidence in the hope that he may change his mind and accept what we believe to be the truth.

MANIFESTATIONS OF EXTREMISM

The first indications of extremism include bigotry and intolerance, which cause a person to be obstinately devoted to his own opinions and prejudices, as well as rigidity, which deprives him of clarity of vision regarding the interests of other human beings, the purposes of Islamic law or the circumstances of the age. Such a person does not allow any opportunity for dialogue with others so that he may compare his opinion with theirs and choose to follow what appears to him most sound. We condemn such attempts to suppress and discard the opinions of others, just as we condemn the similar attitude taken by their accusers and opponents. Indeed, we emphatically condemn the attitude of anyone who claims that he alone is right and everybody else is wrong, accusing those who have different ideas and opinions of ignorance and self-interest, and those with different behavior of disobedience, sinfulness and blasphemy as if he were an infallible authority and his words divinely revealed. This attitude contradicts the principle of consensus amongst the Ummah, namely, that when it comes to differing opinions we should either take them or leave them – with the obvious exception of the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad.

However, it is strange that some of these people take the liberty of exercising independent reasoning in the most complicated matters and issues whilst passing whimsical judgements, an act they would nevertheless roundly condemn contemporary Islamic scholars for, whether singly or collectively, should they happen to issue their own independent interpretations or contradict their views. Some of them never hesitate to give ridiculous opinions on, and interpretations of, the Qur'an and Sunnah; opinions which contradict those handed down to us by our forefathers or which were arrived at subsequently by contemporary Muslim scholars. This astonishing indifference is due to a presumption that somehow they are on an equal footing with Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Alī, and Ibn 'Abbās, a matter made worse

by the fact that in the same breath they refuse to allow their contemporaries to exercise the same right of independent reasoning claiming that they are incapable of doing so!

Bigotry is the clearest evidence of extremism. An extremist seems to address people in this way: "I have the right to speak; your duty is to listen. I have the right to lead; your duty is to follow. My opinion is right, and couldn't possibly be wrong. Your opinion is wrong, and couldn't possibly be right!"

Thus, a bigot can never come to terms with others. Agreement is possible and can be reached only when people hold moderate positions, but a bigot neither knows nor believes in moderation. He stands in relation to people as the East stands in relation to the West the nearer you get to one, the further you move away from the other. The issue becomes even more critical when such a person develops the tendency to coerce others, not necessarily physically but by accusing them of unjustified religious innovation, laxity, unbelief, and deviation. Such intellectual terrorism is as alarming as physical terrorism.

IMPOSING ON THE GENERAL POPULACE WHAT GOD HAS NOT REQUIRED OF THEM

The second characteristic of extremism manifests itself in a perpetual commitment to excessiveness and in attempts to force others into a similar commitment, despite the existence of good reasons for facilitation and the fact that God has not ordained such austerity. A person motivated by piety and caution may, if he so wishes, choose a hard-line opinion in some matters and on certain occasions. But this should not become so habitual that he rejects facilitation when he needs it. Such an attitude is not in keeping with the teachings of the Qur'an or Sunnah as is clear from the following verse: "God intends every facility for you; He does not want to put you to difficulties" (2:185).

The Prophet also said in a hadith already quoted: "Facilitate [matters for people] and do not make [things] difficult." He also said: "God loves for His dispensations to be accepted, just as He dislikes

disobedience.”²¹ It is also reported that “whenever the Prophet was given a choice between two options, he always chose the easier of the two unless it was a sin.” Complicating matters for people and causing constraint in their lives is contrary to the most outstanding qualities of the Prophet Muhammad. These qualities were mentioned in earlier scriptures and later revealed in the Qur’an: “He [Muhammad] allows them as lawful what is good [and pure] and prohibits them from what is bad [and impure], he releases them from their heavy burdens and from the yokes that are upon them” (7:157).

This is why the Prophet used to prolong his prayers only when he was alone. In fact, he used to offer prayer throughout the night until his feet were swollen. But when leading people in prayer, he used to shorten it, taking into consideration the circumstances of his followers and their varying levels of endurance. He said in this respect, “If any of you leads people in prayer, he should shorten it, for among them are the weak, the sick, and the elderly; and if any of you offers prayer alone, then he may prolong [it] as much as he wishes.”²²

Abu Mas‘ūd al-Anṣārī narrated that a man said to the Prophet:

“O Messenger of God, I stay away from the dawn prayer only because so-and-so prolongs it.” The Prophet became very angry and said: “O people, some of you make people dislike good deeds [in this case, prayer]. Whoever leads people in prayer should shorten it, because among them are the weak, the elderly, and those who have needs to attend to.”²³

As we have already mentioned, the Prophet reacted in the same way when a man complained to him that Mu‘ādh had prolonged the prayer. Anas ibn Mālik narrated: “The Prophet said: ‘When I stand up to pray, I intend to prolong it, but I cut it short on hearing the cries of a child, because I don’t like to trouble the mother.’” It is also strict, excessive and overburdening to require people to observe voluntary forms of worship in the same way that they would observe the obligatory forms, or to hold them accountable for things which are simply undesirable (*makrūh*) as if they were forbidden (*muḥarram*). In short, we should demand that people observe only what God has

categorically commanded and make clear that any additional forms of worship are optional.

The following incident shows that this was also the Prophet's opinion. A Bedouin once asked the Prophet about the obligatory prescriptions required of him, the Prophet mentioned only three: prayer, *zakah*, and fasting. When the Bedouin asked if there was anything else he must do, the Prophet replied in the negative, adding that the Bedouin could volunteer to do more if he so wished. As the Bedouin was leaving, he swore never to increase or decrease what the Prophet had asked him to do. When the Prophet heard this he said, "If he is speaking the truth, he will prosper"²⁴ (or, "he will be granted Paradise").

If a Muslim in this age observes that which is obligatory and eschews the most heinous of the forbidden acts, he should be embraced within the fold of Islam and regarded as one of its advocates so long as his loyalty belongs to God and His Messenger. Even if he commits some minor forbidden acts, the merits gained by his observance of the five daily prayers, the Friday communal prayers, fasting, etc. will atone for his minor faults. The Qur'an says: "Good deeds remove those that are evil" (11:114), and in another verse:

If you [but] eschew the most heinous of the things which are forbidden,
We shall expel out of you all the evil in you and admit you to a state of
great honor. (4:31)

In view of the above evidence from the Qur'an and the Sunnah, how can we exclude a Muslim from the fold of Islam merely because he commits certain actions which may or may not be forbidden, or because he fails to observe something which may or may not be obligatory? This is why I object to the tendency of some pious people to adopt and cling to hard-line opinions, not only in their own personal practice but also in influencing others to do the same. I also object to the charges levelled by such people against any Muslim who disagrees with their line of thought and opts for facilitation in the light of the Qur'an and Sunnah in order to relieve people of distress and undue restrictions in their religious practice.

UNCALLED FOR AUSTERITY

The third mark of extremism is uncalled for austerity and the overburdening of others, i.e., when applying Islamic principles to people who either live in non-Muslim countries or who have only recently converted to Islam, or those who have rediscovered their faith and become newly committed Muslims. With individuals such as these, emphasis should not be placed on minor or controversial issues, but on fundamentals. Efforts should first be made to correct their concepts and understanding of Islam. Once correct beliefs are firmly established, then one can begin to explain the five pillars of Islam and gradually to emphasize those aspects which bring a Muslim's belief and practice into harmony so that his entire life becomes an embodiment of what is pleasing to God.

This fact was recognized by the Prophet Muhammad himself when he sent Mu'adh to Yemen. He told him,

You are going to [meet] people who possess a [divine] scripture, and when you reach them call them to witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is His Messenger. If they obey you in this, then tell them that God has enjoined on them five prayers to be performed every day and night. If they obey you in this, then tell them that God has enjoined upon them charity (zakah) to be taken from the rich amongst them and given to the poor.²⁵

Notice the gradation in the Prophet's advice to Mu'adh. He began with the testimony of faith, namely, testifying to God's oneness and to Muhammad as God's Messenger. If they responded positively to this, he was to call upon them to adopt the second pillar of faith, namely, ritual prayer (salah). If they obeyed him in this, he was to go on to the third pillar, namely zakah, and so forth. Hence, I was shocked and dismayed during a tour of North America to find that devout youth belonging to certain Muslim groups had stirred up controversy in a particular Islamic center because Muslims were sitting on chairs during the Saturday and Sunday lectures in mosques instead of on mats on the floor and weren't facing the Ka'bah as

Muslims generally do, and because those who attended wore shirts and trousers rather than traditional robes and sat at dining tables to eat rather than on the floor. I was angered by this kind of thinking and behavior in the heart of North America and I told them, "It would be more worthwhile in this materialistic society to make your paramount concern the call to monotheism and the worship of God, to remind people of the hereafter and noble Islamic values, and to warn them of the heinous acts in which the materially developed countries have become so immersed. Behavioral norms and modifications in religious practice are governed by time as well as place, and should be introduced only after the most necessary and fundamental tenets have been firmly established."

In another Islamic center, I found people raising a ruckus over the showing of historical or educational films in mosques, claiming that "mosques have been turned into movie theaters." However, they were forgetting that the purpose of the mosque is to serve Muslims' worldly interests as well as their spiritual ones. During the time of the Prophet Muhammad, the mosque was the center of activities relating to the call to Islam, the government headquarters, as well as the center for social activities. Most of us will be aware of the fact that the Prophet permitted a group of people from Abyssinia to sport with their spears in the middle of his mosque, and that he allowed 'Ā'ishah to watch them.²⁶

SEVERITY AND HARSHNESS

The fourth characteristic of extremism manifests itself in harsh treatment of others, roughness in one's approach, and crudeness in calling people to Islam, all of which are contrary to the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah. God commands us to call others to Islam and its teachings with wisdom, not with foolishness, with amicability, not with harsh words: "Invite [all] to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching, and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious" (16:125). It also describes the Prophet thus: "Now has come unto you a Messenger from among yourselves. It grieves him that you should perish, ardently anxious is he over you.

To the believers he is kind and merciful” (9:128). The Qur’an also addressed the Prophet and defined his relationship with his Companions, saying, “It is part of the mercy of God that you [Muhammad] deal justly with them. If you were severe and harsh-hearted they would have broken away from you” (3:159).

Firmness and, indeed, implacability are mentioned only in connection with two situations in the Qur’an. First, in connection with war against oppression and self-defence, when a successful military strategy necessitates fortitude and the putting aside of leniency until the war comes to an end: “Fight the unbelievers who gird you about and let them find firmness in you” (9:123). Second, in connection with carrying out the Islamically prescribed penalties for specified transgressions, there should be firmness in applying God’s injunctions because the safety and well being of humanity and society are at stake: “The man and woman guilty of adultery or fornication, flog each of them with a hundred stripes: Let not compassion move you in their case... if you believe in God and the Last Day” (24:2).

In the area of calling others to Islam, there is no place for violence or harshness. This is evidenced in the following sayings of the Prophet: “God loves kindness in all matters”²⁷ and, “Kindness makes things beautiful, while violence renders them defective,” as well as in the following wisdom of our forebears: “Whoever desires to command the common good, let him do it gently.” Violence can do nothing but distort the call to the path of God. Such a call seeks to penetrate the innermost recesses of man to transform him into a godly person in his conceptions, emotions, and behavior by altering his thoughts, feelings, and will as well as the whole of his being, thereby shaping him into a different person. It also shakes up the structure of the society and alters its inherited beliefs, well-established traditions, moral conventions, and prevailing systems. None of this can be achieved without wisdom and amicability, and without taking into consideration human nature, that is, people’s obstinacy, resistance to change and argumentativeness. These characteristics necessitate the exercise of kindness and gentleness when attempting to reach people’s hearts and minds so that their hardness can be softened, their rigidity lessened and their pride checked.

This approach is described for us in the Qur'an as having been followed by earlier prophets and sincere believers who called people to the worship of God.

Examples can be found in Abraham's call to his father and people, in Shu'ayb's call to his people, in Moses' call to Pharaoh, in the call issued by 'the believer' (a man among Pharaoh's people who possessed faith) to Pharaoh's people, in the call issued by the believer spoken of in *Sūrat Yāsīn* (36:20), as well as in the calls of others who have directed people to truth and righteousness. Let us listen to and contemplate the spirit in which a particular believer mentioned in the Qur'an addresses Pharaoh and his people, expressing his sense of belonging to them and his concern for their destiny and the permanence of their dominion and glory: "O my People! Yours is the dominion this day: You have the upper hand in the land: but who will help us from the punishment of God should it fall upon us?" (40:29). Then he seeks to inspire fear in their hearts by reminding them of what befell earlier nations who refused to listen to the message of God: "O my People! Truly I do fear for you something like the Day [of disaster] of the Confederates [in sin] – something like the fate of the people of Noah, and 'Ād and Thamūd, and those who came after them: but God never wishes injustice upon His servants" (40:30–31). Then he describes the disaster which might befall them on the Day of Judgement, a day which they believe in: "And O my People! I fear for you a Day when there will be mutual calling [and wailing], a Day when you will turn your backs and flee: no defender shall you have from God. Any whom God leaves to stray, there is none to guide" (40:32–33). He continues his earnest plea with gentleness and compassion; he warns, but he also inspires with hope:

O my People! Follow me! I will lead you to the Right Path. O my People! This life of the present is nothing but [temporary] convenience. It is the hereafter that is the home that will last... And O my People! How [strange] it is for me to call you to salvation while you call me to the Fire. You do call upon me to blaspheme against God and to join with Him partners of whom I have no knowledge, and I call you to the Exalted in Power, Who forgives again and again! (40:38–42)

Then he concludes his exhortation with the words, "Soon will you remember what I say to you [now]. My [own] affair I commit to God, for God [ever] watches over His servants" (40:44).

This is the approach and style which contemporary proponents of Islam should adopt when relating to stubborn Muslims and people of other religions. It is also embodied in God's advice to His two messengers, Moses and his brother Aaron, may peace be upon them both, who were sent to preach to Pharaoh: "Go, both of you, to Pharaoh, for he has indeed transgressed all bounds. But speak to him mildly, perchance he may take warning or fear [God]" (20:43-44). Accordingly, Moses addressed Pharaoh gently, saying: "Are you desirous of attaining to purity? [If so,] then I will guide you towards [a cognition of] your Sustainer, so that [henceforth] you will stand in awe of Him" (79:18-19).²⁸

No wonder, then, that people with experience in calling others to Islam disapprove of many young people's manner of arguing with those who hold different opinions! Rather than calling people to the Way of God with wisdom, they are quite often harsh, rough, and crude. No distinction is made between the old and the young; no special consideration is given to those whose age or status deserves special respect, that is, parents, teachers, the learned, or those who have proven themselves in defending against oppression and the call to Islam.

Nor do they differentiate between those who have some excuse for their rejection (or lax practice) of Islam, the illiterate, and the deceived, and those who are busy trying to earn a living and dealing with their daily concerns, and those who have no excuse, that is, who resist Islam out of malice rather than ignorance and who storm into hellfire with their eyes wide open, as it were. In this connection, we have an example to emulate in the hadith scholars of the early days of Islam, who drew a distinction between innovators among the common folk who made no effort to call others to adopt their blame-worthy innovations, and those who set themselves up as propagators and defenders of their particular innovations. Consequently, such scholars would accept the reports of the former group but not those of the latter.

THINKING ILL OF OTHERS

Suspicion and distrust are also manifestations of extremism. An extremist readily accuses people and quickly passes judgement contrary to the generally accepted norm: "innocent until proven guilty." He considers a person guilty the moment he suspects him of something. He jumps to conclusions rather than looking for explanations. The slightest mistake is blown out of all proportion; a mistake becomes a sin, and a sin, unbelief. Such a reaction is a stark violation of the spirit and teachings of Islam, which encourages Muslims to think well of other Muslims, to try to find an excuse if they engage in ill-conduct, and to help them improve their words and deeds.

The sincerity and integrity of those who disagree with such an extremist are always called into question. An extremist depicts people as being guilty of transgression, innovation, or disrespect for the Prophet's Sunnah even if their views are solidly based upon authentic Islamic texts. One could cite many examples: If you argue that carrying a stick or eating while sitting on the ground has nothing to do with the Sunnah, you will be accused of disrespect for the Prophet himself. Not even proponents of Islam and learned Muslim scholars and thinkers are spared such accusations. If a Muslim scholar issues a religious ruling which facilitates matters for Muslims, he is considered lax on religious issues; if a proponent of Islam tries to call to Islam in a manner suitable to the spirit and the taste of the age, he is accused of succumbing to and patronizing Western civilization. In fact, these accusations are hurled not only at the living but even at the dead, who are unable to defend themselves. No one holding a different opinion can escape unjust and indiscriminate accusations, such as being a Freemason, a Jahmite (that is, a predeterminist), or a rationalist Mu'tazilite. Even the four great jurists of Islam, who established the main Islamic juristic schools and who have earned the respect of the majority of Muslims throughout the centuries, have not escaped the venomous slander of the extremists. Indeed, the whole history of the Muslim Ummah since the fourth century AH, with its glorious legacy and unprecedented civilization, has been a target of unjustified criticism. It is viewed by extremists as being the

source of contemporary evils and the root of our present malaise. To some extremists, it was a period of conflict, discord and struggle for personal power; for others, a period of ignorance and even unbelief.

This destructive tendency is not new, and the desire to criticize others and justify oneself is a well-known vice. Yet God warns us, saying, “Therefore, justify not yourselves: He knows best who it is that guards against evil” (53:32). Extremists existed even during the time of the Prophet. Once, an extremist among the *Anṣār* (the Muslims of Madinah) accused the Prophet of favoritism in his division and distribution of the spoils of war. The gravest shortcoming of the contemporary extremists is suspicion. Had they understood and comprehended the Qur’an and Sunnah, they would have discovered that both seek to foster mutual trust and goodwill among Muslims. If a Muslim sees a fault in a fellow Muslim, he conceals it in order that God might conceal his faults both in this world and the next, and if he finds something praiseworthy in another Muslim, he publicizes it and brings it to light. Moreover, when he observes some failing or sin in another Muslim, he will not allow it to make him forget that person’s good qualities and virtues, both those of which he is aware and those of which he is not aware.

Indeed, Islam issues a dire warning against two characteristics: despairing of God’s mercy and suspecting fellow human beings. God says: “O you who believe! Avoid suspicion as much [as possible]: for suspicion in some cases is a sin” (49:12). The Prophet also says in this respect: “Avoid suspicion, for suspicion is the falsest of all speech.”²⁹

The root of all this is arrogance and contempt for others, an attitude which formed the basis for the first act of disobedience, that is, Satan’s rejection of God’s command to prostrate himself to Adam, claiming: “I am better than he [is]” (38:76). It is worthwhile to heed the warning embodied in the following hadith:

If you hear a person saying that people are ruined, he himself will be ruined [by his vanity, conceit and willingness to accuse others].³⁰

Another version of this hadith reads, “...he himself will cause

their ruin,” i.e., by his suspicion and snobbery, and by causing them to despair of God’s mercy.

Vanity is one of the human traits which cause moral degeneration and which Muslim scholars have referred to as “sins of the heart.” The Prophet warned us against these sins: “There are three deadly sins – unrestrained avarice, desire that’s given free rein, and conceit.” A true Muslim never takes pride in his work or actions, since he is never sure that God will accept them. The Qur’an describes charitable people as “those who dispense their charity with their hearts full of fear, because they will return to their Lord” (23:60). It is reported in hadith literature that this Qur’anic verse is about people who do righteous deeds but fear that God may not accept them. Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allah said,

God may open up for you the gates of obedience, but without opening up for you the gates of acceptance. On the other hand, He may allow you to fall into disobedience which happens to lead you to the right path. Disobedience that teaches you humility is better than piety that fills you with vanity and arrogance!

This derives from the saying of Imam ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, “A bad deed that offends you is better in the sight of God than a good action that puffs you up with pride.” In the same vein Ibn Mas‘ūd declared: “Ruin is caused by two traits – pride and despair. Happiness cannot be attained without effort and struggle. A vain person makes no effort because he believes he is perfect; a despairing person makes no effort because he believes it would be useless.”

FALLING INTO THE ABYSS OF *TAKFĪR*

Extremism reaches its utmost limit when it leads an individual or group to deny others the right to safety and protection, and instead sanctions taking their lives, confiscating their property and refusing to abide by any covenant concluded with them. This, of course, occurs when an extremist views everyone but those in his own group as godless. This kind of extremism severs any bond between such a

person and the rest of the Ummah. This is the trap into which the Kharijites fell during the early days of Islam. The Kharijites were known for their strict observance of religious duties such as prayer, fasting and recitation of the Qur'an. However, their thinking, if not their consciences, was distorted and corrupt. Consequently, they were so infatuated with their own belief and behavior that they inadvertently deviated from the right path. The Prophet described the devotion of such people by saying: "One of you would consider his own prayer as nothing when compared with theirs [the Kharijites'], his rising by night for worship of no account compared with theirs, and his recitation [of the Qur'an] lacking compared with theirs." Nevertheless, he said of them, "They slip out of religion as an arrow slips out of a felled game animal,"³¹ and he described their relationship with the Qur'an by saying, "They recite the Qur'an, but it does not go beyond their throats." The Prophet also said of them that they regard it as their duty to "destroy adherents of Islam and save idol-worshippers."³² This is why, when a certain Muslim scholar fell into their hands and was asked about his identity, he replied that he was a polytheist curious to find out about God's message and book. On hearing this, the Kharijites told the man that they would protect him and grant him safe passage. They supported their conduct by quoting the following verse from the Qur'an:

If one amongst the pagans asks you for asylum, grant it to him so that he may hear the Word of God; and then escort him to where he may be secure. That is because they are men without knowledge. (9:6)

The irony is that if the man had admitted that he was a Muslim they would have cut off his head!

Unfortunately, some Muslims have not yet learned this lesson. The Jamā'at al-Takfīr wa al-Hijrah group seems to be following in the footsteps of the Kharijites. They readily brand as an unbeliever anybody who commits a sin and does not immediately repent, as well as both rulers who do not apply Islamic law and the people who submit to such rulers. They brand as infidels those Muslim scholars who do not openly condemn both rulers and ruled as infidels (since

whoever does not declare an infidel to be an infidel is himself an infidel). They brand as infidels those who do not accept their way of thinking, and even those who do accept their way of thinking but who do not join their group and pledge allegiance to their imam. As for those who pledge allegiance to their imam and join their group but who later, for one reason or another, decide to leave, they are labelled apostates whose blood may be shed with impunity. They likewise brand as infidels those who reject the group's beliefs and accept the teachings elaborated by the four great jurists of Islam (al-Shafi'i, Anas ibn Mālik, Abū Ḥanīfah, and Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal), or who acknowledge the validity of consensus (ijma'), analogy (*qiyās*), unrestricted interests (*al-maṣāliḥ al-mursalah*) or juristic preference (*istihsān*).³³ In fact, they view all the Islamic periods since the 4th Century AH as periods of ignorance and unbelief due to their veneration of the idol of tradition rather than God!³⁴

In this way, this group has gone to such extremes in accusing people of unbelief that they spare neither the dead nor the living. The group has thus run into deep trouble, because accusing a Muslim of unbelief is a very serious matter; after all, it entails dire consequences, since he then comes under the laws of apostasy and his property can be confiscated. As an unbeliever, or *kāfir*, he must be separated from his wife and children; there can be no bond between him and other Muslims; he must be deprived of his inheritance and cannot be inherited from; he must be denied the Islamic burial and the prayer prayed over the dead person; and he must not be buried in a Muslim graveyard. The Prophet said: "When a Muslim calls another Muslim *kāfir*, then surely one of them is such."³⁵ This means that unless the accusation is substantiated, it will fall back on the accuser, who will face great danger in this world and in the hereafter. Usāmah ibn Zayd said:

If a man says, "I witness that there is no god but God", he has embraced Islam and [consequently] his life and property should be granted safety. If he said so in fear or to protect himself from the sword, he will account for that before God. We should base our judgements only on what is apparent.³⁶

The Prophet thus rebuked Usāmah when he discovered that the latter had killed a man who had uttered the words, “There is no god but God” during a battle in which the man’s tribe was defeated. When Usāmah argued that he had thought, at the time, that the man did so only out of fear of being killed, the Prophet said: “So, did you look into his heart after he had confessed that there is no god but God?” And, as Usāmah related the account, “He [the Prophet] went on repeating this to me till I wished I hadn’t embraced Islam until that very day.”

The law of Islam teaches that those who embrace Islam with certainty of mind can only be expelled from its fold by proven and substantiated evidence. Even major sins such as murder, fornication, and drinking alcohol do not justify the accusation of unbelief, or *kufr*, provided that the person concerned does not show disrespect for, reject, or refuse to recognize the law of Islam. This is why the Qur’an establishes brotherly love between the person who has committed a premeditated murder and the slain person’s next of kin, saying: “But if any remission is made by the brother of the slain, then grant any reasonable demand, and compensate him with handsome gratitude” (2:178).

Similarly, the Prophet once said to someone who was cursing an alcoholic who had been punished several times for drinking, “Do not curse him, for he loves God and His Messenger.”³⁷

The law of Islam has prescribed different punishments for crimes such as murder, fornication, and drunkenness. Had all of these been equated with unbelief, then they would have been punished in accordance with the law of apostasy (*riddah*). All the vague and suspect arguments on which the extremists base their accusations are refuted by categorical texts in both the Qur’an and the Sunnah. This issue was settled by the Ummah centuries ago; hence, it is futile to try to revive it now.

The Causes of Extremism

THE CAUSES AND MOTIVE FORCES BEHIND EXTREMISM

Extremism does not arise arbitrarily or develop in a vacuum. On the contrary, it must have underlying causes and motivations. Like living organisms, events and actions do not come out of the blue and cannot germinate without seeds. Rather, they are governed by the law of cause and effect which is one of the divine signatures on God's creation. A remedy must be preceded by a diagnosis, but diagnosis is impossible – or, at least, extremely difficult – when causes are not known. With this in mind, we shall endeavor to examine the causes and motives which have generated extremism (*al-taṭarruf*), a term which has become synonymous with *ghuluw*, or religious excess.

AN INTEGRATED VIEW OF THE CAUSES BEHIND EXTREMISM

We must realize at the outset that no single cause is wholly responsible for the spread of extremism. It is a complex phenomenon with numerous interrelated causes, some of which are direct, others of which are indirect, some of which are found in the distant past, and others of which exist in the present. Consequently, we should not focus on one cause while disregarding all others, as do people who seek to advocate a particular school of thought. Psychologists and especially psychoanalysts, for instance, attribute all behavior to certain

subconscious psychological causes. Meanwhile, the sociologists point to man's helplessness vis-à-vis social and environmental influences; for them, man is nothing more than a puppet whose strings are pulled by society.¹ The advocates of historical materialism emphasize economic forces which, they argue, create events and change the course of history. Others, who hold a more comprehensive and balanced view, believe that the causes are complex and interrelated, producing a variety of effects which, although differing from one cause to another, have their undeniable impact in the final analysis.

The causes of extremism are thus varied and could be direct or indirect, manifest or latent. They may be religious, political, social, economic, psychological, intellectual, or a combination of all of these. The primary motive force may lie in the extremist's own inner makeup. Or, upon further examination, it may become apparent that it derives from his relationship with the members of his family and their relationships with one another. Further analysis may reveal that it is due to the society itself with all its blatant contradictions: between faith and behavior, duty and reality, religion and politics, words and actions, aspirations and achievements, the secular and the divine. Such contradictions may be tolerated by the older generation; as for the youth, some may tolerate such contradictions, but not all. And though they tolerate them for the time being, they will not tolerate them indefinitely.

Extremism may also be due to the corruption of regimes, i.e., the despotism of rulers, their egotistic pursuits, their adherence to the views of corrupt counsellors and advisers as well as various foreign enemies of the Ummah, and their total disregard for the rights of their peoples. These practices have set religion and the state on two parallel tracks which will never meet.

LACK OF INSIGHT INTO THE TRUE NATURE OF *DĪN*

Undoubtedly, one of the main causes of extremism is a lack of understanding of the purposes, spirit, and essence of *dīn*, that is, the normative religion which God ordained for humanity with its associated faith, devotional practices, ethics, law and institutions. Such a

lack does not necessarily mean total ignorance, which in general does not lead to extremism or excess, but rather, to their opposites, i.e., degeneration and laxity. Rather, it is a kind of half-knowledge which deludes its possessor into believing that he knows all there is to know when, in fact, he has no more than a hodgepodge of undigested and unintegrated facts which neither enhance insight nor clarify vision. A person possessing this kind of “knowledge” concentrates on marginal and trivial issues only and fails to see the relationship between the parts and the whole, between particulars and universals, between unambiguous and allegorical texts, or between speculative texts and definitive ones. Such a person has not mastered the art of synthesizing a variety of inputs by determining which of a number of rulings or considerations has the most evidence in its favor and dealing wisely with contradictions.

Aware of the danger of such half-knowledge, Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī draws attention to the phenomenon in his book *al-I’tiṣām*,² where he argues that self-presumption and conceit are the root causes of *bid‘ah*, or objectionable religious innovations, as well as the disunity of the Ummah, and may lead to internal schism and gradual disintegration. He asserts that a person may unduly presume himself, or be presumed, to be knowledgeable in religious matters and capable of issuing legal opinions based on his own independent interpretations. If such a person then acts based on this presumption, claiming that he has the right to present different opinions and interpretations, he may cite particular aspects of the religion in such a way that they undermine its universal principles.

In other words, he supports the view which appears valid to him without comprehensive knowledge or understanding of the meanings and intents of Islamic Law. Such a person, he states, is an innovator (*mubtadi‘*). In the following hadith, the Prophet warns against such persons, saying,

God does not take knowledge away by removing it directly from people’s minds and hearts. Rather, He takes it away by removing true scholars from their midst. When this happens, people take as their leaders ignorant persons who, when consulted, issue their verdicts without

knowledge. Hence, they themselves go astray, and they lead the people astray with them.³

Some of the learned infer from the above hadith that people are never led astray by genuine Muslim scholars but that in their absence people turn to those who are not true scholars, and who lead them astray by giving incorrect advice. After all, a trustworthy person would never betray a trust; however, if he places his confidence in an untrustworthy person, he thereby commits a kind of betrayal. Similarly, a genuine Muslim scholar would never innovate; however legal rulings have been sought from persons who are not true scholars. Anas ibn Mālik stated, “Rabī‘ah was once seen weeping bitterly. When he was asked if some calamity had befallen him, he replied, ‘No, but people who possess no knowledge are being asked to issue religious rulings!’”

The fact is that partial knowledge coupled with vanity and pride is more dangerous and subversive than an admitted total ignorance, since the former is the ignorance of a person who is not aware of his limitations. Such ignorance manifests itself in various ways, the most important of which is rigid adherence to the literal meanings of the texts in total disregard for their essence and purposes. The phenomenon is not new; on the contrary, it has been manifested in numerous ways throughout history, the most important of which are summarized below.

THE LITERALIST TREND IN THE UNDERSTANDING OF TEXTS

There are many today who cling to the literal meaning of texts without seeking to establish their essential meaning and purposes. In so doing, they are repeating the same errors committed by the original *al-Zāhiriyyah*, or Literalist, school, which rejects *ta‘līl al-ahkām*.⁴ It follows, then, that it rejects *qiyās*, or analogical reasoning, since it holds that Islamic law differentiates between things which are similar and brings together those things which differ.

This neo-Literalist school follows the original one by seeking to regulate both acts of worship and transactions without any attention

to their bases or any attempt to understand their intents and the human interests they are meant to serve. Perhaps the only difference between the two schools is that the adherents of the earlier school stated their methodology explicitly and offered powerful defenses thereof, then adhered to it without apology. As for their contemporary successors, they do not admit to their literalist persuasions; at the same time, they have adopted only the negative aspect of their predecessors' approach, namely, total rejection of *ta'lim*⁵ and of the importance of rulings' intents and inner meanings.

My own opinion, as well as that of other Muslim scholars who have studied the matter carefully, is that Islamic acts of worship are to be accepted as they are without an attempt to analyze their bases and purposes, whereas the bases and purposes of those rulings which apply to our mundane transactions can, and should, be analyzed. In this view, it is wrong to claim, for example, that a person who gives money to poor Muslims or finances useful Islamic projects can therefore dispense with the pilgrimage to Makkah. Nor can it be claimed that giving the monetary value of *hady al-tamattu'*⁶ or *qirān*⁷ as alms is better than the actual sacrifice. It is equally inconceivable that modern taxes could replace zakah, the third pillar of Islam and one which is on a par with prayer. In fact, prayer is rarely mentioned in the Qur'an without zakah following immediately. Nor, of course, should Ramadan be replaced by another month for fasting, nor Friday by another day for the weekly communal prayer which is obligatory for Muslim men. However, in relation to acts other than the purely devotional ones, we may examine them in light of their underlying meanings and purposes. Once we grasp such meanings and purposes, we can base verdicts thereon and either accept or reject them.

Let us examine the following texts: It is related in an authentic hadith that a Muslim should not carry a copy of the Qur'an when travelling in a land of unbelievers or through enemy territory. However, if we examine the reason underlying this prohibition, we conclude that the Prophet prohibited this out of his concern that unbelievers might do harm to or defile the Book. In the absence of such harm or defilement, Muslims can take it with them wherever they

wish. This is the customary practice among all Muslims today. Indeed people of other religions and faiths now compete to distribute their “sacred books” and utilize all possible means in the process. Muslims are trying to do the same through translations of the meanings of the Qur’an for non-Arabic speakers.

Another authentic hadith prohibits a Muslim woman from travelling unless she is accompanied by a *mahram*⁸. Surely, the main purpose of this prohibition was to protect women at a time when travelling was a laborious and dangerous experience. Presently, however the means of transportation used by travellers have considerably reduced the risks faced by a woman travelling on her own. Her husband, for instance, can take her to the airport and see her off. When she arrives at the other end, a *mahram* can meet her and convey her safely to her final destination. In fact, the Prophet foresaw such a development, for he said that there would come a time when people could travel from Iraq to the Ka‘bah (in Makkah) with nothing to fear but God.

Similarly, the Prophet did not permit a Muslim who had been away from his family for a long period of time to arrive home at night. He himself used to return only in the mornings or early evenings. There are two reasons for this. First, arriving home unexpectedly after a long absence may indicate that the husband distrusts his wife and intends to take her unawares. This kind of distrust is not acceptable in Islam. Secondly, it is argued that the prohibition seeks to give the wife the right to know of her husband’s arrival in advance so that she can beautify herself for him. But in modern times a traveller can come home any time he likes provided that he inform his wife by telephone or by letter, email, fax, telegram, etc. Further, today’s traveller cannot always choose when to travel, for he is governed by schedules and timetables. Therefore, such a prohibition cannot be taken at its face value; it must be analyzed on the basis of its original purpose and intent with regard to the circumstances of time and place.

As previously mentioned, compulsory obligations related to worship cannot be rationalized in order to exclude zakah by claiming that it is part of the financial and economic system rather than that

of worship. Zakah is mentioned both in books on Islamic jurisprudence along with acts of worship in its capacity as a fundamental religious obligation, and in writings dealing with land taxes, monetary transactions and governmental and political rulings in its capacity as a fixed source of state income in Islamic law and a pillar of the Islamic economic system. Consequently, scholars of Islamic jurisprudence analyze rulings relating to zakah in light of their concrete rationales, stating that the basis for its obligatory nature is that it represents “wealth which grows,” whether actually or potentially. All Islamic schools of jurisprudence apply *qiyās*, or analogical reasoning when arriving at rulings relating to zakah.

Personally, I hold that it is obligatory for Muslims to give ten percent (one-tenth) or five percent (half of one-tenth) of all the produce of cultivated lands to the poor, whether fruit or grain, fresh or dry, edible or non-edible. For the basis of such an obligation as it applies to wealth applies likewise to such produce, namely, that it is an entity that grows; the relevant basis applies to those who own such produce, namely, their need to be purified through the act of giving to others (“Of their goods take alms, so that you might purify and sanctify them” (9:103)). And lastly, it applies to the poor and needy, namely, the fact that they have the right to a share of the wealth of the rich, including those who own agricultural land and orchards.⁹

However, a contemporary literalist will reject the foregoing argument by quoting a hadith which says, “No alms are due on vegetables.” He also argues that there is no precedent in the Prophet’s practice to show that he took zakah on vegetables. I reply that the first argument is invalid, for the hadith is weak and is therefore inconclusive evidence against the overall spirit of the Qur’an and Sunnah. This hadith has not been authenticated by any of the hadith scholars and was reported by no one but al-Tirmidhī, who eventually classified it as weak, adding that nothing authentic can be attributed to the Prophet in this respect. The second argument is also invalid for two reasons, one of which was put forward by Imam Ibn al-‘Arabī, who says that there is no need to cite this kind of evidence given the fact that the issue is categorically dealt with in the Qur’an: “Eat of their fruit in their seasons, but render the dues that are proper on the day

that the harvest is gathered” (6:141). The second reason is that even if there were no precedent in the Prophet’s practice, we could deduce that he might have left the matter to the conscience of his followers, since in those days it was difficult to preserve fruits and vegetables.

The contemporary literalist might still argue that there is a hadith which restricts zakah only to dates, raisins, wheat, and barley. But this hadith is also weak. It has not been authenticated by any of the scholars, and it has not, therefore, been taken as evidence by any of the schools of jurisprudence. Hence, it cannot stand as evidence against the comprehensive authenticated texts which institute zakah as obligatory on all the produce of land. We read, for example: “It is He who produces gardens with trellises and without, and dates, and tilth with produce of all kinds, and olives and pomegranates, similar [in kind] and different [in variety]. Eat of their fruit in their season, but render the dues that are proper on the day that the harvest is gathered” (6:141); and, “O you who believe! Give of the good things which you have earned, and of the fruits of the earth which We have produced for you...” (2:267). There is also an authentic hadith which makes the rendering of zakah more inclusive than the contemporary literalists would like to admit. The Prophet said: “One-tenth on land watered by rivers or rain [i.e., natural irrigation], and five percent on land watered by means of a water wheel [artificial irrigation].”¹⁰

These texts are not confined to one particular type of produce, and the basis for treating them equally, whether the obligation is to render either one-tenth or half of one-tenth, is clearly evident. This is what Abū Ḥanīfah deduced from all the above texts and which was later accepted by ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz. This interpretation is also in tune with the spirit and intents of Islamic law. May God bless the Mālikī Imam and just judge Abū Bakr ibn al-‘Arabī, who supports Abū Ḥanīfah’s view in his commentary on the Qur’anic verse: “It is He who produces gardens...” (6:141) and in his explanation of the aforementioned hadith, “On a land watered by rivers...”¹¹

After presenting the evidence and arguments put forward by different schools of jurisprudence and showing their weaknesses, Ibn al-‘Arabī states, “Abū Ḥanīfah made the [previously mentioned] verse

his mirror [guide] and was consequently able to see the truth.”¹² He also states, “With regard to this issue, Abū Ḥanīfah’s *madhhab* (school of jurisprudence) provides the most solid evidence for its position; in addition, it demonstrates the clearest concern for the needy and the most gratitude for God’s bounties, all of which are evident in the general content of the verse and the hadith.”¹³

In conclusion, failing to see the relevance between Islamic legal rulings and their logical bases will lead to dangerous contradictions on the basis of which we may draw distinctions between phenomena which are similar and equate phenomena which are dissimilar; this is contrary to the justice which is the basis of Islamic law. It is true that pseudo-scholars often delve without knowledge or insight into such complex issues in search of bases for Islamic legal rulings; in so doing, however, they extend their domain without authentic evidence. However, even as we warn against intruders and parasites, this should not discourage us from seeking to give people their due or from opening the gate of *ijtihad*, that is, interpretation based on independent reasoning, for those who are qualified and capable.

PREOCCUPATION WITH SIDE ISSUES

Intellectual shallowness and lack of religious insight also manifest themselves in an intense interest in marginal issues at the expense of central ones – those which could affect the existence, identity, and destiny of the whole Ummah. There is excessive and unnecessary talk about growing a beard, wearing robes below the ankle, moving of the finger while reciting the *tashahhud*¹⁴ in prayer, acquisition of photographs and so on. Unfortunately, such time-wasting debates persist and occupy our thinking at a time when we are being confronted by the unrelenting hostility and infiltration of secularism, Zionism, and Crusader-like campaigns as well as break-away groups in the Muslim world. In long-standing Islamic regions in Asia and Africa, Christian missionaries are waging new crusades with the intent of undermining their historical and Islamic character. Muslims are being mercilessly slaughtered in various parts of the world; and

proponents of Islam are being subjected to the worst forms of intimidation and aggression.

Strangely, and tragically, I have found that a percentage of Muslims who have emigrated to the United States, Canada, and Europe in pursuit of knowledge or gainful employment have actually taken with them such conflicts and controversies over marginal issues. I have often witnessed, or heard about, violent debates which have succeeded in creating disunity among Muslims on issues that are subject to varied interpretations, some of which I have already outlined, and on which jurists will continue to differ and people are unlikely ever to agree. Instead of such futile wrangling, it would be far better for these Muslim expatriates to concentrate their efforts on disseminating true adherence to Islam among themselves, especially among the young, committing them to Islamic obligations, and helping them to avoid major transgressions. If Muslims in these countries succeed in accomplishing these things, they would realize a great hope and open up new opportunities for the dissemination of Islam.

It is a pity that those who initiate and encourage these confrontations are well known for their negligence of essential religious duties, i.e., kindness to parents, cautious investigation of what is permissible and what is prohibited, execution of their own tasks, and respect for the rights of their spouses, children, and neighbors. However, instead of improving themselves, they derive satisfaction from initiating conflicts which eventually lead them to take either hostile or hypocritical positions. Such wrangling is the subject of the following hadith: "People going astray after guidance are bound to be argument-stricken."¹⁵ It is not uncommon to find people warning Muslims not to eat animals slaughtered by the People of the Book (the Christians and Jews) although there are many past and present legal decisions which have legitimized this. Yet, if we examine the attitude and behavior of these people with regard to other more serious matters, we find that they engage in some practices which are categorically forbidden in Islam. I'm reminded of a man living in the United States who, I was told by trustworthy brothers, spoke out against eating the meat of animals slaughtered by Jews or by Christians, yet had no objection to eating with others at the same table while they were drinking alcohol!

Such contradictory behavior on the part of some Muslims once outraged the renowned Companion ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar when, following the murder of the great Muslim martyr al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī, a man from Iraq asked him a question about mosquito’s blood.¹⁶ Imam Aḥmad reported as follows:

As I was sitting with Ibn ‘Umar, a man came and asked him about the blood of a mosquito. (In another version of the hadith, the man asked about a pilgrim killing a mosquito). Ibn ‘Umar asked the man, “Where are you from?” The man answered, “From Iraq.” Then Ibn ‘Umar said: “Look at this man! He’s asking me about the blood of mosquitoes when they [the Iraqis] killed the Prophet’s grandson (i.e., al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī)! I heard the Prophet saying: ‘They [al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn] are my two sweetest-smelling flowers of this world.’”¹⁷

EXCESSIVE PROHIBITIONS

One of the indications of this shallowness, this lack of solid grounding in Islamic jurisprudence and Law, is the tendency to make things difficult through an overemphasis on prohibitions despite the clear warnings against this in the Qur’an and Sunnah. We read, for example, “But say not – for any false thing that your tongues may put forth, ‘This is lawful and this is forbidden,’ so as to ascribe false things to God. For those who ascribe false things to God will never prosper” (16:116). The Prophet’s Companions as well as his righteous successors never prohibited anything unless they were absolutely certain that it had, in fact, been disallowed. Otherwise, they would recommend against it or express their abhorrence of it, but never categorically declare it *ḥarām*. Extremists, however, are hasty to prohibit things without reservation, either out of piety and cautiousness if we take them to be well-meaning, or possibly out of other motives known only to God. If there are two opinions in Islamic jurisprudence on a certain thing, one declaring it indifferent (*mubāḥ*) and the other undesirable (*makrūh*), the extremists abide by the latter; if it is declared *makrūh* by one and *ḥarām* by another, they likewise favor

the latter. If there are two opinions, one which facilitates while the other makes things difficult, they follow the latter. They persistently adhere to Ibn 'Umar's hard-line opinions, but never accept Ibn 'Abbās's dispensations. This tendency is largely due to their ignorance of the point of view which supports facilitation.

To illustrate this point, I would like to relate the following incident which I witnessed myself. One day, an extremist saw a man drinking water standing up. The extremist rudely asked the man to sit down because such an action was a deviation from the Prophet's Sunnah. Confused, the man remained standing. He was then told that if he was a true Muslim, he would immediately induce vomiting to purify himself. At this point I gently intervened, telling the extremist: "The issue doesn't call for this kind of harshness. Standing is a minor and controversial issue which doesn't merit outright condemnation or severity." The extremist then said that there is a hadith which categorically forbids it and requires "whoever absentmindedly does so to induce vomiting."¹⁸ My reply was: "But the hadiths that permit drinking while standing are more authentic and are therefore cited by al-Bukhārī in a chapter in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* entitled, 'Drinking While Standing'. However, he cites none of the hadiths that forbid it. Furthermore, al-Tirmidhī and others report several hadiths which testify to this. It is also true that the Prophet drank water while standing during his farewell pilgrimage.¹⁹ It is also true that 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib once drank while standing and said, 'Some people dislike drinking while standing, but I saw the Prophet doing it, just as you see me doing it now.'²⁰ Al-Tirmidhī also reported the permissibility of drinking while standing, basing this on the sayings and practices of a number of the Companions of the Prophet. According to al-Tirmidhī, Ibn 'Umar said, 'During the time of the Prophet we used to eat while walking and drink while standing.' Kabshah tells us that he 'came once upon the Prophet and saw him drinking from a suspended water skin.'²¹ The interpretations handed down to us by the most reliable hadith scholars show that although there is a clear encouragement to drink while sitting, there is no prohibition of drinking while standing. These scholars argue that the hadiths which encourage the former were nullified by other hadiths,

and that this was confirmed by the practice of Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, Uthmān and ‘Alī. Therefore, in relation to such an ambiguous issue, it would be totally wrong to forbid a person to drink water while standing.”

Similarly, many young people today engage in speculations about proper Islamic attire. Such speculations are based on the following sound hadith: “The part [of the man’s garment which hangs] below the ankles is in the fire.” In their desire to adhere to this hadith, many young men wear above-the-ankle garments despite the family-related and social problems this brings on them. The hadiths which warn Muslims against wearing garments below the ankle are qualified by other hadiths which, upon a deeper reading, reveal the reason for this prohibition. Below-the-ankle garments were once seen as manifestations of pride, arrogance, and extravagance. For example, the Prophet answered: “On the Day of Resurrection, God will not look at the person who trails his garments [behind him] out of conceit.”²² Abū Bakr once said to the Prophet: “My *‘izār*²³ hangs low if I do not take care of it,” and the Prophet answered: “But you are not of those who do so out of conceit.” For this reason, al-Nawawī and other Muslim scholars contend that wearing such a garment is undesirable, but that the undesirability attached to it is removed when there is a reasonable need associated with it.

MISCONCEPTIONS

The aforementioned examples of confused thinking and a blurred vision of the fundamentals of Islam, Islamic law and the aims of its message have led to many misconceptions in the minds of Muslim youth. Such misconceptions need to be fully explained and carefully defined, since they form the basis for relating to others, judging and reforming them. Some of the most important misconceptions have to do with concepts such as *islam*, *imān*, *kufr*, *nifāq*, *jāhiliyyah*, etc. Linguistic complexities or a lack of mastery of the Arabic language by some people have led to confusion and misunderstanding. The complexities of language escape non-experts who are unable to differentiate between metaphoric and literal meanings, thereby confusing

matters. They fail to discern the difference, for example, between absolute (or perfect) faith (*al-imān al-muṭlaq*) and faith as such (*muṭlaq al-imān*), between perfect Islam and limited (or nominal) Islam; between major *kufr* which excludes one from Islam and the *kufr* of disobedience; between major *shirk* and minor *shirk*; or between hypocrisy of belief and hypocrisy of action. They also make no distinction between the ethics and behavior characteristic of the time of ignorance (that is, the age that preceded Islam) and the beliefs associated with that era. The following is a brief clarification of these concepts²⁴ with a view to preventing dangerous consequences.

Absolute (or perfect) faith (*imān*) combines what a person believes, says, and does. This is the kind of faith referred to in the following Qur'anic verses: "For believers are those who, when God is mentioned, feel a tremor in their hearts, and when they hear His signs rehearsed, find their faith strengthened and put [all] their trust in their Lord" (8:2); "Successful indeed are the believers, those who humble themselves in their prayers" (23:1-2); "Only those are believers who have believed in God and His Apostle, and have never since doubted, but have striven with their belongings and their persons in the cause of God: Such are the sincere ones" (49:15). The same concept of faith is also found in the following hadiths: "Anyone who believes in God and in the Last Day should keep good relations with kith and kin... he should say what is good or keep silent."²⁵ In another, faith is defined by negating what it is not: "None of you will have faith until he desires for his [Muslim] brother what he desires for himself."²⁶ The Prophet in another hadith defines faith by saying, "When an adulterer commits fornication, he does not have faith at the time he is doing it; when somebody drinks alcohol, he does not have faith at the time of drinking; and when a thief steals, he does not have faith at the time when he is stealing."²⁷

It is important to notice that in the last two hadiths, faith is defined by negation. This means that the reference here is to absolute or perfect faith, not to relative or limited faith, as when you say: "He who does not apply his knowledge is not a scholar." Negation here is of perfect knowledge or scholarship rather than their limited forms. Perfect faith is also referred to in the following hadith: "Faith consists

of seventy branches [i.e., parts] and *ḥayā'*²⁸ is part of faith." In his book *al-Jāmi' li Shu'ab al-Imān* (The Compendium of the Branches of Faith), Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī likens faith to a tree. The trunk symbolizes the fundamental articles of faith, while its branches and fruits take the form of religious observances, manners, ethics, and transactions. Just as a trunk is essential to the existence of the tree, so are the fundamental articles of faith essential to faith. Conversely, if someone loses some of the branches although the trunk still remains, he may be said to have faith which is imperfect in proportion to what has been lost of the branches. However, we could in no wise judge him to be an unbeliever. Basic or essential faith was defined by the Angel Gabriel, who said, "Faith is to believe in God, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Day of Judgement and divine foreordination." Al-Hāfiẓ ibn Ḥajar wrote in *Fatḥh al-Bārī*,

Our righteous forebears said, "Faith is belief in the heart, utterance with the tongue, and action with one's bodily members." In other words, the translation of faith into practice is a condition of its perfection. In this sense, they believed that faith can be more or less complete. The *Murji'ah* [literally, the deferrers]²⁹ contended that faith is belief and utterance only; the *Karāmiyyah* believed that utterance is enough; the *Mu'tazilah* held that faith consists of action, utterance, and belief. The difference between these groups and the righteous forebears is that the former view actions as a necessary condition for the validity of faith while the latter view them as a necessary condition for its perfection.

Ibn Ḥajar goes on to say,

This has to do with what God knows concerning a person's faith, whereas in relation to what we human beings know, a verbal declaration of faith is sufficient. Once this has been uttered, the person is to be judged in accordance with the Islamic law but cannot be considered an unbeliever unless he commits an action which serves as evidence of unbelief by, for example, prostrating before an idol. If a person commits a sinful act short of apostasy or blasphemy, he may be considered a believer based on his utterance of faith, but an unbeliever when

measured by the standard of perfect faith. If, conversely, such a person is accused of unbelief, this will be based on his having committed an action indicative of unbelief, and if he is cleared of the accusation of unbelief, this is with reference to the standard of utter unbelief.

A person may be recognized as a Muslim simply because he has uttered the testimony of faith which is the gateway to Islam; hence, an unbeliever becomes a Muslim as soon as he witnesses that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is His Messenger, even before performing the ritual prayer, giving zakah, etc., since these forms of worship are only accepted from a Muslim. He only needs to acknowledge these duties and commit himself to them even if he does not practice them. It is the utterance of the testimony of faith that secures protection of his life and property. The Prophet said: "If they [people] utter it [the testimony of faith], they protect their lives and property from me so long as they do nothing to forfeit their right to this protection [by committing murder, declaring themselves apostates, etc.]. And ultimately, they are accountable to God."³⁰ The term 'Islam' may also be used to mean the five pillars, as mentioned in the well-known hadith attributed to Ibn 'Umar, "Islam is based on five pillars: to witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is His Messenger; to perform prayer; to give zakah; to fast during Ramadan; and to perform the major pilgrimage if one is able to do so."

Hadith literature also contains Gabriel's definition of Islam. When the Prophet asked Gabriel to tell him about Islam, the latter said: "Islam is to worship God alone and to associate no other beings with Him, to perform prayer, to give the ordained zakah, and to fast during Ramadan."³¹ In Gabriel's words we can discern the difference between the concepts of faith (*imān*) and Islam; it is also evident that the two terms can be used synonymously, and if they are linked together, each is implicit in the other. There is indeed no faith without Islam [surrender to God], and no Islam [surrender to God] without faith. Faith pertains to the heart whereas Islam pertains to bodily action and outward behavior, as we can see from the following hadith: "Islam is overt, faith [what is believed] is in the heart."³²

The same definition of faith and Islam is found in the following Qur'anic verse: "The desert Arabs say: 'We believe.' Say: 'You have no faith: but you [only] say: "We have submitted our wills to God," for not yet has faith entered your hearts'" (49:14). Islam can also be used to signify perfect Islam as in the following: "Islam is [the state in which] your heart submits [completely] to God, and in which you avoid harming Muslims with your tongue or hand." Also in two other hadiths we read, "A Muslim is one who avoids harming Muslims with his tongue and hands," and, "You are a Muslim when you desire for others what you desire for yourself."

In juristic language, *kufir* signifies the rejection and denial of God and His messages, as in the following Qur'anic verses: "Anyone who denies God, His angels, His Books, His Apostles, and the Day of Judgement has gone far, far astray" (4:136). *Kufir* could also imply apostasy (*riddah*), and consequently the complete loss of faith: "If anyone rejects faith, fruitless is his work, and in the hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost [all spiritual good]" (5:5).

Also: "And if any of you turn back from their faith and die in unbelief, their works will bear no fruit in this life and in the hereafter. They will be companions of the fire and will abide therein" (2:217). The term *kufir* is also used to denote transgressions which fall short of a total rejection of Islam and do not amount to a denial of God and His Messenger. The scholar Ibn al-Qayyim divided *kufir* into two categories: major and minor.³³ Major *kufir* leads to eternal punishment in the hellfire, whereas minor *kufir* leads to chastisement in the hellfire which is temporary rather than eternal. Consider the following hadiths: "Two things if practiced by my Ummah are manifestations of *kufir*: false accusations concerning a person's lineage and lamentation of the dead." And, "He who has anal sex with his wife reveals unbelief (*kufir*) in what was revealed to Muhammad." And, "If a person seeks a diviner or fortune-teller and believes in him or her, he reveals unbelief (*kufir*) in what was revealed to Muhammad."

We have the saying: "Do not revert to unbelief after my death by killing one another." This is the interpretation of Ibn 'Abbās as well as the majority of the Prophet's Companions of the following Qur'anic verse: "And if any fail to judge by [the light of] what God

has revealed, they are [no better than] unbelievers” (5:44). There are various interpretations of the above verse. Ibn ‘Abbās says: “It is not speaking of *kufṛ* which excludes a person from the fold of Islam, though it has an element of *kufṛ* in it, since the person who commits it does not deny God and the Last Day.” Ṭāwūs expresses the same opinion. ‘Aṭā’ states, “This is a kind of unbelief, injustice or disobedience which can be greater or lesser in degree.” Others like ‘Ikrimah have argued that the verse is referring to a failure to judge in accordance with what God has revealed due to a repudiation thereof. However, this argument is weak, since repudiation of God’s revelation amounts to *kufṛ* whether a person has judged in the light of the law of Islam or not. According to ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Kinānī, the verse refers to *kufṛ* in the sense of a failure to judge in accordance with all that God has revealed, including *tawḥīd*, that is, affirmation of God’s oneness and Islam. But this is also farfetched, for the reference in the verse is to the rejection of either all or part of what has been revealed. According to al-Baghawī, most jurists agree that the reference is to those who deliberately violate a text concerning which they are neither ignorant nor confused. Qatādah, al-Ḍaḥḥāk and others hold that *kufṛ* in the above verse refers to the People of the Book, i.e., the Jews and the Christians. But this contradicts even the literal meaning of the verse and therefore cannot be accepted.

Some jurists, moreover, maintain that it signifies a form of *kufṛ* which indeed excludes a person from the fold of Islam. Ibn al-Qayyim states,

The correct view is that judging contrary to what God has revealed entails both types of *kufṛ*, the major and the minor, according to the attitude of the person making the judgement. If he believes that he has the obligation to rule according to what God has revealed in this particular situation but refrains from doing so out of disobedience in spite of the fact that he believes punishment to be merited, he will be guilty of minor *kufṛ*. If, on the other hand, he believes that it is not obligatory to rule according to what God has revealed and that he is free to act as he wishes, notwithstanding his conviction that it is a divine judgement, he will be guilty of major *kufṛ*. Lastly, if he acts out of ignorance or makes

an unintentional mistake, he is only to be judged as someone who is mistaken.

In sum, all acts of disobedience are types of minor *kufr* since they are contrary to gratitude which requires obedience. Therefore human endeavor could manifest itself in gratitude, in *kufr*, or in something other than the two. And only God knows.

Shirk, which is the Arabic term meaning association of partners with God, is also divided into two categories: major and minor. Major *shirk* is basically to worship beings other than God or to associate other beings with Him. It is the subject of the following verse of the Qur'an: "God does not forgive that partners should be set up with Him: but He forgives anything else to whom He pleases" (4:48). Minor *shirk* involves such practices as taking a sacred oath in the name of someone or something other than God, or believing in the power of amulets to bring good or bad fortune. This type of *shirk* is the subject of the following hadiths: "He who takes an oath in the name of any being other than God commits *shirk*,"³⁴ and "He who wears an amulet commits *shirk*,"³⁵ and, "Charms, amulets, and mascots are [all] *shirk*."³⁶

Nifāq (hypocrisy) may also be major or minor. Major *nifāq* is to harbor unbelief in one's heart while pretending to be a believer with the intent to deceive. This type of hypocrisy is mentioned in the following Qur'anic verses: "Of people, there are some who say: 'We believe in God and the Last Day', but they do not [really] believe. Fain would they deceive God and those who believe, but they only deceive themselves and realize [it] not!" (2:8-9); "When they meet those who believe, they say: 'We believe', but when they are alone with their evil ones, they say: 'We are really with you. We [were] only jesting'" (2:14). This is the kind of *nifāq* which is mentioned in *Surat al-Munāfiqūn*, as well as in other Qur'anic verses. It is the same *nifāq* which God promises to punish: "The hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of the Fire: You will find no helper for them" (4:145). Minor *nifāq* signifies the *nifāq* of believers, i.e. the behavior of a Muslim who genuinely believes in God and in the hereafter, but retains hypocritical characteristics.

This is best described in the following hadiths:

The signs of a hypocrite are three: whenever he speaks, he tells lies; whenever he promises, he breaks his promise; and if he is trusted, he proves to be dishonest.³⁷

Whoever has the following four characteristics will be a blatant hypocrite, and whoever has one of these characteristics will have an element of hypocrisy until he gives it up: if he speaks, he tells a lie; if he is trusted, he betrays; if he makes a covenant, he proves treacherous; and if he disagrees, he behaves in an impudent, evil, and insulting manner.³⁸

This is the kind of hypocrisy which the Companions of the Prophet and our righteous forbears feared most. They said in describing it: "None but a hypocrite will rest assured against this kind of hypocrisy, which is only feared by a true believer."

EMPHASIS ON ALLEGORICAL TEXTS AT THE EXPENSE OF DEFINITIVE ONES

It is important to point out here that a root cause of extremism and of misunderstanding of religious matters, in the past as well as in the present, is emphasis on allegorical texts and disregard for categorical ones: the allegorical ones are those with hidden, ambiguous meanings; the categorical are those whose meanings are clear, manifest and well-defined. Laying emphasis on allegorical texts is not characteristic of those with knowledge and insight, but of those who cherish perversity in their hearts. The Qur'an declares,

He it is Who has sent down to you [Muhammad] the Book: in it are verses basic or fundamental [of established meaning]; they are the foundation of the Book; others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for hidden meanings, but no one knows its true meanings except God. (3:7)

Extremists and innovators of old used such allegorical texts as definitive evidence, neglecting and overlooking the fundamental ones with clear and established meanings. Extremists today do exactly the same: They use allegorical texts to define important concepts, a practice which has grave consequences when such texts are used as a basis for judging individuals or groups and their behavior, and for classifying them as either friends or enemies, that is, as either believers or unbelievers who must be fought against.

Such shallow understanding and hastiness to make judgements without careful investigation or comparison (since the fundamental, categorical texts were neglected, and only the allegorical considered) is what caused the Kharijites to fall into the trap of *takfīr*, considering all Muslims but themselves to be unbelievers, or *kuffār*. On the basis of strange religious notions and delusions, they fought the great Muslim ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, although they were among his followers and soldiers. The main reason for their disagreement with ‘Alī was his decision to accept arbitration to settle his differences with Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān in order to maintain the unity of his army and to save the lives of Muslims on both sides. The Kharijites, however, rejected any arbitration because of their misinterpretation of the Qur’anic verse: “Judgement rests with God alone” (12:40),³⁹ and accused ‘Alī, one of the first Muslims to give the cause of Islam his essential support, of perversity. ‘Alī replied to their citing of the above verse with his famous saying, “A word of truth in the service of falsehood.”

The fact that authority in all matters belongs to God alone does not mean that human beings are forbidden to arbitrate and judge subsidiary issues within the framework and injunctions of the law of Islam. ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbās, who had deep insight into and knowledge of Islamic law, debated the Kharijites on this issue and refuted their arguments, citing verses in the Qur’an which sanction various types of arbitration. The following verse, for instance, sanctions arbitration to settle differences between a husband and a wife: “If you fear a breach between them twain, appoint [two] arbiters, one from his family and the other from hers. If they wish for peace, God will cause their reconciliation” (4:35).

Another instance of arbitration can be seen in the discretion that arbiters can exercise in judging a pilgrim who hunts and kills while in pilgrim's garb:

O you who believe! Kill not game while in the sacred precincts or in pilgrim garb. If any of you does so intentionally, the compensation is an offering, brought to the Ka'bah, of a domestic animal equivalent to the one he killed, as adjudged by two just men among you; or by way of atonement, the feeding of the indigent, or its equivalent in fasts, that he may taste of the penalty of his deed. (5:95)

Some people do not give careful thought to the Qur'an and Sunnah in their entirety, seeking balance between affirmations and negations, the specific and the general or the absolute and the limited and believing equally in the categorical and the allegorical. Such careless people are bound to go astray, lose clarity of vision, and make haphazard judgements. This is the trap into which the Kharijites of old fell, and into which those who still hasten to brand others as unbelievers have fallen. According to al-Shāṭibī, the fundamental cause behind this extremism is ignorance of, and undue presumptions about, the purposes and meanings of the law of Islam, since a person with well-founded knowledge of Islam will not fall prey to extremist thought.

It may be worthwhile in this connection to reconsider the case of the Kharijites, who "slipped out of religion as an arrow would slip out of its kill" and of whom the Prophet said that they "recite the Qur'an but [its teachings] never touch their hearts." This probably means – though God knows best – that their verbal recitation of the Qur'an was just a physical exercise that never influenced or affected their inward beings. This also recalls the previously quoted hadith about the taking away of knowledge. This interpretation is in tune with one advanced by Ibn 'Abbās as reported by Ibrāhīm al-Taymī both in Abū 'Ubayd's *Faḍā'il al-Qur'an* and in Sa'īd ibn Mansūr's interpretation of the Qur'an:

Once, as 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb sat alone, he began wondering to

himself how people who follow one Prophet and turn their faces toward the same *qiblah* in prayer could disagree so frequently. ‘Umar then sent for Ibn ‘Abbās and asked him: “Why should this Ummah disagree so frequently when it has the same Prophet and the same *qiblah*?” (Sa‘īd adds to this, “and the same Book.”) Ibn ‘Abbās replied, “The Qur’an was revealed and we read it and comprehended the reasons for its revelation. But there will come people who will read the Qur’an and fail to understand the occasions and subjects of revelation. As a result they will put forward different interpretations and will, therefore, disagree.”

Sa‘īd ibn Manṣūr added,

Ibn ‘Abbās said, “Every group of people will have an opinion about the Qur’an, which will lead to disagreement, and then to fighting.” But ‘Umar and ‘Alī, who were also present, did not like this [Ibn ‘Abbās’s] ominous explanation and they reproached him. But no sooner had Ibn ‘Abbās left than it occurred to ‘Umar that there might be some truth in what he had said. He sent for him again and asked him to reiterate what he had told them earlier. And after careful consideration, ‘Umar recognized and appreciated what Ibn ‘Abbās had said.

Al-Shāṭibī wrote,

Ibn ‘Abbās was right. When a person knows the reason behind a certain verse or surah, he will know how to interpret it and what its objectives are. However, ignorance of this leads people to misinterpret it and to have different opinions, without insight and knowledge which could lead them to the truth and prevent them from delving ignorantly into such matters with no support or evidence, and thereby going astray and leading others astray. This can be demonstrated by what is reported by Ibn Wahb on the authority of Bukayr, who asked Nāfi‘, “What does Ibn ‘Umar think of the *Harūriyyah*?”⁴⁰ Nāfi‘ replied, “He [Ibn ‘Umar] thinks they are the most evil of people. They apply the verses which pertain to unbelievers to believers.” Pleased with this response, Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr stated that the allegorical [Qur’anic] verses misinterpreted by

the Kharijites include: "If any do fail to judge [by the light of] what God has revealed, they are [no better than] unbelievers" (5:44), which they usually combine with, "Yet those who reject Faith hold [others] as equal with their Guardian-Lord" (6:1). If they saw an imam ruling unjustly, they would say, "He is guilty of unbelief, and whoever is guilty of unbelief associates others with God and is therefore guilty of *shirk*." On this basis they would declare people unbelievers and fight and kill them. This indeed is the kind of misinterpretation and misunderstanding which Ibn 'Abbās has warned against, and which results from ignorance of the meaning intended in the revelation.

Nāfi' said, "Whenever Ibn 'Umar was asked about the Kharijites he would say, 'They declare Muslims unbelievers and sanction the shedding of their blood and the confiscation of their property; they marry women before their prescribed waiting periods have come to an end, and they even marry women who are already married and whose husbands are still alive. I know of no other people who deserve to be fought more than they.'"⁴¹

BEWARE OF GETTING YOUR FACTS FROM THE UNQUALIFIED

One of the causes of extremists' lack of insight is that they refuse to enter into a genuine dialogue with anyone who disagrees with them. Indeed, it is inconceivable to them that their own views might be put to the test through comparison with others' opinions or be contradicted or refuted. Many of them have not been taught by reliable Muslim scholars with specialties in their field. Rather, they imbibe half-knowledge directly from books and newspapers without any opportunity for revision or discussion which could test their understanding and the depth of their knowledge. They simply read, then reach their own conclusions. However, their reading, interpretations and conclusions may well be wrong or deficient.

There may be those who oppose their opinions on stronger and more valid foundations, but they fail to realize this because nobody has drawn their attention to such a possibility. These devout young people have ignored the fact that if they want to study the law of

Islam, they must seek the help of reliable Muslim scholars. They cannot venture into this extensive and sophisticated discipline without the guidance of trustworthy scholars who can interpret and explain obscurities, define terms, and point out similarities and the relationships between the parts and the whole. Those who venture into it alone are bound to meet with the same catastrophic results that await the unskilled swimmer who ventures into deep waters.

Knowledge of Islamic law cannot be perfected without practice and close contact with experts, especially in those areas where opinions diverge, evidences seem to contradict each other, and certain matters seem to be confusing. This is why Muslim scholars who came before us have warned us not to seek to study and understand the Qur'an through a person who has only memorized it without any knowledge of its contents, nor to seek knowledge through a person who has acquired his information from reading books and journals only, yet without being properly tutored by reputable and qualified scholars.

WHY MUSLIM YOUTH HAVE TURNED AWAY FROM SCHOLARS

Seeking knowledge of Islam in isolation and through books alone reflects young people's complete loss of confidence in professional Muslim scholars and academics, especially those patronized by the authorities, since they believe that such people have lost the courage to disagree with rulers who go astray. Not only are religious scholars silent about rulers' atrocities and their neglect of Islamic law, but they frequently, and hypocritically, glorify and commend them for these very actions. The least they could do would be to remain silent rather than actively supporting falsehood! Be that as it may, it comes as no surprise that young Muslims are more prepared to put their trust in the dead (i.e., the Muslim scholars of the past) than they are in the living, and thus seek out the formers' books for knowledge and guidance. When I once asked a devout young Muslim why he didn't try to seek knowledge through learned Muslim scholars, his reply was, "And where will we find a scholar we can trust? The only ones we're aware of are puppets in the hands of rulers, who go to great

lengths to issue legal decisions that pander to rulers' whims and wishes. They bless socialism and consider it Islamic if the ruler happens to be a socialist, but if he happens to be a capitalist, they're ready to bless capitalism and dub it 'Islamic'! They declare peace with the enemy *ḥarām* when a ruler decides to wage war, but are quick to bestow their blessings on this very peace when the ruler's policy changes. They 'make it lawful one year, and forbidden another year' (Qur'an, 9:37). They make no distinction between the mosque and the church, ...!" My reply to him was: "Beware of generalizing. There are indeed Muslim scholars who have condemned falsehood, stood up against oppression, and refused to compromise with or support dictators in spite of intimidation and temptations. Many of these scholars have been imprisoned and tortured, and some have even been martyred for the cause of Islam." The young man – though admitting the truth of what I said – insisted that the power to guide, advise, and issue Islamic legal decisions is still in the hands of the corrupt instead of the righteous, and that it is the former, not the latter, who occupy positions of eminence and prestige.

One has to admit that there is a great deal of truth in what the young man claimed. Most of the 'eminent' Muslim scholars who are entrusted with leadership and guidance have become mere pawns in the hands of those in authority, who pull their strings however they please. Such 'scholars' need to realize that keeping silent about the truth is tantamount to uttering falsehood, both of which are deeply sinful with serious consequences. In a debate on Egyptian television dealing with family planning and birth control from the perspective of Islamic law, one of the speakers who was a well-known Muslim scholar asked – to the astonishment of the chairman – whether the aim of the debate was to advocate or oppose family planning so that he could prepare himself accordingly! May God's blessings be upon the preceding generations of Muslim scholars, one of whom courageously addressed an influential member of a past regime in Egypt with the words, "He who stretches his legs looking for work doesn't need to stretch out his hands to beg." One wishes that contemporary scholars who are so deficient in belief and piety that those of the past would blush could enrich and deepen their knowledge in general,

and their understanding of Islamic jurisprudence in particular! Unfortunately, devout young people keen to deepen their knowledge of Islam have come in contact with illustrious scholars only to find that the latter's knowledge of the Qur'an and Sunnah is seriously deficient. One such scholar wrote in a daily newspaper claiming that there is no usury in transactions between a government and its subjects. He presumptuously deduced that since there is no usury between father and son, one could say that there is no usury between a government and its subjects. But the ruling concerning father and son upon which this man based his argument has been the subject of considerable disagreement and is not supported by a reliable text or by consensus. How then could it be taken as a foundation upon which other matters could be analyzed and judged by analogy? And even if it could be taken as a criterion, it should have been dealt with through differential analogy.

In light of the foregoing, one has to admit that young people's despair of such individuals – who lack both piety and knowledge – is fully justified. Some of these 'scholars' have been found citing hadiths with forged contents or chains of transmission while disregarding authentic hadiths which are agreed upon by all, or supporting their views by appealing to the dreams and the desires of the masses. There are those who support harmful innovations to the Islamic religion which happen to be prevalent in our day while rejecting solidly authenticated Sunnah-based practices, who pander to the whims of the general populace and the elite alike, and who never seek knowledge from reliable sources. Consequently, serious Muslim youth have washed their hands of them and lost confidence in anything they say. Even some reputable 'Muslim scholars' whom the young used to respect and admire have been lured by the media into voicing their support for the authorities, throwing all the blame on the young without listening to their arguments or points of view or even trying to understand the reasons behind their attitudes. On another occasion, after the Egyptian government had imprisoned many members of various Islamic groups and suspended their activities, one well-known Muslim scholar declared in a public meeting that the Islamic groups had been forsaken by God. He argued that if

they had been following the right path and been blessed by God, neither the police nor the army could have defeated them. Such an absurdity is no criterion for judging between truth and falsehood; in fact, it is patently un-Islamic.

For one thing, there may be circumstances or means that could lead to victory but which are unavailable to those fighting for the truth, who therefore suffer defeat. Alternatively, a person or group fighting for falsehood may be helped to triumph by certain circumstances; but such a victory can never last. The ups and downs of current history amply demonstrate this. In these days defeat and victory are not determined by truth and falsehood, but, rather, by the interference of superpowers. Do we not all know how the committed Muslim Turks and their scholars were mercilessly crushed by Ataturk and his gang, or how Islam was elbowed out of the homeland of the caliphate to be forcibly replaced by an anti-religious secularism that was insidiously imposed on the Turkish people? Which of the two sides was following the truth, and which was following falsehood? Some venerable Muslim scholars were recently tortured and sentenced to death in a Muslim country because they opposed a family law which the government intended to enforce even though it was a stark deviation from the Law of Islam. The punishment was intended to terrorize and silence all who opposed this legislation. The despotic authority achieved its objective and other Muslim scholars, along with everyone else, were silenced. Does this mean that the government was right and the sentenced Muslim scholars wrong? In another Muslim country, the non-Muslim minority rules the Muslim majority. Thousands of Muslim men as well as women are arrested and terrorized daily to suppress any opposition or rejection. When prisons are full, these men and women are liquidated. Moreover, to humiliate and coerce such devout Muslims as these who do not fear death or even torture, the authorities resort to heinous atrocities the likes of which were not committed even by murderers like Hulagu, Genghiz Khan, or others; they rape their daughters, sisters, or wives in front of them.

O God! How many innocent people have been killed? How many chaste women have been violated? How many sacred sites have been

defiled? How many time-honored mosques have been razed? How much precious wealth has been robbed? How many homes – indeed whole cities – have been brought down on their inhabitants? How many men, women, and innocent children have been subjected to atrocities? How many young children are there who no longer know what family they belong to, or who their mothers and fathers are?

The mere thought of such things is enough to make one's heart melt from sorrow if it is, indeed, a believing heart surrendered to God. Entire Muslim peoples have been vanquished by the tyranny of the tyrannical. Which of them was right, and which of them in the wrong? Yet this is the course of history, indeed of Islamic history. The Prophet's grandson al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī was defeated by the army led by Ibn Ziyād, one of the commanders of Yazīd ibn Abī Sufyān. As a result, the Umayyads ruled for decades, but the descendants of the Prophet were given no share in the caliphate even during the reign of their cousins the Abbasids. Could this be cited as evidence that Yazīd was following the truth while al-Ḥusayn was following falsehood?

Years later the courageous and learned commander 'Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr was defeated by the unscrupulous al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf. Then al-Ḥajjāj crushed another great Muslim commander, 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ash'ath as well as a group of prominent Muslim scholars, which included Sa'īd ibn Jubayr, al-Sha'bī, Mutrif ibn 'Abdullah, and many others. All of these defeats were great losses to the Ummah, especially Sa'īd ibn Jubayr, of whom Imam Aḥmad said: "Sa'īd was killed at a time when every Muslim was in great need of his knowledge and learning." Hence we may ask: Were these men's defeat before the tyranny of al-Ḥajjāj proof that they were wrong and that al-Ḥajjāj was right? In this connection we would do well to remember what some Muslims said when they were overpowered by their enemies during a battle: "By God! Even if we were torn into pieces by lions, we would never doubt the truth of our convictions and the falsity of your claims." When Ibn al-Zubayr and a few of his followers were besieged in Makkah he said, "By God, the righteous will never be disgraced even if the whole world collaborates against them. And by God, the wrongdoers will never be exalted even if the

moon appears on their foreheads!” This is in keeping with what the Qur’an tells us of the fates of various prophets who were killed by their own people: “Is it that whenever there comes to you a messenger with what yourselves desire not, you are puffed up with pride? Some you called imposters and others you slay!” (2:87). Among such prophets were Zechariah (Zakariyyā) and his son John the Baptist (Yaḥyā). Could it be said that the killing of these prophets and the success of their enemies indicate that the formers’ stand was false?

We also read in the Qur’an the story of “the Makers of the Trench” who made trenches of fire and threw the believers alive into them while they sat around sadistically enjoying the bizarre spectacle: “And they ill-treated them for no other reason than that they believed in God, exalted in power, worthy of all praise!” (85:8).

Were these tyrants right because they defeated and eliminated helpless believers? Were the believers wrong because their end was so gruesome? There are instances in the Qur’an which show that believers are sometimes tested by mishaps, and that unbelievers are tempted by success. God says, “Do men think that they will be left alone upon saying, ‘We believe,’ and that they will not be tested? We did test those before them, and God will certainly know those who are true from those who are false” (29:2–3). After the Muslims’ defeat in the battle of Uḥud the following verse was revealed: “If a wound has touched you, be sure a similar wound has touched the others. Such days [of varying fortunes] we give to men by turns: that God may know those that believe, and that He may take to Himself from your ranks martyr-witnesses [to truth] ...” (3:140). God also says of the unbelievers, “...by degrees shall We punish them from directions they perceive not” (68:44).

LACK OF INSIGHT INTO HISTORY AND GOD’S WAYS IN THE UNIVERSE

In addition to their lack of insight into the true teachings of Islam, extremists lack insight into reality, life and history as well as into God’s ways, or *sunan* in His creation. In the absence of such insight,

some people will continue to seek or demand the impossible. They will imagine what does not or cannot happen, misunderstand occurrences and events, and interpret them on the basis of cherished illusions which in no way reflect God's *sunan* or the essence of Islamic law. They want to change the entire fabric of society: its thought, its traditions, its ethics, its systems. They also want to change its social, political, and economic systems by illusory, unrealistic means. At the same time, they are willing to sacrifice, brave death and disregard any consequences for or against them, so long as they know their actions are intended to glorify God and honor His word. Hence, it is not surprising that such people venture into actions which others refer to as either suicidal or mad, in total disregard of the numbers of people they will victimize.

Yet if such Muslims would take a moment to contemplate the Sunnah of the Prophet, they would find the guidance they seek. We need to be reminded that the Prophet spent thirteen years in Makkah instructing, calling upon people to accept the message of Islam and even praying at and circumambulating the Ka'bah despite the fact that it was surrounded at the time by more than 360 idols. Aware of the insignificance of his physical power as compared to that of his enemies, he never attempted an attack to destroy the idols. He was perceptive enough to realize that to do so would be to endanger both himself and his followers. Moreover, the physical destruction of the idols – which could easily be replaced – would not blot out the polytheism which was ingrained in the minds and hearts of his fellow tribesmen. Consequently, he labored instead to liberate their minds and thoughts from the fetters of superstition and paganism. With this goal in mind, the Prophet ignored the idols and concentrated his efforts on teaching monotheism and purifying pagan hearts through piety. The result was that those who embraced the message constituted a nucleus of believers who knew what they were fighting for; who were sure of success through patience and perseverance, and who would neither be intoxicated by victory nor despondent over defeat. Indeed, there was a time when his Companions, outraged by the brutal afflictions the pagans had inflicted upon them, requested his permission to fight back, but he always refused, realizing that the

time was not yet ripe and that they had to endure until God gave them permission to fight.

One day, the Prophet came upon ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir and his parents while they were being tortured by unbelievers. All that he did at the time was to encourage them to endure patiently, and to give them good tidings of their assured place in Paradise. Things continued in this manner until the Muslims were permitted to fight in defense of their freedom and religion: “To those against whom war is made, permission is given [to fight], because they are wronged – and verily, God is Powerful for their aid – [They are] those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right, [for no cause] except that they say, ‘Our Lord is God’” (Qur’an, 22:39–40). But this permission was only given after the Prophet and his Companions had managed to establish a home for themselves and increase their power and authority. After they were allowed to fight their enemies, they won one victory after another until God enabled them to enter Makkah (from which the Prophet had emigrated under the pressure of persecution) as conquerors, destroying the idols there and reciting the following Qur’anic verse: “And say: ‘Truth has [now] come, and falsehood perished: for falsehood is [by its nature] bound to perish’” (17:81).

This is the history which, oddly enough, *Jama‘āt al-Takfir wa al-Hijrah* in Egypt considers unworthy of emulation or even study. Such an absurd attitude is one cause behind the disagreement between two of the leading men of the group, ‘Abd al-Rahman Abu al-Khayr and its founder, Shaykh Mustafa Shukri. Abu al-Khayr notes in his “Reminiscences”, that the group’s “lack of confidence in and reliance on Islamic history” was the fourth aspect of the difference between him and Shaykh Shukri, who considered Islamic history “a series of unauthenticated events.” History, for Shukri, consists only of the stories narrated in the Qur’an, and therefore he prohibits any interest in or study of the periods of the Islamic caliphate.⁴²

Imagine a conception so unreasonable, narrow-minded and shallow that it considers – on “religious grounds” – the study of Islamic history to be unacceptable! The history of a nation, with all its positive and negative aspects, its victories and defeats, is a rich store-

house upon which that nation can draw in order to reconstruct and redirect its present. A nation which neglects its history is like a person who has lost his memory; or like a nation without roots or sense of belonging or direction. How could any group make such an unhealthy and abnormal condition the basis of its survival? Further, history is the mirror in which God's laws and ways are reflected in the whole universe in general and in human life in particular. This is why the Qur'an gives special attention to the historical perspective and the wisdom that can be drawn from it. There are various Qur'anic references to this. Let us contemplate the following verses: "Many were the ways of life that have passed away before you: travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those who rejected Truth" (3:137). God's ways, however, are characterized by consistency; they never change or alter: "They swore their strongest oaths by God that if a warner came to them, they would follow his guidance better than any [other] of the peoples: but when a warner came to them, it only increased their flight [from righteousness], on account of their arrogance in the land and their plotting of evil. But the plotting of evil will hem in only the authors thereof. Now are they but looking for the way the ancients were dealt with? But no change will you find in God's way [of dealing]; no turning off will you find in God's way [of dealing]" (35:42-43). As God's ways are common factors for all, His ways of dealing with those who follow evil are the same in all cases and apply to all people irrespective of their religion, as well as of time and place. We have an instructive example in the battle of Uḥud, when the Muslims paid dearly for disregarding the Prophet's advice, and which is clearly pointed out in the Qur'an: "What! When a single disaster smites you, although you smote [your enemies] with one twice as great, do you say: 'Whence is this?' Say [to them]: 'It is from yourselves: for God has power over all things'" (3:165). Another verse makes clear the nature of the mistake which led to their defeat: "God did indeed fulfil His promise to you when you, with His permission, were about to annihilate your enemy, until you flinched and fell to disputing about the order and disobeyed it..." (3:152).

The assertion that history is a series of doubtful events may be

true with respect to some trivial incidents, but the general direction and the fundamental events are well known and are well authenticated by more than one source. Even those events which are doubtful can be investigated by the learned in order to determine the truth and to sift out any errors, fabrications, or exaggerations.

However, we are not only concerned with Islamic history but with the whole history of humanity, that of Muslims and non-Muslims, ever since the beginning of creation. Wisdom is not drawn from the history of the believing and pious alone, but from that of the atheistic and profligate as well, since God's laws – like natural laws – apply equally to all.

Indeed, we cannot comprehend the Qur'an properly or acknowledge with gratitude the favor conferred upon us by Islam unless we understand the erroneous nature and practices that characterized the pre-Islamic 'times of ignorance' (*al-jāhiliyyah*) referred to in the following verses: "...While, before that, they had been in manifest error" (3:164); and, "...And you were on the brink of a pit of fire, and He saved you from it" (3:103). This is also the essence of the following saying by 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, "The bonds of Islam will be undone, one by one, as some Muslims become ignorant of [the true nature of] the *jāhiliyyah*, [that is, the time of ignorance that predated Islam]". Though many people concerned about Islam and its propagation have neither carefully studied nor comprehended history, they nevertheless have not forbidden themselves or their followers to study it as some extremists have done. The study of history is not just a recognition of events in their temporal sequence, but an activity that requires insight and perception into events in order to comprehend their essence, draw wisdom from them, and discern God's ways revealed through them. Mere observation of the ruins of earlier nations serves no purpose. The following verse shows that insight into history cannot be realized by such observations or by simply hearing about them: "Do they not travel through the land, so that their hearts [and minds] may thus learn wisdom and their ears may thus learn to hear? Truly it is not their eyes that are blind, but their hearts which are in their breasts" (22:46). Historical occurrences repeat themselves and closely resemble each other because

they are governed by consistent laws which set them in motion and adjust them. This is why Westerners say: "History repeats itself," while the Arabs express the same notion in the saying, "How similar tonight is to last night!"

The Qur'an refers to the observable similarity in people's attitudes, utterances, and actions due to the similarity of the thoughts and visions from which they emanate, saying: "Those without knowledge say, 'Why does not God speak unto us? Or, why does not a sign come unto us?' So said the people before them words of similar import. Their hearts are alike. We have indeed made the signs clear unto any people who hold firmly to faith [in their hearts]" (2:118). God also said of the pagans of Quraysh, "Similarly, no messenger came to the peoples before them, but they said [of him] in like manner, 'A sorcerer or one possessed!' Is this the legacy they transmitted to one another? Nay, they are themselves a people transgressing beyond bounds" (51:52-53). This similarity between the attitudes of the former and the latter nations toward God's messengers and the hastiness with which the people accused the messengers of sorcery or madness is not the result of a legacy transmitted by one of them to the other, but rather, because both are unjust and transgressing. Since the cause, i.e., transgression, is common to both, the attitude is the same. Those who comprehend the importance of history and the operation of God's *sunan* therein can, and should, learn from the mistakes of past generations. Happy will be those who take a lesson and a warning from the mistakes and misfortunes of others and seek, nevertheless, to adopt the good they offer. Wisdom, wherever he finds it, is a believer's goal, because he is more worthy of it than anyone else.

TWO IMPORTANT DIVINE *SUNAN*

There are two important divine laws which the hasty and impetuous tend to overlook, namely, the law of gradation and the importance of allowing due time for the achievement of goals. As for gradation, it is clearly manifest in the process of creation as well as in legislation. God is able to create the heavens and the earth in less than the

twinkling of an eye: “Be, and it is” (Qur’an, 2:117). Yet He created them in six of His days, i.e., in stages whose length is known only to Him because they are different from our concept of ‘day’. Gradation is also apparent in the creation of all living organisms which grow in stages until they reach maturity. The same process can also be seen in the call to Islam (*da‘wah*), which began with the inculcation of monotheism to liberate people’s minds from the fetters of paganism and superstition. Once monotheism was firmly established, duties and prohibitions were gradually introduced: ritual prayer, fasting, the payment of zakah, the prohibition of alcohol, etc. And this is the basis for the difference between Qur’anic texts which were revealed in Makkah and those revealed in Madinah.

‘Ā’ishah describes the process of gradation in the introduction of Islamic law and the revelation of the Qur’an, saying,

The first Qur’anic verses to be revealed were those in which Paradise and the Hellfire were mentioned. [Later], when people embraced Islam, verses dealing with *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* were revealed. If verses prohibiting drinking alcohol and practicing fornication had been revealed first, people would have said, ‘We’ll never give up drinking or fornication!’⁴³

Hence, those who call for a return to the Islamic way of life and the establishment of the Islamic state need to recognize the necessity of gradation for the realization of their goals, taking into account the sublimity of the goals, their own means and potentials, and the multiplicity of impediments. This brings to mind an example from the life of the righteous Caliph ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, who successfully reconstructed life on the model set up by the rightly guided caliphs. But the process of reconstruction was not easy. Even his own son, ‘Abd al-Malik, a devout and enthusiastic Muslim, thought that his father was too slack in his attempts to eradicate all traces of deviation. He once addressed his father saying: “Father, why don’t you implement [reforms more swiftly]? By God, I would be willing for both of us to perish for the sake of the truth!” But ‘Umar replied, “Don’t be hasty, son. God condemned alcohol twice in the Qur’an

and prohibited it only the third time. I fear that if I forced all the truth on people [at once], they would reject it entirely, in which case I would have been the cause of even greater evil.”⁴⁴

EVERYTHING IN ITS TIME

The second of these *sunan* is complementary to the first, namely, that everything has an appointed term during which it reaches maturity. This applies to the material realm as well as the moral. Nothing should be harvested before its appointed time. Crops, for example, cannot be harvested before they are mature. Rather than being useful, unripe fruit and vegetables can cause harm. And just as crops need time – sometimes a long time – to mature, the fruits of great actions can only be ‘picked’ until decades after they were undertaken. The greater the action concerned, the longer it takes for its fruit to mature. The endeavors of one generation often fail to materialize until two or three generations later. And there is no harm in this if everything takes its planned and set course.

During the Prophet’s early days in Makkah, unbelievers would mock him whenever he warned them of the punishment that awaited them if they persisted in rejecting God. In fact, they even asked him to hasten this punishment, not realizing that it could neither be hastened nor delayed: “They ask you to hasten on the punishment [for them]: had it not been for a term [of respite] appointed, the punishment would certainly have come to them: and it will certainly reach them, of a sudden, while they perceive not!” (29:53). We also read in the Qur’an, “They ask you to hasten on the punishment! But God will not fail in His promise. Verily, a day in the sight of your Lord is like a thousand years of your reckoning” (22:47). At this stage God advised the Prophet to persevere just as the earlier prophets had done and not to be hasty in invoking God’s punishment on them: “Therefore patiently persevere, as did [all] the messengers of inflexible purpose; and be in no haste about the [unbelievers]” (46:35).

God reminded the Prophet and his followers of the unflagging perseverance of earlier prophets in the face of hardships, the prolonged

struggle they had endured, and the difficulty of awaiting victory: “Or do you think you shall enter the garden [of bliss] without such [trials] as came to these before you? They encountered suffering and adversity and were so shaken in spirit that even the Messenger and those of faith who were with him cried, ‘When will the help of God come?’ Verily, the help of God is [always] near” (2:214). Indeed, God’s ordained victory is near, but it has an appointed time known only to Him, for He does not hasten things as His creatures do. For this reason, the Prophet used to advise his Companions to be patient and not to expect victory before its appointed time. The following incident demonstrates this point: When Khabbāb ibn al-Arāṭt once complained to the Prophet of the great suffering he was encountering for the sake of Islam, saying, “Do you not pray for us, O Messenger of God? Do you not call down victory for us?” the Prophet was so upset that he sat down, his face flushed. Then he replied,

[One believer] before you used to be cut to the bone with iron cutting tools, and another was sawed in two, but neither would abandon his religion. By God, He will surely grant Islam such a victory that someone travelling from Ṣan‘ā’ [in the Yemen] to Haḍramawt [in Oman] will have nothing to fear but God Himself, and no danger to fear for his sheep but the wolf. But you are [always] impatient.”⁴⁵

ISLAM: A STRANGER IN ITS OWN LAND

Perhaps the most alarming and unbearable factor for any ardent, committed Muslim, especially the young, is the lack of adherence to the teachings of Islam in Muslim countries where perversion, corruption and falsehood are rampant. Marxism and secularism are being propagated openly and publicly. Contemporary “crusaders” plan and act to infiltrate everywhere without fear. The media, in addition to clubs and theaters, spread obscenities and misconduct. Half-naked, drunken women roam the streets tempting and provoking, while alcohol is available legally and easy to come by. All manner of distraction or sensual entertainment in the form of obscene

literature, songs, plays, films, and pornographic material is being designed to corrupt, deepen ignorance of Islam and hamper faith. In addition, the committed Muslim observes daily that the legislation being passed – which is supposed to embody the beliefs and values of the Ummah in the forms of laws upholding its morals and punishing those who transgress them – endorses all that is forbidden by Islamic law and advocates corruption, since it derives not from divine guidance, but from secular philosophies. No wonder, then, that it sanctions what God has prohibited and prohibits what He has made permissible. It also neglects obligations ordained by God and abolishes the specific punishments assigned to deeds prohibited by God or the Prophet. Moreover, young people witness daily the deviation of the rulers of most Muslim countries – the very people who have been entrusted with the responsibility to translate Islam into concrete realities. Such rulers unabashedly befriend the enemies of God and show hostility and enmity towards those who fear Him and endeavor to call others to the divine truth; the former are the object of rulers' favor and protection, whilst the latter of their wrath and oppression. Islam is seldom mentioned except on national and "religious" occasions to pay lip service to the religious and deceive and beguile the masses.

Furthermore, the young constantly witness blatant social injustices and disparities between the poor and the rich, between those who can hardly eke out a living and those who waste millions on gambling and women; they see mansions which cost millions but may only be lived in for a few days out of the year while millions die from lack of shelter. They hear of those whose coffers are so full that they smuggle their fortunes abroad to be kept in secret accounts, while the only 'coffers' possessed by the vast majority are their mostly empty pockets. Indeed, they would be content with little, but even the little they might content themselves with is nowhere to be found. There are those who can hardly feed their children or buy medicine for their sick and elderly. Yet, if those who usurp oil revenues, who benefit from the policy of economic cooperation with the West, or those who are agents of major international companies donated even a fraction of the wealth they throw away on the satisfaction of their

whims, it would relieve a great deal of poverty as well as feed and shelter tens of thousands. Meanwhile, however, countless wealth and public funds are embezzled in broad daylight, while bribery and favoritism are deeply rooted. Those who commit these thefts always escape justice, but those who commit relatively insignificant misdeeds are severely punished. Such injustice has created feelings of envy, hatred, and bitterness in various sectors of the community. The advocates of destructive ideologies exploit these feelings to fan the flames of class struggle and social hatred, thereby creating an atmosphere conducive to the acceptance of their imported, alien ideologies. In fact, the advocates of such ideologies find large numbers of people willing to listen to them, not because of a rational acceptance of their ideas but as a reaction against prevailing conditions. There is nothing mysterious about the root cause of this tragic situation. Islam as a way of life, with all its comprehensiveness, vision, justice, and balance is almost absent from the scene, a stranger in its own land. Removed from public life, from the economic and public affairs of the state, from legislation and from international relations, Islam has been reduced to a private relationship between the individual and his Lord in a situation akin to that of Christianity during the period of its decadence. Islam has been made a set of doctrines without a law, a religion without a state, and a Qur'an without authority.

In short, Islam has been made to suffer the consequences of a past which is alien to its own history and its own people. The history of the Catholic church in the West is riddled with disasters and negative attitudes. Notorious for its alliances with unjust monarchs and feudal lords against the helpless masses, it initiated the Inquisition, a particularly cruel form of justice, which tortured men of knowledge and ridiculed new ideas; burnt alive scholars and scientists; and forced ignorance, aggression and false confessions on societies in the name of religion. It is no wonder, then, that the masses revolted against it and sought to liberate themselves from its grip. There is no reason, however, for Islam to bear the consequences of this black history by being deprived of the opportunity to guide the Ummah and influence legislation, and by being relegated to the confines of the

consciences of people, or, at best, the ineffectual arenas of ‘tonguetied’ mosques and retreat centers where it remains under surveillance lest it raise its voice above a whisper or exercise its right to command the common good, forbid that which is harmful or call others to faith.

The problem, in essence, is attributable to the imposition of an alien ideology, secularism – at odds with all that is Islamic – on Muslim societies. The end result of secularism is separation between religion and the state, legislation and authority, a separation which has never been recognized throughout the length of Islamic history. Islam and the law of Islam have always been the inspiration not only for worship, but, in addition, for legislation, public transactions, traditions, and ethics. True, there are a few cases in which rulers and their subjects have deviated from the right path, but never has Islamic law been neglected in settling disputes or differences between opposing parties. Even the most despotic rulers, such as al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf and others, would not have had the audacity to reject a verdict based on the Qur’an and Sunnah. This distinction is important. For it is one thing to deviate from the law of Islam out of desire, envy, negligence, anger, etc., and quite another to deny its relevance and, indeed, its superiority over other systems. After all, Islamic law has the right to rule by virtue of the fact that it embodies God’s word and judgement: “Do they seek after a judgement of [the days of] ignorance? But who, for a people whose faith is assured, can give better judgement than God?” (5:50). No wonder, then, that when confronted with this state of affairs, the current generation of young Muslims is shocked to find that non-Muslim countries live their lives in accordance with their ideologies, philosophies, or concepts relating to faith, existence, God, and man, while the Muslim alone is obliged to live in conflict between his beliefs and his reality, between his religion and his society.

Secularism may be accepted in a Christian society, but it will never enjoy general acceptance in an Islamic society. Christianity is devoid of a specifically “Christian law” comparable to the Shari‘ah of Islam or a comprehensive system of life to which its adherents must commit themselves. The New Testament itself divides life into

two realms, one of which belongs to God, or religion, and the other of which belongs to 'Caesar', or the state: "Render...to Caesar the things that are Caesars, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21)⁴⁶. As such, a Christian can accept secularism without any qualms. Furthermore, Westerners, especially Christians have good reasons to prefer a secular regime to a religious one. Their experience with "religious regimes" – as they have known them – have meant the rule of the clergy, the despotic authority of the Church, and the resulting decrees of excommunication and so-called 'deeds of forgiveness'. [Of course this is not the essence of true spiritual Christianity but it has been hijacked this way].

For Muslim societies, by contrast, the acceptance of secularism means something totally different. Since Islam is a comprehensive system of worship and legislation, the acceptance of secularism means abandonment of Islamic law, a denial of divine guidance and a rejection of God's injunctions. It is indeed a false claim that the law of Islam is not suited to the requirements of the present age. To accept legislation formulated by humans means is to prefer human beings' limited knowledge and experience to divine guidance: "Say! Do you know better than God?" (2:140). For this reason, the call for secularism among Muslims is, in effect, atheism and a rejection of Islam, and its acceptance as a basis for rule in place of the law of Islam is out-and-out apostasy. The failure of the general populace in the Muslim world to speak out against this deviation has been a major transgression and a clear-cut instance of disobedience. This has produced a sense of guilt, remorse, and inward resentment, which has led in turn to discontent, insecurity, and hatred among committed Muslims because such deviation is illegitimate. Secularism is compatible with a Western, deistic conception of God, which maintains that after God created the world, He left it to look after itself. In this sense, God's relationship with the world is like that of a watchmaker with a watch: he makes it, then leaves it to function without any need of him. This concept is inherited from Greek philosophy, especially that of Aristotle, who argued that God neither controls nor knows anything about the world. Such a God, as Will Durant once put it, is 'helpless'! No wonder, then, that He leaves

people to look after themselves. How can He legislate for them when He is ignorant of their affairs? This concept is categorically opposed to that of Muslims, who believe that God is the sole Creator and Sustainer of the Worlds who "...takes account of every single thing" (72:28). Moreover, God in the Muslim view is an omnipotent and omniscient Being whose mercy and bounties encompasses everyone and suffice for all. As such, God has revealed His divine guidance to humanity, permitting some things and prohibiting others, and commanding people to observe His injunctions and judge according to them. If they do not do so they are guilty of unbelief, aggression, and transgression.⁴⁷

Devout and committed young Muslims daily witness all these abominable and un-Islamic practices but do not know how to confront them. They cannot change things by physical force or by voicing their concerns and opinions. Hence, the only way for them is to condemn these practices in their hearts, though this is the least manifestation of faith. Even so, this inward tumult cannot be suppressed forever, and must eventually explode.

POLITICAL SITUATIONS AND EVENTS AS PERCEIVED BY MUSLIM YOUTHS

In addition to all this, Muslim youths look around them and feel that the Muslim world and all that Muslims hold most sacred are under attack with various powers working together to thwart any signs of a revival. They thus argue that non-Islamic causes find material and moral support from both East and the West, while Islamic causes find no real or practical support from either camp.

It is impossible for a Muslim to look on indifferently at the tragedies that beset his Ummah, or to watch his brothers in Islam being slaughtered, or misled into ignorance. What about Muslim brotherhood, and solidarity they wonder? Muslims are required to believe in the brotherhood of Muslims, and they should be proud of belonging to the Ummah. Furthermore, they must believe that Muslims, irrespective of their nationalities or language, are one Ummah and as such concerned with all its affairs. Daily news brings to the concerned

Muslim youth reports of the sufferings of other Muslims in Palestine, Lebanon, Afghanistan, the Philippines, Eritrea, Somalia, India and other places. In addition, the young observe with indignation that such events do not elicit any adequate response from the governments of other Muslim countries. On the contrary, they are completely indifferent to the persecution of fellow Muslims. Muslim rulers' primary concern seems to be for their parochial, regional, national, or racial interests, or loyalty to others rather than loyalty to God, His Prophet, His religion, and His Ummah and its cause.

Moreover, Muslim youths perceive Muslim rulers to be mere puppets manipulated by foreign powers. One of the main issues that has created frustration and resentment in the minds and hearts of young Muslims during the last several decades is the war between the Palestinians and Israelis, a catastrophe for all with no peace in sight. Young Muslims in Arab countries have been brought up with the conviction that Israel is a foreign body in the region founded upon aggression and usurpation with no right to occupy a land that does not belong to it, and that the liberation of Muslim land from this foreign body is a national and religious obligation. The late Amin al-Husayni, mufti of Palestine, said in this regard: "Palestine is not a land without a people for a people without a land!"

After the catastrophic defeat of the Arab regimes in 1967, politics in the Arab world took a new turn whose main objective became to remove the effects of the aggression, and this through recognition of the existence of Israel. What this meant, in effect, was that the situation had on one level been legitimised. This being the case, why did the Arab regimes not agree to recognize Israel from the beginning and spare the Ummah the tragic consequences of these wars?

Be that as it may, this was followed by the quest for a so-called "peaceful solution" and peace treaties. But such an endeavor was disappointing and frustrating to the aspirations of Muslim youth. The authorities in Egypt tried to justify these efforts based on considerations both military and political, local and international. But all this was a severe shock to Muslim youth. The shock was augmented by the fact that all of the major world powers supported Israel's existence despite the obvious violation which it constituted to

the rights of Arabs and Muslims. This in turn led youth to the belief that a contemporary “crusade” in a new form was being waged against Islam, and around them they saw facts as supporting them in this belief. Such feelings have profoundly influenced Muslim youth, who sense that the old crusading spirit still motivates a large number of Western politicians.

Many Muslim intellectuals have been skeptical as to the reality of this so-called Western crusading spirit, claiming that national interests are the West’s primary, if not sole motivation when making political or military decisions. However, to Muslim youth events demonstrate that they are wrong and that the enmity is still alive and well. For instance, they ask, Why does the West continue to support Israel to this day? Why does the United States challenge the whole world by vetoing every United Nations resolution that condemns Israel? Why is a blackout imposed on all Muslim causes, while a great fuss is made about far lesser incidents in both East or West? Why is a Muslim’s blood cheaper than someone else’s? Such questions are constantly being asked by Muslim youth and to them there seems to be no explanation for this other than the existence of an alliance of powers campaigning against Islam and Muslims.

In the opinion of young Muslims, all the rulers of the Arab and Muslim countries are mere “pieces on a chessboard” and puppets in the hands of the covert powers that rule the world. They see military coups d’état and major political changes in the Muslim world as mere maneuvers by foreign powers to bring to office persons who are incapable of managing anything, but who are made to look like heroes. Muslim youth strongly believe that these rulers only appear to be true patriotic leaders concerned for their people and their religion, while in reality they are nothing but agents who stage attacks on their own nation in the service of its foes.

EXPROPRIATING THE FREEDOM TO CALL FOR A COMPREHENSIVE ISLAM

Another cause of extremism has to do with the freedom – indeed duty – to call people to Islam. Islam teaches a person not only to be

pious and righteous but, in addition, to endeavor to reform others. This is the purpose of the obligation to call people to righteousness, to command the common good and forbid what is evil and undesirable, and to join together by teaching each other truth and patience. From the Islamic point of view, every Muslim is required to call others to Islam to the best of his or her ability. The following verse is addressed to every Muslim: "Invite [all] to the Way of your Lord..." (16:125). Furthermore, every follower of the Prophet is a proponent of Islam, as the following verse makes clear: "Say: 'This is my way. I invite unto God – with evidence as clear as the seeing with one's eyes – I and whoever follows me'" (12:108). Hence the motto of reformers: "Reform yourself before you call others to righteousness." The Qur'an says: "Who is better in speech than one who calls [men] to God, works righteousness, and says, 'I am of those who bow in Islam?'" (41:33).

Islam does not intend for the Muslim to work alone. The Prophet said: "God's hand [of support] is with the group," and also: "Believers are, one to another, like bricks in an edifice that cause it to stand strong."⁴⁸ The individual can offer little by himself, but a great deal together with his brothers and sisters. Cooperation in righteous, God-conscious action is not only a religious obligation but a vital necessity. It is no wonder, therefore, that collective work in the field of *da'wah* is a duty according to Islamic law, because that without which a duty cannot be fulfilled is itself a duty. The fact that non-Muslim ideological forces work collectively in the form of blocs, parties, and associations makes it incumbent upon Muslims to counter these forces with similar approaches. Otherwise, we will continue to lag behind, unable to do anything while others achieve progress. For this reason, the gravest sins committed by some of the governments in Muslim countries are the censorship of the freedom to call people to Islam as a system of beliefs and a way of life and the intimidation of those who call for the application of Islamic law, the establishment of the Islamic state, the unity of the Ummah, the liberation of Muslim lands, and support for all Islamic causes. This suppression of *da'wah* and those who engage in it and the restriction of all forms of Islamic action, especially that which is collective in

nature, is one of the main causes behind extremism. This is especially so in light of the fact that the adherents of secular philosophies and ideologies are allowed to organize themselves into groups and disseminate their ideas with complete freedom. Does it make sense, in Muslim countries, to grant the advocates of secularism, Marxism, liberalism, etc. the freedom to establish parties, organizations, newspapers, and magazines while censoring only Islam and its proponents, who speak for the majority of the populace?

However, the call to Islam as a positive and comprehensive religion and way of life does indeed face censorship and suppression in many Muslim countries. The only form of Islam allowed is that upheld by the dervishes and the professional traders in religion, the “Islam” of the ages of backwardness and decadence, the “Islam” that does nothing but celebrate occasions, support despotic rulers, and ask God to grant its adherents length of days. It is an “Islam” based on divine pre-determination and “no-choice” in belief which sanctions blameworthy innovations in worship, permits passive ethics and intellectual rigidity, and encourages emphasis on minor rather than major issues. Those who follow and promote this “Islam” are patronized by corrupt and despotic rulers. Even irreligious, secularist rulers bless this form of religiosity, showing respect and support for its advocates in order to help them lull the deprived masses into passive acceptance of the status quo and trap the youth in a web of illusions, symbols, words and trivialities. In this way they sabotage young people’s zeal for jihad, that is, their determination to struggle against injustice, perversion, and corruption. Perhaps this is what led Marx to claim that “religion is the opiate of the people.”

However, the authentic, original Islam contained in the Qur’an and the Sunnah – as understood and practiced by the Companions of the Prophet as well as their immediate successors – is the embodiment of truth and power, honor and dignity, sacrifice and jihad. And this is precisely why it is rejected by those in authority, because it kindles the spirit of revolt against injustice and darkness and teaches its adherents to emulate the practice of “...those who preach the messages of God and fear Him, and fear none but God” (33:39). Given this conviction and clarity of vision, they believe that since

sustenance and the duration of a person's life are determined by God alone, there is no reason to fear or to seek support from anyone but Him. In contemporary Turkey, a Muslim country which served as the seat of the caliphate for several centuries, the leader of a popular party and then-deputy premier, was led away from his ministry into prison. He and his followers were put on trial on charges of calling for the application of Islamic law in a country where 98% of the population are Muslims! The prosecution brought fifteen charges against them, all of which revolved around their endeavor to change Turkey from a secular state opposed to Islam (the religion of the Turkish people) to a state that respects its religion and abides by its injunctions as genuine faith requires. The military authority which rules Turkey by force pledges obedience to Ataturk, the founder of secular Turkey, rather than to God and His Prophet. Consequently, it regards any call for the application of Islamic law or the return to the Islamic way of life as a crime, even if those issuing the call use legal means which are acknowledged and sanctioned by all the democratic systems whose praises the authorities sing.

These devoted Muslims were not prosecuted for using force and violence to topple the government, but simply because they believed in Islam – the faith of their fathers and their forefathers – and sought to call others to embrace it “with wisdom and goodly exhortation,” by arguing “in the most kindly manner,”⁴⁹ and through legitimate, constitutional channels. The military prosecutor accused them of using the following slogans: “Islam is the only way,” “Muhammad is the sole leader,” “The law of Islam and Islam are one and the same,” and “The Qur’an is the constitution.”

Is it possible for any Muslim who accepts God as his Lord, Islam as his religion, and Muhammad as his Prophet to reject such slogans? What are Muslims who aspire to live in accordance with the teachings of Islam expected to do when unbelief is prescribed and faith is rejected; when the unlawful is declared lawful, and the lawful, unlawful? Are these not unnatural situations the root cause of excess and extremism?

In a certain Afro-Arab country which is considered part of the ‘free world,’ Communists are permitted to establish an official

political party which engages in open activities and is protected by the constitution and laws of that country, whereas the Islamic trend which represents the real conscience, beliefs, suffering, and aspirations of the nation, is forbidden to have even the most minimal official presence. Still worse, Islamic leaders and active proponents of Islam in this country are in prison after receiving the harshest of sentences. Even so, the only charge against them is that they declare that God alone is their Lord, that Truth is their ultimate goal, that Islam is the only path and source of judgement, that the word is their weapon, and that knowledge is their only provision.

Is it reasonable, then, to blame youth who, after despairing of being allowed to call for Islam “with wisdom and goodly exhortation,” have resorted to meeting force with force and violence with violence? This situation should not be allowed to continue. Islam will, God willing, find followers and supporters and a party of believers who continue to be committed to the Truth, unintimidated and unhampered by those who oppose them or let them down. It is in our best interest to acknowledge our responsibility to let this community of believers be born naturally and give them a chance to mature and develop in a healthy atmosphere of freedom. Otherwise, they will find some other way which is unacceptable to us. The call to Islam, like a torrential stream of water, is bound to find a course through which it can flow, even if it passes through boulders of granite. Stated another way: Unless it is given the chance to express itself openly and publicly, this call will go looking for underground vaults, as it were, where there is more darkness than light, as a result of which vision will be disturbed and extremism will find its way into people’s hearts and minds.

RESORTING TO VIOLENCE AND TORTURE
DOES NOT ELIMINATE EXTREMISM—IT CREATES IT

The gravest error authorities can make is to resort to violence and torture, whether physical or psychological, in prisons and detention camps to which people are led away and in which they are treated with less dignity than dumb animals. In Egypt (both in 1954 as well

as 1965), devout Muslims were subjected to nightmarish, unbelievable torture and punishment at the Military Prison near Cairo: they were lashed, exposed to flames, their flesh burnt with cigarettes; men and sometimes even women, were hung upside down like slaughtered animals, while the executioners took turns lashing them until their bodies swelled up in heaps of blood and pus. Many were martyred in this bestial way while their executioners showed no fear of God and showed no mercy or humanity. They not only used all the forms of torture engineered by Nazism, Fascism, and Communism, but innovated and developed new techniques of their own.

It was in this infamous prison that extremism and the tendency to brand others as unbelievers were born. The prisoners began by asking simple questions: Why are we being subjected to this torture? What crime have we committed? Have we said anything other than that God is our Lord, Islam is our path, and the Qur'an is our constitution? In so doing, we seek nothing but God's pleasure. We've asked for no reward or thanks from anyone! Could commitment to the cause of Islam in a Muslim country be regarded as a crime for which we are being tortured in this way?

These questions led to others: Who are these beasts who torture us, degrade our humanity, curse our religion, dishonor our sacred beliefs, ridicule our religious devotions and worship, and even dare to mock our God? One of their high-ranking officials once said: "Bring me your God and I'll put him in a jail cell." Could these be regarded as Muslims? If they are, then who could bear to see real unbelief! No. There can be no doubt that these are unbelievers who are beyond the pale of Islam.

This in turn led to further questions: If this is our verdict concerning those who torture us to death, what should our judgement on their masters be? What judgement should be made against the leaders and rulers in authority, who not only refuse to rule in accordance with God's injunctions, but also wage war against those who call for the application of His law?

In comparison with the former, the latter are worse in their unbelief and more categorical in their repudiation of Islam as spoken of in the Qur'an: "If any fail to judge by [the light of] what God has

revealed, they are [no better than] unbelievers” (5:44). Having come to this conclusion, these oppressed Muslims raised a further question addressed to their fellow inmates: What do you think of the rulers who do not judge in accordance with what God has revealed, and who torture those who call for the application of His law of Islam? Those who agreed with them that such rulers are unbelievers were regarded as ‘one of them’, while those who disagreed, or even who hesitated, were considered unbelievers also, since in their view, whoever entertains any doubt concerning the unbelief of an unbeliever is himself an unbeliever.

However, they didn’t stop there. Another question was raised about the people who submit to and obey such rulers. The answer was ready: they are also unbelievers like their rulers, because – or so it was claimed – he who submits to an unbeliever is himself an unbeliever. In this way, then, the tendency to label individuals and groups as unbelievers was born and nurtured.

The observable fact is that violence not only breeds violence but also muddles clear thinking; and repression inevitably leads to an explosion.

Toward A Remedy for Extremism

Having shed some light on the nature and characteristics of what has been termed ‘religious extremism’ as well as its most important causes and motives, it remains for us now to outline a remedy for it. It should be emphasized at the outset that the remedy is inseparable from the causes and must, therefore, be as varied and complex as the causes themselves. Needless to say, no mere magic touch will put an end to extremism or restore extremists to moderation. The malaise afflicting the soul and mind of mankind is far more deeply rooted than we think, and consequently more difficult to treat than we might expect. Extremism is essentially a religious phenomenon with a variety of psychological, social, and political dimensions. As such, all of these aspects must be tackled from an Islamic point of view.

I do not agree with the determinists, who hold either society alone or prevailing economic conditions responsible for the phenomenon rather than holding people responsible for their own behavior. It would also be unfair, of course, to hold youth alone responsible and to exonerate society, governmental regimes and their governmental departments – especially those in charge of education, guidance, and the media. The responsibility is in fact mutual, and each side, as it were, plays an important part. The Prophet said, “Each of you is a shepherd responsible for his flock.”¹ The questions that arise, then, are: What must society do in order to cause moderation to prevail over extremism? And what do youth need to do in order to resist this

destructive tendency? In what follows we will attempt an answer to both these queries.

DUTIES OF SOCIETY

As I have indicated, the inner contradictions and chaos that mark present-day Muslim societies, as well as the estrangement of these societies from Islam, have contributed significantly to the emergence and spread of extremism. Therefore, these societies must play a positive role in addressing the phenomenon. The initial step for a Muslim society is to acknowledge and confirm its genuine commitment to Islam. This is not something that can be achieved through a mere verbal declaration, nor through a set of slogans or a clause in the constitution stating that “Islam is the official religion of the state,” but, rather, through true adherence to the teachings of Islam.

Islam is a comprehensive system of life. It invests life with a sublime character and guides it in an ethical direction; it sets up the framework, the landmarks, and the limits which govern life’s movement and goals, thereby protecting it from going off track. For this reason, Islam consists of beliefs to enrich the mind, acts of worship to purify the heart, morals to purify the soul, legislation to establish justice, and manners to enhance life. In order to be truly Islamic, society must commit itself to Islam in its totality rather than being like the Israelites, who adopted only parts of the Torah but ignored the rest.

Consequently, God admonished them in the Qur’an: “Then is it only a part of the Book that you believe in, and do you reject the rest? But what is the reward for those among you who behave like this but disgrace in this life? And on the Day of Judgment they shall be consigned to the most grievous penalty” (2:85). In addition, society must be willing to apply God’s injunctions and the Sunnah of His Prophet to all aspects of life: social, economic, political, and intellectual. This is what faith requires: “But no, by the Lord, they can have no [real] faith, until they make you judge in all disputes between them, and find in their souls no resistance against your decisions, but accept them with the fullest conviction” (4:65); and, “The answer of

the believers, when summoned to God and His Messenger, in order that He may judge between them, is no other than this: they say, 'We hear and we obey.' It is such as these that will attain felicity" (24:51).

Our societies must endeavor to eliminate this blatant contradiction, namely, that of claiming to be Muslims and believing in Islam both as a divine creed and a law, but disregarding its guidance and moral teachings, then replacing them with imported systems and alien ideologies from both East and West!

MUSLIM RULERS MUST RETURN TO THE LAW OF GOD

Our rulers must understand that they live in Muslim lands and are ruling Muslim peoples who have the right to be governed in accordance with the teachings of their religion. Constitutions, laws, educational systems, etc., must all reflect and express the people's beliefs, values, and traditions, which must also be guided, consolidated, and disseminated via the media. Economic and social policies at the local and international levels must be formulated within the framework of these beliefs and must serve their goals. The failure of rulers in Muslim countries to live up to these legitimate expectations is utterly unacceptable and is in stark contradiction to Islam.

Indeed, these rulers' defiance of the Muslim conscience in most Islamic countries has become intolerable. Some of them openly reject Islam and express their commitment to an Eastern or Western ideology. Moreover, they deprive Islam of any form of expression. Even the mosque and its religious activities are manipulated to express support for regimes and rulers, while those who dare to object are severely punished. Other rulers in Muslim countries profess to be Muslims, but their concept of Islam is the product of their own illusions and desires. They pick and choose, accepting what serves their egotistical pursuits and discarding what doesn't. What they themselves believe and declare to be 'Islamic' is truth, and what they reject is falsehood. Hence, they disregard the interpretations of our venerable forebears as well as those of their renowned successors and contemporaries. They have the audacity to disagree with the whole Ummah while ignoring the established traditions of the Companions

of the Prophet, the jurists, and the interpreters of the Qur'an and Hadith. They see no reason to consult any of these. Such a ruler considers himself to be a scholar of Islam, an interpreter, a narrator, a scholastic theologian and a philosopher all in one.

In other words, such a ruler claims to be a one-man show who has no need to learn anything even from the Prophet Muhammad himself. Rather, he claims to rely on the Qur'an alone, forgetting that the Prophet is the supreme interpreter of the Qur'an. In this respect God says: "He who obeys the Messenger, obeys God" (4:80). Such rulers import ideas and laws while relegating Islam to a tiny corner concerned with civil or private affairs, talks about Islam on the radio or television, and perhaps an article on Islam on the Friday newspaper's religion page. However, let it be known that this 'corner' is not for Islam, but for 'religion' in its Western ecclesiastical sense, that is, a private relationship between the conscience of the individual and his Creator. It has nothing to do with either society or life; Caesar and the Lord both get their due! Theirs is the concept of "religion" as doctrine without law, individual piety, *da'wah*, jihad [struggling against oppression and injustice in self-defence], or commanding what is good and prohibiting what is harmful. If a person condemns something as wrong, criticizes certain deviations, advocates a call for the right path and confronts falsehood, whether from the platform of a mosque or in a newspaper, he is reminded that he has exceeded all bounds by mixing religion and politics! For such rulers there is neither a place for religion in politics, nor a place for politics in religion.

All this conflicts, of course, with the teachings of God and the Sunnah of His Prophet, as well as with the practices of the Companions and their righteous successors. Hence, it is high time our rulers realized that there can be neither stability in their societies nor hope for their peoples except through real commitment and adherence to Islam. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said: "We were once the lowest of nations, but God honored us with Islam. And should we try to attain honor through means other than Islam, God will debase us." Furthermore, unless Islamic law is applied, our societies will continue to breed extremists, both religious and otherwise.

RELATE TO THEM IN A SPIRIT OF FATHERHOOD
AND BROTHERHOOD

The second step toward dealing effectively with extremism is to speak to Muslim youth from where they are. To begin with, we who are older must not address them from ivory towers, with an attitude of superiority or condescension. After all, this type of attitude is bound to alienate them even further to the point where they refuse to trust or listen to us. Equally, we must seek to understand them and gain insight into their genuine concerns. Our attitude toward them should not be that of someone who has come to accuse them, expose their demerits and cast suspicion on their intentions and actions in an attempt to prove that they merit the worst of punishments. Rather, we should treat them with paternal and brotherly love, letting them know that they belong to us and we to them and helping them to realize that they represent our hope for our own future and that of the Ummah.

Through love and compassion rather than accusations and arrogance, we can break down the barriers that separate us. Hence, we need to come to their defense in the face of the myriad allegations being leveled at them from all directions, be they true or false, well-meaning or malicious. And if for some reason we find ourselves unable to assume the role of defender, we should at least stand firmly for the application of justice, which neither punishes without evidence nor sides with either the claimant or the defendant.

One of our failings is our tendency to rush to hasty, sweeping, definitive conclusions when judging social issues. This is often done without listening to the defense of the accused or the evidence cited. Many people rush to judge these youth without actually getting to know them and finding out how they think, feel, behave, and react. Many judge them all based on the behavior of a few, and this despite the fact that the majority cannot be held responsible for the deeds and behavior of the minority. It is for this reason that Muslim jurists ruled that a verdict passed on the majority applies to the entire group, but that a rare, that is, isolated instance calls for no verdict whatsoever. Furthermore, some people pass judgment on a person

on the basis of one single instance of behavior which may have specific motives and personal circumstances associated with it. If this person's accusers would listen patiently to his justifications, they might change their minds. Be that as it may, no one may be judged to be ethically bankrupt on the basis of just one or two actions. Rather, he should – in the light of the following Qur'anic verse – be evaluated on the basis of the totality of his actions and behavior: “Then those whose balance [of good deeds] is heavy, they will attain salvation” (23:102).

On the other hand, there are people who judge such youth based on their own personal conception of what religion is and what it means to be religious. In these people's estimation, these young Muslims are just eccentrics suffering from psychological problems. This may be true of a small number, but on the whole they are psychologically sound and the sincerity of their deeds is unquestionable. Indeed, there tends to be great harmony between their inward beliefs and attitudes on one hand, and their words and actions on the other. I myself have known many of these young Muslims in a number of Muslim countries, and I can testify that I found strength and firmness of conviction in their faith, truth in their words, and sincerity in their work. I also admire their love for truth and hatred of falsehood, their passion to disseminate the divine message, their determination to command the common good and forbid what is harmful, their zeal for jihad [struggling against oppression and corruption], their concern for Muslims everywhere in the world, and their aspiration to establish an Islamic society which lives in accordance with the teachings of God.

My meetings and contacts with these youth have convinced me of the tremendous differences between our traditional Islamic conceptions and theirs; they are committed to a new, vital Islam which opposes our own worn-out traditional belief. Their faith is warm and passionate while ours has grown cold; their will to do what is right is passionate while ours is numb; they fear God and are full of love for Him, and their hearts pulsate with His remembrance in their constant recitation of the Qur'an. One must also acknowledge their determination to recapture the true Islamic spirit and to reconstruct

life according to it. I know that many of them spend whole nights in prayer and worship, fast during the day, ask God's forgiveness at dawn, and vie with each other in doing good deeds. It is for this reason that many people, including myself, entertain the hope that the future of Islam will be realized through the determined endeavors of these youths. This is why I have declared on several occasions in Egypt that the young generation, which has grown up on righteousness and piety, is the real treasure upon which Egypt can build its hopes. Indeed they are more precious than any material considerations.

BEWARE OF BEING EXTREME IN ONE'S DEPICTION OF EXTREMISM

I also believe that whoever tries to suggest a remedy for the problem of extremism must do so with balance, justice, and open-mindedness. Otherwise, such a person is bound to fall into extremism himself while discussing the phenomenon and suggesting its remedy. The first characteristic of balance in this regard is to avoid exaggerating the manifestations of the alleged phenomenon, making much ado about nothing, and thereby spreading alarm and terror. This, unfortunately, is our customary tendency in dealing with such issues. Exaggeration is extremely damaging because it distorts the facts and blurs vision, as a result of which any verdict for or against the issue is bound to be either unjust or, at least, incomplete.

It is regrettable that a great deal of what has been or is being said or written in the aftermath of the crisis resulting from the authorities' clash with Muslim youth in Egypt and the emergence of so-called "religious extremism" is itself tainted with exaggeration and excess in its attempts to tackle the issue. These attempts are influenced by the prevailing atmosphere, which is charged against the youth. This attitude provoked the Egyptian sociologist, Sa'd al-Din Ibrahim to respond to this campaign directed against the youth in an article published in *al-Ahram* newspaper. Sa'd Ibrahim pointed out that those who have taken part in analyzing the issue are actually ignorant of its constituent factors. Indeed, it would have been more fitting for these people to keep silent or approach the subject with

truth and fairness, examining the phenomenon in a realistic and balanced manner. A balanced opinion would take into consideration the fact that religious extremism is often a reaction to another opposing extremism such as permissiveness and laxity in religious matters or cynical attitudes towards religion. Therefore, there should be an attempt to bring both extremes together on the ‘middle way’ of Islam. The very nature of life occasionally sets one form of extremism against another in order to create a balance, a concept found in the Qur’an: “And did not God check one set of people by means of another, the earth would indeed be full of mischief: But God is full of bounty to all the worlds” (2:251).

Strangely enough, extremist Muslim youth are unfairly treated while other extremist groups – especially those who lead an immoral and totally irreligious life – are not condemned. Nor are such people ever imprisoned or subjected to harsh punishments. Justice requires that both types of extremism be condemned. Is it fair to put all the blame and negative focus on the youth who live for and in accordance with the teachings of Islam – those who regularly perform the ritual prayers, eschew what Islam prohibits, lower their gazes, and guard their modesty and chastity; those who carefully investigate what is lawful and what is prohibited; those who adhere adamantly to what they believe to be an Islamic norm of behavior, be it growing a beard, wearing above-the-ankle clothes, using a *siwāk* to clean their mouths, or avoiding vain talk; those who never smoke, and who are keen to spend their money only on what is useful? Is it fair to condemn these young people who have grown up on piety and righteousness, however excessive and strict they may be, while we keep silent about the immorally permissive behavior of others amongst whom it is hard to distinguish between the “male” and the “female”? Morally as well as intellectually Westernized, the latter have been completely uprooted from Muslim culture. Is it fair to make so much fuss about and condemn so-called “religious extremism” and yet keep silent about “irreligious extremism”? Is it fair to disparage and sneer at a young woman who veils her face because she is convinced that her action is in tune with Islamic teachings and is seeking God’s acceptance, then to keep silent about another who

walks about in the streets or on the beach or appears on television or movies almost naked, deliberately seeking to provoke the instincts, claiming that she is simply exercising “personal freedom” as sanctioned by the constitution? Do constitutions provide for “personal freedom” with regard to nakedness and banality but prohibit it with regard to modesty and chastity?

If society had taken a stand against those who were immoral and irreligious and had endeavored to change all the manifestations of evil, the phenomenon of religious extremism would never have emerged in our countries. Even if it could have appeared – for one reason or another – its impact would have been less significant than it is at present. We also need to acknowledge that extremism is universal, manifesting itself in various ways and areas, such as religion, politics, thought and behavior. There are indeed many active non-Muslim religious extremist groups; they have neither been condemned by the world as Muslim groups have been, nor have they been treated by their countries as Muslim groups have been in theirs. For instance, the Christian Falangists in Lebanon engage in extreme forms of violence and religious extremism; they have slaughtered Muslims, mutilated their bodies, assaulted Muslim women, burnt Muslim religious books (including the Qur’an), and have sought to degrade everything related to Islam and Muslims – and this in the name of Christianity and Christ, the Apostle of peace and love, who addressed his followers: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also.” (Luke 6:27–29). Similarly, almost every year extremist Hindu religious groups massacre peaceful Muslim citizens, and the irony is that those who slaughter human beings in cold blood prohibit the slaughter of animals because they claim it is cruel and merciless to kill a living creature! For this same reason, they do not kill mice but allow them to eat up thousands of acres of wheat. None of these creatures, they claim, should be harmed because they have “souls”! But these people never hesitate to slaughter Muslims, as if the latter were the only beings devoid of souls!

In addition to all this we have to realize that we live in an age of

uneasiness, anxiety, and rebellion generated by the spread of a materialism which has warped human thought and behavior. Although man has succeeded in landing on the moon, he has failed miserably to realize happiness on earth. The 20th Century has witnessed rapid progress in all fields of science; however, this development brought about material, but not spiritual, prosperity. Hence, it was unable to create the happiness and peace of mind for which so many of its beneficiaries had hoped. On the contrary, it caused an ever-increasing number of people – like the hippies of the 1960's – to feel lost and confused, and to rebel against this “modernization” by going back to nature. For them, life had no meaning, and civilization had failed to answer their persistent questions: Who am I? What is my purpose in life? Where did I come from and where am I going? Such anxiety and rebellion found an echo in our countries as well, where it led either to irreligiosity or to a greater commitment and adherence to Islam. Some young Muslims have found the answers to their questions in Islam and have turned to it with enthusiasm, if not excessive zeal. Yet it would be unreasonable to expect peace and tranquility in the present age of rebellion, or moderation and balance in a world characterized by extremism. Nor would it be logical to demand from these enthusiastic young people the “wisdom and maturity” of their elders. Man is, in a real sense, a product of his environment.

OPEN THE WINDOWS TO LET IN THE BREEZE OF FREEDOM

In light of the foregoing, it should be clear that we have no choice but to turn away from the tried-but-not-true approaches that are the staple of secret services and state security apparatuses. In other words, we must abandon the methods of violence, torture, and assassinations. We must spread and encourage an atmosphere of freedom and welcome criticism, and reactivate our forbears' practice of advising one another. We have an example of this in the life of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who declared, “May God bless the person who points out my faults to me!” In keeping with this sentiment, he always encouraged and supported those who advised or criticized him. One day while he was with a group of his companions, a man said to him:

“O Commander of the Faithful, fear God!” ‘Umar’s companions were angered by the man’s words. However, ‘Umar asked them to let the man express himself freely, saying: “There is no good in you if you do not speak up (like this man), and there is no good in us (the rulers) if we do not listen (to advice and criticism).”

On another occasion, ‘Umar addressed his audience: “If any of you sees any deviation in me, it is his duty to put it right.” Upon hearing this, a Bedouin stood up and said: “By God, if we see any deviation in you, we will put it right with our swords (i.e., even if we have to use force!)” ‘Umar was not angered. On the contrary, he said approvingly, “Thank God there are Muslims who would be ready to use their swords to put ‘Umar on the right path!”

An atmosphere of freedom produces ideas which can be rationally discussed and analyzed by the learned, either to be adapted and adopted or to be rejected and discarded, then eventually disappear. Otherwise, ideas are bound to thrive and be nurtured secretly, after which they take root, develop and grow until they become dominant and strong, taking people by surprise because they had been aware of neither their birth nor their subsequent development. Deviant thought and ways of understanding are the sources of extremism; hence, in seeking to deal with it, we must rely on sound thought and correct ways of understanding. It is a grave mistake to resort to force in order to counter deviant thought. Persecution may cause such thought to disappear from view. However, it will not die. Rather, what is required is that we address confused minds with reason until they emerge from their confusion, entering into dialogue with them “in the most kindly manner” until the light dawns for those with eyes to see. And even if they bear arms, our duty is to take the arms away from them but without striking back with them. The brutal methods adopted by the secret police and by leaders of military coups who torture and kill whoever disagrees with them cannot possibly put an end to extremism. They may succeed temporarily, but they will ultimately fail in their endeavor. If one extremist group is crushed, another – even more violent – will be in the making.

Our first duty, then, is to create a sound Islamic awareness based on an enlightened understanding of Islamic legal rulings. Such an

understanding, or *fiqh*, goes to the heart of things rather than being content to remain on the surface; it relates the parts to the whole, the branches to the roots, the speculative to the definitive; moreover, it derives its rulings from primary sources rather than secondary ones. Creating such an awareness and developing such a *fiqh* among extremists will not be easy. After all, changing people's beliefs and convictions requires sincere effort, tremendous patience, and support and guidance from God Almighty.

Those in authority mistakenly imagine that such changes can be easily effected by the media. They think that these channels can alter the intellectual as well as the spiritual convictions of people in the direction they desire. They either unwittingly or deliberately ignore the fact that the state-controlled media and their spokesmen, agents, and agencies are incapable of actualizing the required changes and consciousness, because the form and substance of such endeavors are totally rejected by the youth.

This has been attempted by various regimes in different countries where the authorities exploited certain Muslim scholars and speakers to lecture prisoners in order to brainwash them. But all these lectures, speeches, and sermons were mocked and failed miserably to achieve their intended purpose. The only individuals capable of imparting such knowledge are Muslim scholars who are free from the crippling influence of authority – scholars who enjoy the confidence of the youth because of the authenticity of their knowledge and the impeccability of their religious convictions. In addition, this requires a free, natural atmosphere untainted by either the 'carrot' or the 'stick' to be found within the walls of a prison cell.

Furthermore, such a transformation cannot be achieved overnight either by spoon-feeding from above or martial orders. On the contrary, it requires a long-term approach involving free encounter, constructive dialogue, and mutual give-and-take.

BEWARE OF RESPONDING TO *TAKFĪR*
WITH 'COUNTER-*TAKFĪR*'

What I wish to emphasize in this respect is the danger of confronting

one form of intellectual extremism with another; that is, confronting obstinacy with obstinacy, bigotry with bigotry, or reacting to a misdeed with another misdeed. The danger manifests itself, for example, in a tendency to respond to extremists who accuse others of unbelief by accusing them, also, of unbelief. Those who adopt such an attitude may cite the following hadith: “He who accuses a Muslim of unbelief is himself an unbeliever.” The truth, however, is that if we behave in this manner, we fall into the same trap into which the extremists have fallen. The hadith under consideration does not apply to a Muslim who accuses another Muslim of unbelief as a result of judicial misinterpretation and misunderstanding. This can be demonstrated by authentic hadiths as well as by firmly established events in the lives of the Companions.

We have a good example in the attitude taken by the Caliph ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib towards the Kharijites who fought him and hurled against him the most unjust accusations that could be leveled against an ordinary Muslim, let alone ‘Alī, the most renowned and courageous Muslim hero, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet. Nonetheless, ‘Alī condemned the Kharijites’ falsehood without leveling against them the same accusation they had hurled at him, and without branding them unbelievers as they had done to him. Instead, he accommodated them in the fold of Islam by giving them the benefit of a doubt.

Hence, when the people asked ‘Alī whether the Kharijites were unbelievers, he replied: “They have fled from unbelief...” The people persisted, “What are they, then?” ‘Alī answered: “Those who were our brothers in the past have wronged us today.” In other words, the Kharijites are to be classified among those who are guilty of rebellion, or *bāghy*², not as unbelievers or apostates. Such rebels (Arabic, *bughāh*, singular, *bāghin*) are those who disobey a just Muslim imam on the basis of a judicial misinterpretation.

If such rebels are powerful and rebel and take up arms against the Muslim ruler, he should not hasten to fight them, but should send to them people who can rectify their errors by debating with them with wisdom and patience in order to prevent the shedding of Muslim blood and to preserve Muslim unity. If they persist in their attitude

and initiate war, they should be fought until they abide by God's command. But during the hostilities, those of them who flee from the battlefield should not be persecuted, nor should their wounded or prisoners of war be killed, their women should not be taken captive, and their belongings should not be confiscated. They are to be treated as Muslims who are fought only because they constitute a menace to the Ummah, since the aim is not to exterminate them but to bring them back into the fold of Islam. Convictions can be altered neither by force nor by the threat of the sword.

Another instance of 'Alī's attitude is worth mentioning as evidence of the unprecedented freedom of expression – especially that of the opposition – attained in the early days of Islam, a freedom which other countries achieved only many centuries later. The Kharijites dissented because they rejected 'Alī's acceptance of arbitration, claiming that: "Judgment belongs to God alone." 'Alī replied to this with his laconic, proverbial saying: "A word of truth uttered in the service of falsehood." In spite of their opposition to him, 'Alī told them clearly and frankly: "We pledge you three things: (1) not to prevent you from praying in the mosques, (2) not to deny you your share of the booty, and (3) not to initiate fighting with you unless you spread corruption in the land (of Islam)." Thus, 'Alī granted the opposition – the Kharijites – all these rights, although each of them was a fully trained, armed soldier capable of taking up arms at any moment. It is also worth pointing out in this connection that despite the existence of authentic hadiths which describe the Kharijites as heretics and command that they be fought and killed, reliable Muslim scholars have nevertheless hesitated to brand them as unbelievers despite the fact that they themselves (i.e., the Kharijites) branded all other Muslims as unbelievers and sanctioned taking up arms against them and confiscating their possessions.

In his book, *Nayl al-Awtār*, Imam al-Shawkānī states,³

Most Sunni jurists are of the opinion that the Kharijites were Muslims on the basis of their witnessing that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is His Messenger, as well as their regular observance of the other pillars of Islam. Their sinfulness was the result of their adoption

of an erroneous interpretation on the basis of which they held all other Muslims to be unbelievers. This led them to openly accuse their opponents of unbelief and polytheism, and to sanction killing them and confiscating their possessions.

Similarly, al-Khaṭṭabī states, “Although the Kharijites have strayed from the right path, Muslim scholars are unanimously agreed that they are an Islamic group. Therefore, they have permitted intermarriage with them and the eating of the animals they slaughter. Furthermore, they hold that they should not be considered unbelievers so long as they continue to adhere to the fundamentals of Islam.”

‘Iyāḍ writes, “This was probably the most complex issue for scholastic theologians until fiqh scholar ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq asked Imam Abū al-Ma‘ālī about it. The latter refused to decide, however, asserting that to classify an unbeliever as a Muslim or to classify a Muslim as an unbeliever is a very serious matter. ‘Iyāḍ adds that the judge Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī also refused to decide on the matter, saying, “The people (the Kharijites) did not openly profess unbelief, although they uttered things which could lead to unbelief.”

Al-Ghazālī states in *al-Tafrīqah bayn al-Imān wa al-Zandaqah*, “One has to be extremely cautious about branding people unbelievers, for it is a great error to sanction the killing of Muslims who have drawn near [to God] through belief in the divine unity. To let a thousand unbelievers live is a less serious matter than to shed the blood of one Muslim.”

Ibn Baṭṭāl says, “The majority of Muslim scholars have stated the view that the Kharijites do not stand outside the fold of Islam. When asked whether the people of Nahrawan (who were Kharijites) were unbelievers, ‘Alī replied, “They have fled from unbelief.” Ibn Baṭṭāl is also of the opinion that the Kharijites are to be considered *bughāh* (those who have rebelled against the legitimate Muslim ruler based on a judicial misinterpretation) if they dissent and initiate war.

Lastly, Muslim scholars agree that the practice of *takfir* is a dangerous one with grave consequences.

DUTIES OF YOUNG MUSLIMS

The first duty of Muslim youth is to rectify their thoughts and perspectives with a view to knowing their religion on the basis of clear evidence and understanding. The starting point for such an understanding is adherence to a sound methodology for comprehending Islam and for dealing with themselves, people and life. Historically, Muslim scholars concerned themselves with establishing the principles and criteria needed for correct comprehension and for deducing rulings on both matters which have been spelled out clearly by the Lawgiver, and matters concerning which there is no explicit text. This led to the establishment of the science of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, or the fundamentals of jurisprudence, which may be defined as Islamic thought concerning the derivation of practical rulings from the sources of Islam based on detailed evidence. Thus, they established principles relating to the sources of Islamic rulings, the actions upon which rulings are made, and the persons on whose actions they are made. Juristic principles also deal with primary and subsidiary evidence, commands and prohibitions, the general and the particular, the absolute and the restricted, and explicit versus implicit meanings. Scholars of *uṣūl al-fiqh* likewise studied the overall intents of Islamic law and the ways in which it safeguards people's welfare and counteracts that which is harmful. Such scholars divided human interests into the categories of essentials (*al-ḍarūriyyāt*), exigencies (*al-ḥājjiyyāt*) and enhancements (*al-taḥsīniyyāt*). This is indeed a unique science which has no counterpart in other religions, and of which Muslims have the right to be proud.

In addition, there are other principles and criteria not covered by official writings on the fundamentals of jurisprudence but which may be found in various books on hermeneutics (*uṣūl al-tafsīr*) and Qur'anic sciences, as well as books dealing with the science of prophetic hadiths (*uṣūl al-ḥadīth*). In addition to these, there are various rules and principles buried, as it were, in other scholarly works on Islam, including books on Islamic doctrine or hermeneutics, hadith interpretation, jurisprudence, etc., and which will be discerned by those with insight into Islamic law and its inward truths.

What we seek, therefore, for the nascent generations of Muslims, is not a shallow understanding of Islamic texts but rather a deep knowledge and genuine comprehension of the purposes of Qur'anic verses and hadiths. Such an understanding must take the following into consideration:

Firstly, knowledge of and insight into the law of Islam cannot be complete without considering its particular aspects in relation to the general context of the entire truth of Islam. Before a judgment is arrived at, a Qur'anic verse or a hadith must be interpreted in the light of other Qur'anic verses or hadiths, the example of the Prophet as well as the practice of the Companions and the rightly guided caliphs. Moreover, it must be understood in the light of Qur'anic principles and the overall intents of Islamic law. Otherwise there will be a defect in one's understanding and in the conclusions one draws, which in turn could create the appearance of contradictions within the law of Islam and subject it to ridicule and calumny.

For this reason, Imam al-Shāṭibī stipulated two conditions which must be fulfilled by those who engage in independent reasoning (ijtihād): (1) an understanding of the intents underlying the law of Islam in its totality, and (2) the ability to draw conclusions on the basis of this understanding.⁴ The fulfillment of these conditions requires a profound and thorough knowledge of Islamic texts, especially hadiths and other Islamic traditions, insight into the circumstances surrounding each text and the purposes associated with it. In addition, such a scholar should be able to distinguish between those rulings which are eternal and unalterable and those which arose based on a prevailing custom or tradition, specific, transient circumstances or a particular human interest such that the ruling concerned is subject to modification given changes in said customs, circumstances or interests.⁵

One day I was lecturing on proper Islamic attire for women according to the Qur'an and Sunnah when someone in the audience said that the *ḥijāb* mentioned in the Qur'an must include an additional outer covering. I replied that the *ḥijāb* is not an end in itself, but rather a means for decently covering those parts of the body which the law of Islam prohibits one to expose. In this sense, it can

differ from one place and time to another. But the man shouted furiously that the garment required is very clearly specified in a Qur'anic text and that as a result, we have no right to change it. He cited the following verse:

O Prophet! Tell your wives and daughters and the believing women that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad). That is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested. (33:59)

I replied that the Qur'an sometimes specifies certain means and methods that were suitable and common at the time of the revelation, but were never meant to become permanently binding if better or similar ones are found. The following example should demonstrate my point: God said, "Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies of God and your enemies" (8:60). The steed is specifically mentioned above because at the time of revelation, it was one of the most powerful means known at the time. However, there is no reason why Muslims in our times should not use tanks and armored vehicles to achieve the end referred to in the above verse, i.e., to strike fear into the hearts of the enemies of God and of Muslims. Similarly, the woman's outer garment could be any dress which satisfies the objective expressed in verse (33:59), according to which Muslim women should be recognized as Muslims and not molested.

If such is the case when dealing with the Qur'an, which is eternal and comprehensive in nature, it is only to be expected that the Sunnah should contain even more instances of the same phenomenon. The Sunnah is comprised of a multitude of teachings, some legislative and some non-legislative, some general and some specific, some eternal and some which are subject to change if there is a change in the circumstances or conditions which initially necessitated them. In matters related to eating, drinking, and dressing, for example, there are legislative as well as non-legislative pronouncements and examples in the prophetic Sunnah. Eating with the fingers

rather than with cutlery is not compulsory. The former method was more natural and suitable to the simple life and nature of the Arabs at the time of the Prophet. However, this does not mean that using a spoon is forbidden or even undesirable, since spoons are now so widely available that they no longer indicate extravagance or excess. This does not apply, however, to silver or gold tableware, the use of which has clearly been forbidden. Similarly we have to abide by the injunction to eat with the right hand, since the purpose of this teaching is clear and unalterable, and because it seeks to establish a uniform custom among Muslims, directing them to follow a right-hand approach in everything. The Prophet ordered us: "Say *bismillah* (in the name of God) [before you begin] and eat with your right hand."⁶

Similarly, during the Prophet's time, Muslims had no familiarity with sieves, which were introduced later and used to advantage. This does not of course mean that sieves can be regarded as a prohibited innovation or a hateful practice!

Another example is the issue of wearing a short robe, which pious young Muslims insist on despite the problems which it creates for them, as if it were one of the fundamentals of Islam. These young men put forth two arguments: (1) The garment has to be short because this is the type of dress the Prophet and his Companions used. They further believe that other forms of dress lead us to imitate unbelievers, which is prohibited in Islam. (2) It has to be short because there are hadiths which prohibit Muslims to wear a loin-cloth or robe which falls below the ankle. One such hadith reads, "The part of a loin-cloth or robe that hangs below the ankles is in the Fire."⁷ With regard to the first argument, the Prophet's Sunnah known to us is that he wore whatever was available to him. For this reason, he wore tunics, robes, and loin-cloths. The Prophet also wore garments made in Yemen and Persia which were embroidered on the sides with silk. In addition, he sometimes wore a turban with a skullcap under it, and at other times he wore a skullcap without a turban. Imam Ibn al-Qayyim says in *al-Hady al-Nabawi*,

The best guidance is the example of the Prophet, the things he regularly did himself and commanded and encouraged others to do. His Sunnah

in dressing is that he used to wear whatever was available to him, whether it was made of cotton, wool, or linen. He is known to have worn cloaks from the Yemen, green cloaks, a *jubbah*⁸, garments with full-length sleeves, tunics, pants and robes, shoes and sandals... And sometimes he would let a lock of hair grow long in the back.⁹

The textile industry was unknown at that time in the Prophet's immediate environs, so people used to wear clothes imported from the Yemen, Egypt, and Syria. In our time, we have no hesitation about wearing underwear, head coverings, shoes, etc., which were unknown during the Prophet's time. Why, then, all the fuss about the robe in particular?

As for the debate relating to imitation of unbelievers, what we are forbidden to do is to imitate those things which distinguish them as followers of other religions – such as sporting the cross, wearing clerical vestments, celebrating non-Muslim festivals, etc., all of which indicate adherence to a different religion. Ibn Taymiyyah explains all this in detail in his book: *Iqtiḍā' al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm Mukhālafat Ahl al-Jahīm*. With the exception of such conspicuous matters, judgments are to be made on the basis of intention and purpose. If a Muslim deliberately imitates unbelievers, he will be held blameworthy on the basis of his intention. But if a person unintentionally does things which unbelievers do or chooses something which is easier for him or for his job, such as a factory worker's or an engineer's choosing to wear overalls, he is not to be held blameworthy. Nonetheless, it is more becoming for a Muslim to distinguish himself from non-Muslims in all material and spiritual matters to the best of his ability. The gist of the matter is that wearing a short robe is more desirable than wearing a long one. However, wearing a long one is not prohibited if it is just a habit and is not meant to show arrogance, as has already been pointed out.

All the examples given above pertain to purely personal behavior. As such, they are less serious than the issues related to society as a whole, the affairs of the state, and international relations, which are more complex and constitute a danger to the community, the state, and humanity at large in the absence of an insightful jurisprudence

which takes into consideration the proper dimensions of human needs and social interests. When we call for the resumption of a true Islamic lifestyle and the establishment of a truly Islamic society led by an Islamic state, we must recognize the fact that we live in a world in which human relations are highly complex, ideologies are numerous, distances are shrinking, and barriers are beginning to collapse. It is a world that has become smaller than ever before due to unprecedented technological progress. We must also take into consideration the fact that the community includes the powerful and the weak, men and women, adults and children, the righteous and the transgressor. This diversity must be taken into consideration when we seek to guide, legislate, or issue Islamic legal decisions.

A Muslim who seeks God's pleasure may choose to place restrictions on himself and stick to the most extreme and cautious opinions in his endeavor. He may deprive himself of all means of diversion, including singing, music, photography, television, etc. But can any modern state do without these, or can it afford to deprive its citizens of them? Can any effective journalism do without photography? Can any ministry of interior, passport office, immigration or traffic department or educational institution do without photography, which has become the most important means of discovering and preventing crimes and forgery? Can any contemporary state ignore the times it exists in and deprive its subjects of the invaluable services of television and rely solely on the radio on the grounds that television depends upon photography, which is viewed by some seekers of religious knowledge as forbidden to this very day? In short, what I wish to emphasize here is that a person's restrictions on himself may be tolerated and accepted, but it would be intolerable and indeed unacceptable to force these restrictions upon the various groups in the community as a whole.

As we saw earlier, the Prophet said, "Whoever leads people in prayer should shorten it because among them are the weak, the old, and those who have needs to attend to." And this guidance concerning leading people in prayer is likewise applicable to leading people in any other area of life.

THE VARYING CATEGORIES OF ISLAMIC LEGAL RULINGS
AND THE ETHICS OF DISAGREEMENT

One of the most serious problems we face today is the failure of some religious people to take account of the fact that Islamic religious rulings are not all equally important or permanent and that, as a result, different interpretations of Islamic law may be permitted. There are speculative judgments¹⁰ which deal primarily with mundane transactions, customs and manners and which are open to more than one interpretation. Disagreement on these issues based on sound, legitimate independent reasoning represents no harm or threat. On the contrary, it is a blessing for the Ummah, as it demonstrates the flexibility of Islamic law and the breadth of Islamic jurisprudence. In the realm of Islamic jurisprudence, speculative certainty is sufficient for its rulings to be acceptable applications of Islamic law. And in fact, there were differences of opinion among the Prophet's Companions, as well as among their successors, on various issues of this nature. However, such disagreements never caused ill feelings or disunity among them.

As for rulings that deal with matters of doctrine, they are not acceptable unless they are of definitive certainty. And there are, in fact, rulings of this nature which are firmly established based on the Qur'an, the prophetic Sunnah and the consensus of Muslim scholars. Although they are not requirements of the religion, they nevertheless represent the Muslim nation's intellectual and behavioral unity, and deviation from them is a deviation from the Sunnah. As such, such deviation is viewed as sinful and as a prohibited innovation which could lead to unbelief. In addition, there are those rulings which are necessarily recognized by all people, learned or otherwise. Rejection of these rulings is agreed to be an expression of blatant disbelief in God and His Prophet.

Hence, it is not permissible to place all Islamic rulings in the same category or on the same level such that one is justified in accusing of unbelief, sinfulness or innovation anyone who opposes any Islamic ruling whatsoever, simply because it is widely known and circulated among seekers of knowledge or found widely in books on Islamic

jurisprudence. Rather, a distinction needs to be made between rulings on fundamental issues and rulings on subsidiary issues, between those which have been established on the basis of an explicit text from the Qur'an or the Sunnah and those established based on independent reasoning (ijtihād); between definitive texts and speculative ones, and between rulings which are vital to the religion and those that are not. For each has its own particular status.

The great scholars of Islamic history have differed widely in their interpretation of scores of texts. Indeed, on any given issue one is likely to find among Muslim scholars every view that could possibly occur to the human mind. There is wide disagreement, for example, on the heinous sin of murdering a Muslim under duress. Should the punishment fall upon the murderer or upon one who compelled him to do it? Or should it fall upon neither, since the crime was not completely premeditated and committed by any one person? All these possibilities have been articulated and supported by some Muslim scholars. Even within each school of Islamic jurisprudence we find different opinions, narrations, perspectives and approaches. Suffice it to note here that the disagreements within Imam Aḥmad's school, which is based on adherence to tradition, have encompassed enough opinions and narrations to fill a twelve-volume book, namely, *al-Inṣāf fī al-Rājiḥ min al-Khilāf*.

This being the case, young Muslims should be aware of which issues are subject to disagreement and which are not. Even more importantly, they should know that the area in which disagreement is allowed is much vaster than that in which it is disallowed. And most importantly of all, they must learn "the ethics of disagreement,"¹¹ that is, the rules governing the ways in which we are to behave toward one another when seeking to settle differences. This etiquette is one which we have inherited from Muslim religious leaders and scholars. From them, then, we need to learn how to be open-minded and tolerant toward those with whom we disagree about subsidiary religious matters.

In other words, we need to learn how we can hold differing opinions without our hearts being divided. How can a Muslim disagree with his fellow Muslim without their sense of brotherhood, unity,

love and mutual respect being undermined, and without either of them questioning the sincerity or validity of the other's knowledge or religious faith? First of all, we must realize that disagreements on marginal and subsidiary matters and issues are natural. There is indeed a profound divine wisdom to be seen in the fact that very few Islamic legal rulings are of definitive certainty with respect to both their meaning and their chains of transmission, whereas the vast majority of these rulings are speculative in nature and, for this reason, allow broad scope for fruitful disagreement.

It is a blessing that God has granted some Muslim scholars the ability to investigate, examine closely, and decide which of two points of view has more evidence in its favor without prejudice for or against any particular school or point of view. Such scholars include: Ibn Daqīq al-'Id, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn al-Qayyim, Ibn Kathīr, Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, al-Dahlawī, al-Shawkānī, al-Ṣan'ānī, and others. However, even the efforts of these great minds and of others who have emerged since then have not eliminated differences; on the contrary, disagreements are bound to arise and continue, since they are rooted in the nature of human beings, life, language, and human accountability before the divine commands. Attempts to eradicate these differences are thus bound to fail since they go against the very nature of things. As we have already mentioned, disagreement based on legitimate *ijtihād* which does not create discord or disunity is a blessing for the Ummah and an enrichment of Islamic jurisprudence. Objective disagreement in itself poses no threat if it is coupled with tolerance and is free of fanaticism, accusations, and narrow-mindedness. The Prophet's Companions differed among themselves on many issues and practical Islamic rulings, but they never condemned one another and maintained cordial, strong relations. 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz once said, "I never wished that the Prophet's Companions hadn't had disagreements. On the contrary, their disagreements were a mercy."

Different interpretations emerged during the life of the Prophet, who sanctioned these varied viewpoints and never singled out any one party or group for blame. Immediately after the Battle of the Confederates, the Prophet said to his Companions: "Let those who

believe in God and the Last Day refrain from performing the mid-afternoon prayer (*ṣalāt al-‘aṣr*) until they’ve reached [the dwellings of] Banū Qurayzah.”¹² However, some of the Companions went ahead and prayed on the way, explaining their decision to do so by saying, “What he (the Prophet) meant by what he said was to arrive quickly, not to delay our prayer.” Others, who were more literally minded, delayed their prayer until they had reached the dwellings of Banū Qurayzah as the Prophet had instructed them. When the Prophet was told of the dispute, he approved of the action of both parties, although one of them must have been wrong.

What this incident tells us is that there is no sin in acting upon an interpretation which is based on solid evidence, sincere intention and independent reasoning. According to Ibn al-Qayyim, the first group, who adhered to the implied meaning of what the Prophet said, were the forerunners of *Ahl al-Qiyās* (‘analogists’), while the second group, who adhered to the literal sense of what the Prophet had said, were the forerunners of the *Zāhiriyyah* (literalists). Unfortunately, there are people these days who not only assume that they know the whole truth and all the answers, but who also try to coerce other people into following them in the belief that they can eradicate all schools of thought and disagreements and unite all people in one single stroke. They tend to forget that their own understanding of the texts is no more than a hypothesis which may be right or wrong. Moreover, no scholar is infallible, even if he happens to satisfy all the conditions for being qualified to engage in *ijtihād*. His only certainty is the reward he will receive for his *ijtihād*, whether it was right or wrong, if his intention is sincere. Therefore, the only thing such people can hope to accomplish is the establishment of a new school of thought! How strange, that while they condemn the adherents of the various schools of thought for imitating their imams, they themselves try to persuade people to imitate and follow them.

No one should conclude from what I have just said that I condemn such people for their call to adhere to the texts or for their interpretation or understanding of them. On the contrary, this is the right of everyone who possesses the qualifications and wherewithal to engage in *ijtihād*. No one has the right to close the gates of *ijtihād*

which were opened by the Prophet for the whole Ummah. What I do reject, however, is their presumption, arrogance, vanity, and disregard for the findings of their learned predecessors and their disrespect for the jurisprudence we have inherited from our great forebears. I reject the claim that they alone are right, as well as their belief that they can eliminate disparity and disagreement and unite people on the basis of a single opinion, namely, their own.

An adherent of this “one-opinion” school once asked me why not all Muslims agree on the juristic opinion supported by the text. I replied that the text first has to be authentic and accepted by all, its meaning has to be plain, and it must not be contradicted by another specific text from Islamic law, either equal in strength or stronger, or by any of Islamic law’s universal principles. There should be full agreement as regards the three preceding points. After all, a text may be regarded as authentic by one imam and as weak by another. Moreover, two different imams may view the same text as authentic, but not agree on the meaning it communicates. Similarly, a text may be regarded as general by one imam and as particular by another; by one imam as unconditional and by another as restricted or qualified; by one imam as indicating that a given action is categorically prohibited and by another as indicating that the same act is only undesirable; by one imam as indicating that an action is commanded and by another that it is only recommended; by one imam as binding and by another as abrogated, and so on. Considerations such as these, as well as others, are detailed by Ibn Taymiyyah in his book, *Raf‘ al-Malām ‘an al-A‘immat al-A‘lām*, by Walī Allāh al-Dahlawī in his book, *Ḥujjat Allāh al-Balīghah* and in his treatise entitled *al-Inṣāf fī Asbāb al-Ikhtilāf*, and by Shaykh ‘Alī al-Khafīf in his book, *Asbāb Ikhtilāf al-Fuqahā’*. Let us now consider the following hadiths:

Any woman who wears a gold necklace will be made to wear a similar one [made] of fire on the Day of Judgment. And any woman who wears a pair of gold earrings will have a similar one [made of fire] on the Day of Judgment.¹³

Whoever desires his beloved to wear a ring of fire [on the Day of

Judgment], let him give him [her] a gold ring. And whoever desires his beloved to wear a necklace of fire [on the Day of Judgment], let him give him [her] a gold necklace. And whoever desires his beloved to wear a bracelet of fire [on the Day of Judgment], let him give him [her] a gold bracelet. But you can do whatever you please with silver.¹⁴

It is also related by Thawbān (may God be pleased with him) that the Prophet warned his daughter Fāṭimah against wearing a gold chain. In response, she sold it, then bought a slave with the money and set him free. When the Prophet was told of this, he said: “Thanks be to God, who has rescued Fāṭimah from the Fire.”¹⁵

Jurists have taken different stances on these hadiths:

(1) Some have examined their chains of transmission and, finding them to be weak, rejected them and considered them an insufficient basis for a prohibition, which requires clear-cut evidence and careful investigation, especially with respect to matters of general concern and which Muslim scholars have generally accepted.

(2) Others hold that they are authentic, but have concluded that they have been revoked because of evidence in other sources which permits women to adorn themselves with gold. Al-Bayhaqī and others have reported a consensus among Muslim scholars on this matter, which has been accepted in Islamic jurisprudence and become standard practice.

(3) Some consider these hadiths to be applicable to those who have not paid zakah on the gold they have, basing their opinion on other hadiths which themselves have been subject to criticism. Zakah on women’s jewellery is a subject of disagreement among the different schools of Islamic jurisprudence.

(4) Some jurists argue that these hadiths seek to warn women who adorn themselves with gold in a deliberate attempt to draw attention to their wealth. Al-Nasā’ī has reported some hadiths which are relevant to this issue under the title: *Bāb al-Karāhiyyah li al-Nisā’ fī Izhār Hulī al-Dhahab* (Disapproval of Women’s Display of Golden jewellery). Other jurists say that they are related only to excessive adornment out of vanity or pride.

(5) In recent times Shaykh Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī came out with an opinion which breaks with the consensus on permitting women to adorn themselves with gold, even though it has been accepted by all schools of Islamic jurisprudence for the last fourteen centuries. He not only believes that these hadiths have reliable chains of transmission, but that these texts are categorical in this matter; i.e. prohibiting gold rings and earrings. In this he disagrees with the consensus of Islamic jurisprudence and the practice of the Ummah throughout the past fourteen hundred years.

The question arises, then: Has the existence of these hadiths prevented disagreement on their authenticity or meaning? Can the modern “traditionalist school” eradicate disagreement and unite all people on one opinion on the basis of a hadith or a tradition which they use as evidence? The answer is clear enough: People will continue to disagree and differ amongst themselves, but this need not pose any danger. As God has declared, “To each is a goal to which God turns him” (2:148).

Of all the modern age’s proponents and reformers of Islam, I have found no one with a better understanding of the issue of disagreement and the proper etiquette relating thereto than Hasan al-Banna (d.1949), who taught his followers to adhere to these ethics. Al-Banna demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the cause of Muslim solidarity and exerted sincere efforts to unite the various Muslim groups and help them agree at least on a minimum set of Islamic concepts and principals.

However, as is clear from his well-known work *al-Uṣūl al-ʿIshrūn*, he was convinced of the inevitability of disagreement on subsidiary issues and the practical rulings of Islam. In his treatise, *Daʿwatunā* (Our Call), al-Banna speaks of his call as being a general one which neither patronizes a particular sect nor advocates a particular line of thought. It concerns itself with the core of religion and its essence in the hope that [Muslims’] perspectives and concerns may be united so that their work might be more effective and yield greater fruit. His call supports truth everywhere; it strives for consensus and abhors deviance. In addition, it considers disagreement and disunity to be the most serious affliction which Muslims have

ever suffered, while it views love and unity as the basis for all the victories they have ever achieved. It holds, moreover, that the only hope for invigorating and revitalizing the present-day Ummah lies in reviving and adopting the practice of the early generations of Muslims.

Yet, in spite of his powerful belief in the necessity of unity, al-Banna could write,

We believe that disagreements on subsidiary religious issues are inevitable for various reasons, the most important of which are:

- Intellectual differences resulting from varying levels of intelligence and degrees of knowledge, the multiplicity and interrelatedness of the facts, and the inherent ambiguities of the Arabic language which are bound to affect the interpretation of the texts. In all these people are different, and therefore disagreement is inevitable.
- The abundance of sources of knowledge in some parts of the Islamic world and their scarcity in other places. Imam Mālik once said to Abū Ja‘far, “The Prophet’s Companions scattered into remote regions, each group possessing specific knowledge. If you were to force them to follow one opinion you would create *fitnah*.”¹⁶
- Environmental differences. Al-Shāfi‘ī used to issue different legal decisions in accordance with the different conditions prevailing in Iraq and in Egypt. In both cases he used to base his verdict upon what he believed to be truth.
- The degree of confidence which a given imam has in a written account or tradition upon receiving it. For whereas one imam may find a given narrator fully reliable, another may have doubts about the same narrator and consequently refrain from receiving what he has transmitted in full confidence.
- Varying assessments of meanings; some scholars give precedence to people’s practices over hadiths passed down by a single narrator whereas others do not, and so forth.

For these reasons we believe that a consensus on subsidiary religious matters is not only impossible, but incompatible with the nature of the

religion. In other words, such a demand is bound to generate rigidity and excessiveness, which are contrary to the Islamic imperatives of flexibility, facilitation, and simplicity. It is these virtues which can enable Islam to meet the requirements of all times.

Furthermore, we understand the reasons of those who disagree with us on subsidiary and marginal issues. Such disagreement does not affect our mutual love or cooperation, as we are all included within the comprehensiveness of Islam. Aren't we all Muslim, required to desire for our Muslim brothers what we desire for ourselves? Why, then, can't each of us have a different opinion even as we try to reach agreement, if possible, in an atmosphere of candor and love?

The Companions of the Prophet used to disagree in the legal decisions they issued. But did this create any disunity or rupture among them? The incident relating to praying the mid-afternoon prayer before reaching Banū Qurayzah is a case in point. If these men, who lived closest to the time of the Prophet and knew the various factors that go to make up Islamic legal rulings far better than we do had their differences, isn't it absurd that we so maliciously disagree with each other on frivolous matters? If our own imams, who know the Qur'an and the Sunnah better than anyone else, have had their disagreements and debates, can we not do the same? If there has been disagreement on even clear and well-known subsidiary issues such as the call to prayer issued five times a day which is supported by texts and tradition, then how much more would one expect disagreements over more delicate issues which are matters of opinion and deduction?

We also need to remember that during the time of the caliphate, disagreements were referred to and settled by the caliph. Since there are no caliphs at the present time, Muslims would do well to find a judge to which they can refer their case. Otherwise, their disagreement will lead to further disputes.

Finally, our brothers are fully aware of all this and, consequently, exhibit the greatest patience and open-mindedness toward those who

disagree with them. They believe that each group of people has specific knowledge and that in each call to embrace this or that message there are elements of truth as well as falsity. They carefully investigate the truth and accept it, and seek in an amicable way to convince those who are wrong. If the latter are convinced, it is indeed very good, but if they are not, they remain our Muslim brothers. We ask God to guide both us and them.¹⁷

I would also like to relate an incident from al-Banna's life – one which could easily be the experience of other Muslim scholars as well – to illustrate these concepts and views. One day during Ramadan, al-Banna was invited to deliver a lecture in a small village in Egypt. The people in that village were divided into two camps over the number of *rak'ahs* to be performed during the *tarāwīḥ* prayers.¹⁸ One group argued that according to the tradition of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, they should be twenty. The other group insisted that they must be eight, maintaining that the Prophet was never known to have exceeded this number at any time. Accordingly, each group accused the other of being 'innovators', and their disagreement escalated to the point where some of them had come to blows. When al-Banna arrived, they agreed to refer the matter to him.

The way he handled this event is instructive to all of us. He first asked: "What is the juristic status of *ṣalāt al-tarāwīḥ*?" "An emulation of the Sunnah," came the reply. "Those who perform it are rewarded, but those who do not are not punished." He then asked, "And what is the juristic status of brotherhood among Muslims?" The people replied, "An obligation, one of the fundamentals of faith." "So," he continued, "is it logical or permissible according to Islamic law to neglect an obligation in order to adhere to the Sunnah?" He then told them that if they preserved their brotherhood and unity and each went home and performed *ṣalāt al-tarāwīḥ* according to his own genuine conviction, it would be far better than arguing and quarrelling.

When I mentioned this incident to some people once, they said that al-Banna's reaction was evasive, and that he should have pointed out the difference between a Sunnah practice and an innovation.

This is a Muslim's duty, they insisted. I replied that this is a matter where there is room for different opinions, and that although I perform eight *rak'ahs*, I do not accuse those who perform twenty of being innovators. They persisted that making a decision on such matters is a duty which a Muslim must not evade. I insisted that this is true when the choice is between things which are clearly forbidden (*ḥarām*) and things which are clearly allowed (*ḥalāl*), but that in matters on which the juristic schools of thought have had their disagreements and on which, as a result, each of us may have his own view, there is no need for bigotry or zealotry.

Many fair-minded Muslim scholars have clearly sanctioned this. The following quotation is from one of the books of the Ḥanbali school of jurisprudence entitled, *Sharḥ Ghāyat al-Muntahā*:

Whoever rejects an opinion reached on the basis of *ijtihād* does so because of his ignorance of the status of the those who engage in *ijtihād*, since they will be rewarded – whether their conclusions are correct or incorrect – for their laborious, time-consuming efforts. Those who follow them commit no sin, because God has ordained for each of them that to which his *ijtihād* had led him, and which thereby becomes part of the law of Islam. An illustrative example is the permission granted to someone who, in a state of dire necessity, eats the meat of a dead animal (i.e., one which has not been ritually slaughtered by pronouncing the name of God over it, but has died on its own). However, this is prohibited for a person who freely chooses to do so. Both of these are well-established juristic verdicts.

In *al-Fatāwā al-Miṣriyyah* Ibn Taymiyyah writes,

The right course is to demonstrate concern for unity [among Muslims]. The *basmalah*, for example, may be uttered aloud in order to serve a well-established interest. Thus, abandoning what is preferable [that is, utterance of the *basmalah* silently] may be justified for the sake of knitting people's hearts together, as the Prophet refrained from rebuilding the Ka'bah [on the foundations laid by Abraham] so as not to alienate them [the people of Makkah]. Authoritative Muslim scholars such as

Imam Aḥmad are of this opinion with regard to the *basmalah*; that is to say, they support foregoing a preferable practice [silent utterance of the *basmalah*] in favor of a merely acceptable one [uttering the *basmalah* aloud] in order to preserve believers' unity, to introduce others to a Sunnah-based practice, and the like. And God knows best.

In speaking of the Prophet's having foregone the rebuilding of the Ka'bah, Ibn Taymiyyah is referring to the hadith in which the Prophet says to 'Ā'ishah, "If it were not for the fact that your people just recently emerged from a time of ignorance [i.e., the attitudes and mentality of pre-Islamic times], I would rebuild the Ka'bah on the foundations [laid] by Abraham."¹⁹

Similarly, Ibn al-Qayyim discusses the issue of the prayer of obedience (*du'ā' al-qunūt*) at the time of the dawn prayer. Some people have considered the utterance of this prayer to be an innovation, while others have viewed it as a voluntary prayer to be uttered in times of hardship as well as at other times. In his book, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, Ibn al-Qayyim argues that the Prophet's Sunnah sanctions the utterance of this prayer during times of hardship, and that this has been accepted by hadith scholars who follow what the Prophet did. Thus, they utter it at the times at which the Prophet is known to have uttered it, and abstain from uttering it at the times at which he is known to have abstained. They see both the utterance of this prayer and abstaining from uttering it as an emulation of the Prophet's example. Therefore they object neither to those who utter this prayer on a regular basis nor to those who do not utter it at all; nor do they consider it an innovation. Ibn al-Qayyim writes,

A suitable point in the ritual prayer for asking God's blessings and offering Him praise is the point at which one rises to a standing position after bowing. The Prophet did both in this posture. It is acceptable for the imam to utter the *qunūt* prayer aloud so that the people behind him can hear. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb raised his voice when reciting the opening supplication (*du'ā' al-istiftāḥ*) of the ritual prayer in order that those following him in prayer could hear him, and Ibn 'Abbās would recite the *Fātiḥah* aloud during the prayer for the dead in order to let

people know that it is an emulation of the Sunnah to do so; similar to this is the prayer leader's utterance of the word *Āmīn* (Amen) aloud. Such practices may acceptably be disagreed on; neither those who do them nor those who refrain from them are considered blameworthy. The same applies to raising the hands during prayer, the various ways of uttering the *tashahhud*, the various forms of the call to prayer (*adhān*) and the announcement that prayer is beginning in the mosque (*iqāmah*), as well as the forms of the pilgrimage to Makkah, including *ifrād*²⁰, *qirān*²¹ and *tamattu'*²².

Our purpose in this book is to focus on the Prophet's guidance, which is the criterion for our investigation and quest. As for what is permissible such that neither those who do it nor those who refrain from it are worthy of blame, this has not been our concern. Rather, our concern is with those permissible practices which the Prophet used to choose for himself, and which are the best and most perfect. If we say that there is no indication in his Sunnah that he consistently uttered the prayer of obedience (*du'ā' al-qunūt*) during the dawn prayer or that he uttered the *basmalah* aloud, this does not mean that we should view adherence to these practices as undesirable or forbidden innovations. Rather, it simply means that his guidance is the best and most perfect.²³

Moreover, an individual is permitted to pray behind an imam who adheres to a different school of jurisprudence even if the worshipper has seen the imam do something which, in the worshipper's view, would nullify his ablutions or render his prayer invalid so long as such an act is permissible according to the imam's own school of jurisprudence or *madhhab*. In *al-Fawākih al-Adīdah* Ibn Taymiyyah states,

Muslims agree unanimously on the admissibility of performing ritual prayer behind each other as was the practice of the Companions and their righteous successors, as well as that of the four great jurists of Islam. Whoever rejects this practice is an innovator who has strayed from the teaching of the Qur'an, the prophetic Sunnah, and the consensus of the Muslim community. Although some of the Companions and

their successors uttered the *basmalah* aloud and others did not, they nevertheless continued to perform ritual prayer behind one another. So did Abū Ḥanīfah and his followers, as well as al-Shāfi‘ī and others who used to pray behind the Malikites in Madinah although the latter utter the *basmalah* neither aloud nor silently. It is said that Abū Yūsuf once prayed behind al-Rashīd, who had undergone cupping.²⁴ When Imam Mālik issued Abū Yūsuf a legal decision to the effect that there was no need to renew his ablutions, Abū Yūsuf continued to pray behind al-Rashīd without needing to repeat his prayer later.

Ibn Taymiyyah continues, saying,

However, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal was of the opinion that ablutions must be done after cupping and venesection. Someone once asked him, “If my imam has a discharge of blood and doesn’t stop to renew his ablutions, should I continue to pray behind him?” In reply Ibn Ḥanbal said, “How could you possibly consider not praying behind Sa‘īd ibn al-Musayyab and Mālik?” He then added, “There are two possible situations that might arise in this connection:

(1) The worshipper praying behind the imam is not aware that the imam has done anything that would invalidate his prayer, in which case it is agreed upon by the pious ancestors, the founders of the four main schools of Islamic jurisprudence and others that the worshipper should continue praying behind him.

And: (2) The worshipper praying behind the imam is certain that the imam has done something which would render him ritually impure, such as touching his genitals or women out of sexual desire, undergoing cupping or venesection, or vomiting, after which he prayed without renewing his ablutions. This situation is the subject of a well-known controversy. The majority of our forebears are of the opinion that the prayer of the worshipper following the imam remains valid; the Malikis also hold this view, while some Shāfi‘īs and Ḥanafīs hold a different view. Most of Aḥmad’s texts support the majority opinion, which is the correct one.”²⁵

AWARENESS OF THE VALUES AND RANKS OF ACTIONS

One of the most important benefits of knowledge and understanding of one's religion is that it helps the believer to discern the relative values of actions in the scale of Islamic law and to keep each action in its proper place on the scale of commandments and prohibitions. Such knowledge prevents one from falling into confusion regarding the relative status of various acts, drawing a distinction between acts which are actually similar, or treating as equal acts which are distinct. Islam has given a specific value to each action according to its positive or negative influence on human beings and their lives, be it spiritual or material, and whether we ourselves are aware of this influence or not.

Actions which are encouraged in Islam are divided into ranks, including that of desirable or commendable (*mustahabb*) actions, the neglect of which does not merit punishment but the performance of which is desired by the Lawgiver. There is also the confirmed Sunnah of the Prophet, which includes things which he did regularly and rarely neglected, but did not categorically command others to do. The Companions used to omit some actions in this category lest people think they were obligatory and cause themselves hardship as a result. For this reason, both Abū Bakr and 'Umar used to refrain from offering a ritual animal sacrifice (*dhabīḥah*).

According to some schools of jurisprudence, actions which are encouraged in Islam also include that which is obligatory (*wājib*), namely, actions which are commanded, but not categorically so. As for actions categorized as *farḍ*, they have been categorically and unequivocally commanded, as a result of which their performance merits reward and their omission merits punishment. Failure to adhere to actions categorized as *farḍ* is sinful, while failure to believe in their obligatory nature is unbelief. It is common knowledge that *farḍ* actions are classified further into collective obligations (*farḍ kifāyah*), and individual obligations (*farḍ 'ayn*). Individual obligations are those which must be performed by every Muslim. As for collective obligations, as long as one or more members of the Muslim community performs them, they are not required of the community's other members.

Individual obligations are further divided into classes or degrees. One of these classes is that of *farā'id*, or obligations in Islam which are viewed as fundamental pillars of the religion. These include the testimony of faith (*shahādah*), that is, the act of witnessing that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is His Prophet, Servant and Messenger, ritual prayer, zakah, fasting, and performance of the major pilgrimage to Makkah (*al-ḥajj*) for those who can afford the journey. There are other *farā'id* of a lesser status which are still compulsory.

Islam gives precedence to individual obligations over collective ones. Thus, kindness and submission to parents, which is an individual obligation, takes precedence over jihad so long as it is a collective obligation.²⁶ A son is therefore not allowed to participate in jihad without the prior consent and permission of his parents, a fact which is enshrined in authentic hadiths. Similarly, an individual obligation which is connected with the rights of the community has precedence over another individual obligation which is connected with the rights of an individual, or a number of individuals, such as jihad and devotion to parents. When jihad becomes an individual obligation, as when a Muslim land suffers foreign aggression, it takes precedence over the rights of parents.

In addition, actions classified as *fard* take precedence over those classified as *wājib*, actions classified as *wājib* are given precedence over Sunnah-based actions, and confirmed Sunnah-based actions are given precedence over actions which are merely commendable (*must-aḥabb*). Islam also gives precedence to acts which serve to draw one nearer to God and which are performed communally over those which are performed individually, and prefers acts which benefit others to those which benefit only the person who performs them. For this reason Islam prefers jihad [struggling in self-defence, and against oppression and injustice] over personal worship and the pursuit of knowledge and understanding to worship.

Similarly, it prefers the scholar to one who has devoted himself to worship, and reconciliation between warring parties to voluntary prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Hence, a just ruler will be rewarded more for his adherence to justice for a single day than he would be

for his performance of voluntary acts of worship for sixty years. Lastly, Islam prefers acts of the heart to actions performed by one's bodily members, and belief to action, considering these inward realities to be the pivot and foundation of religion.

Some of the grave errors into which Muslims fell during the period of decline and decadence are outlined below:

(1) They largely neglected those collective duties of concern to the entire Ummah such as scientific, industrial, and military advancement and excellence, without which Muslims cannot attain strength or power. They also neglected the exercise of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) in the realm of Islamic jurisprudence, the derivation of Islamic legal rulings, the call to others to embrace Islam, and opposition to unjust rulers.

(2) They neglected or undervalued some individual obligations, such as the obligation of every Muslim to command the common good and to prohibit what is harmful or undesirable.

(3) They emphasized some of the fundamental pillars of faith at the expense of others; thus they paid more attention to fasting during Ramadan than they did to prayer. That is why those who fasted outnumbered those who prayed, especially among the women. There were indeed those who never prayed at all. There were also those who showed more concern for prayer than they did for *zakah* despite the fact that God mentions the two practices side by side in twenty-eight places in the Qur'an. Indeed, one of the Companions said, "If someone offers no *zakah*, his ritual prayers will be rendered invalid." And Abū Bakr declared, "By God, I will go to war against anyone who gives either prayer or *zakah* more importance than the other!"

(4) They attached more importance to some voluntary acts than they did to obligatory ones. This can be observed in the practice of many of the later Sufis, who concentrated on *adhkār*,²⁷ praise of God and *awrād*²⁸ while neglecting numerous social obligations, such as condemnation of corruption and resistance to social and political injustice.

(5) They paid more attention to individual acts of worship such as prayers and *dhikr*, while neglecting collective pursuits such as

jihad (striving against injustice), the study of jurisprudence, seeking reconciliation among people, and cooperation in the dissemination of righteousness, piety, compassion, and tolerance.

(6) Finally, most people attached a great deal of importance to subsidiary issues at the expense of central ones such as doctrine, faith, affirmation of God's oneness (*tawhīd*) and seeking to serve God in sincerity.

RANKS OF PROHIBITED ACTIONS

Things which are prohibited in Islam are likewise assigned various ranks and degrees, including:

(1) *Al-makrūh tanzīhan*, namely, acts which are undesirable or frowned on but not to the point of being actually forbidden.

(2) *Al-makrūh taḥrīman*, that is, actions which are undesirable nearly to the point of being forbidden.

(3) *Al-mutashābihāt*, that is, actions which are not familiar to many people and which, if someone commits them, cause him or her to fall into wrongdoing.

(4) *Al-ḥarām al-ṣarīḥ*, that is, things which are explicitly forbidden and detailed in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Of these God says: "Why should you not eat of [meats] on which God's name has been pronounced, when He has explained to you in detail what is forbidden to you?" (6:119). Moreover, explicit prohibitions are divided into two types: major and minor. The minor ones can be expiated by the performance of religious devotions such as prayer, fasting and alms. We learn in the Qur'an that "Good deeds remove those that are evil" (11:114). In the Prophet's traditions we learn that constant adherence to the five daily prayers, the communal Friday prayer and fasting during Ramadan expiates whatever minor sins a person may commit in between if he avoids the major ones, the latter of which can only be expiated through genuine repentance. The major sins likewise differ in degree. The worst of these sins is *shirk*, namely, the association of other beings with God; this is a sin which can never be forgiven except through repentance: "God does not forgive that

partners should be set up with Him; but He forgives anything else to whom He pleases; to set up partners with God is to devise a sin most heinous indeed” (4:48). Next in order are sins mentioned in prophetic hadiths such as disobedience to parents, bearing false witness, sorcery, murder, usury, squandering the property and money of orphans, and falsely accusing virtuous Muslim women of sexual sin.

Disturbance and confusion have resulted from: (1) placing so much focus on combating undesirable and dubious actions that insufficient attention is given to combating explicitly prohibited actions and the neglect of obligatory ones. An example of this is excessive concern over actions concerning which there is disagreement as to whether they are *ḥalāl* or *ḥarām*, rather than actions which are clearly *ḥarām*; and (2) distraction with trying to resist minor transgressions rather than the major and mortal sins such as fortune-telling, magic, wizardry, using the tombs of certain people as places of prayer and worship, making vows in the name of entities other than God, making animal sacrifices for dead people, seeking help from the dead and so on, all of which contaminate the purity of belief in the one God.

RANKS OF PEOPLE

Just as actions are ranked, so also are people, that is, Muslims. Some religious youth commit a gross mistake when they treat everyone as though they belonged to the same category. They make no distinction between the elite and the general populace, between those with plenteous knowledge, experience, etc. and those with none, or between those with strong faith and those still new to Islam, and this in spite of the fact that there is a place for everyone in Islam, each in accordance with his status and readiness. In recognition of these natural differences, Islam offers both dispensations and strict laws, strict justice and magnanimity, obligatory and voluntary acts. Hence God says: “Then We have given the Book for inheritance to such of Our servants as We have chosen: but there are among them some who wrong their own souls; some who follow a middle course; and some

who are by God's leave, foremost in good deeds. That is the highest grace" (35:32). The person who wrongs himself has been identified as someone who commits prohibited acts and whose observance of the obligatory duties is incomplete; the person who follows a middle course is someone who performs only the obligatory duties and eschews prohibitions; and the person who is foremost in good deeds is someone who performs both obligatory and recommended actions and who eschews both acts which are prohibited and those that are undesirable or doubtful. All these types of people, including the person who wrongs himself, are included in the fold of Islam and belong to the chosen Ummah to whom God has given the Qur'an: "Then We have given the Book for inheritance to such of Our servants as We have chosen" (35:32).

Thus, it is wrong and, in fact, senseless to exclude people from the fold of Islam and the Ummah simply because they have been disobedient and wronged themselves. It is equally wrong to fail to recognize the classifications mentioned above and to treat people as if they were all foremost in good deeds.

Enthusiastic young Muslims should not be in a hurry to accuse other Muslims of sinfulness and to show animosity toward them simply because they have committed some minor sins, or acts on which there is no clear judgment in Islam due to contradictory evidence and which cannot therefore be considered definitively forbidden. So loyal are they to their cause, these young people have forgotten that the Qur'an clearly distinguishes between minor and major sins or faults, the former of which do not exclude the Muslim from the fold of Islam and can be atoned for by eschewing the latter. God says,

Yes, to God belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth. He rewards those who do evil according to their deeds, and He rewards those who do good with what is best. Those who avoid great sins and shameful deeds, only [falling into] small faults, verily, your Lord is ample in forgiveness. (53:31-32)

The term rendered 'small faults' (*al-lamam*) in this verse has been

understood in two different ways, both of which reveal the vastness of the divine mercy and willingness to forgive. In his commentary on Qur'an 4: 255–256, al-Hāfiz ibn Kathīr states:

The word *muḥsinūn* (those who do good) has been understood to refer to those who avoid great sins and shameful deeds, i.e., the major prohibitions. If such people commit small faults, God will forgive and protect them, as He promised in another verse: “If you [but] eschew the most heinous of the things which you are forbidden to do, we shall expel out of you all the evil in you, and admit you to a gate of great honor.” (4:31)

Ibn Kathīr then tells us that Ibn ‘Abbās said,

The closest thing to *lamam* that I have encountered is found in the following hadith narrated by Abū Hurayrah on the authority of the Prophet, who said, “God has decreed for Adam’s son [Man] his share of fornication which he will inevitably commit. The fornication of the eye is the gaze; the fornication of the tongue is speech; the inner self wishes and desires, and the private parts testify to this or deny it.”²⁹

Hence, Ibn Mas‘ūd and Abū Hurayrah say that *lamam* includes gazing, winking, kissing, and approaching sexual intercourse without committing actual fornication. The other interpretation of *lamam* related by Ibn ‘Abbās is a person who commits a shameful deed but repents of it. He then quotes a line of poetry which can be paraphrased to mean: “O God, Thy forgiveness is plenteous, for who of Your servants is not guilty of minor faults?”³⁰

Some also argue that *lamam* are sins which someone commits infrequently and without getting deeply involved in them. In sum, there is enough room in Islam for everyone who does not persistently commit major sins, because God’s mercy extends to all those who repent.

One of the most instructive Islamic examples for teaching people how to overlook the small mistakes and faults of those who perform the obligatory duties – since no one is infallible – may be found in

the attitude of ‘Umar ibn al- Khaṭṭāb. It is related³¹ that some people went to ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr when he was in Egypt and told him that they had observed that many teachings of the Qur’an were not being adhered to by their contemporaries and that they wanted to question the Caliph, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, about the matter. ‘Abdullah then took them to ‘Umar in Madinah. When ‘Umar met ‘Abdullah, the latter informed him of the purpose of the visit and of the people who had come with him. ‘Umar then asked ‘Abdullah to arrange for a meeting. When the people from Egypt came to the meeting, ‘Umar turned to the nearest of them and said: “Tell me truly, have you read the whole Qur’an?” The man answered in the affirmative. ‘Umar then asked him a series of questions: “Have you yourself strictly followed its teachings in such a way as to purify your intentions and your heart and to hold yourself to account?” The man answered in the negative. ‘Umar then asked: “Have you strictly followed its teaching in your gaze [by not looking at things which God has prohibited you to look at], in your utterances, and in your way of life?” To each of these the man replied in the negative. ‘Umar then asked the same questions of the other members of the group, who all replied in the negative to each question.

‘Umar then said: “How can you demand that he [the caliph, in this instance, ‘Umar himself] force people to adhere to your understanding of God’s Book when you yourselves, by your own admission, have failed to do so? Our Lord knows that each one of us is liable to commit some evil actions.” He then recited the following verse: “If you [but] eschew the most heinous of the things which you are forbidden to do, we shall expel out of you all the evil in you and admit you to a gate of great honor” (4:31).

Turning to the group he asked: “Do the people of Madinah know why you are here?” When they answered in the negative, he said: “Had they known, I would have made an example of you [by severe punishment].”³² With this far-sighted knowledge and insight into the Qur’an, ‘Umar was able to nip this movement in the bud, thereby preventing the infiltration of bigotry and zealotry. Had he shown any leniency in the matter, a great *fitnah* with grave, far-reaching consequences could have ensued.

SYMPATHIZING WITH OTHERS' ABILITIES,
LIMITATIONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES

Another aspect of the understanding needed is the ability to appreciate the varying levels of people's abilities, limitations and circumstances and the things that render them unable to bear up under the forces that make it difficult for them to live the ideal Islamic life. It would be a great mistake to demand that all people become martyrs like Ḥamzah ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib by standing up against the perpetrators of oppression, injustice, and exploitation and sacrificing everything for the sake of calling others to Islam. This is a virtue which none but the exceptional few can actually realize.

Some people may be content to utter the word of truth from a distance; others may even resort to complete silence out of their conviction that the existing situation has become so decadent that it would be futile, and probably dangerous, to object openly or try to change things. Others may believe that reform must begin from the bottom, not from the top, and thus direct their efforts towards individuals whom they believe to be capable of effecting the desired change and reform. Still others may believe that corrupt regimes based on Westernization and secularism can only be changed through long-term, deeply rooted collective action with clear objectives and well-thought-out strategies led by a popular Islamic movement capable of translating dreams into concrete realities.

However, the law of Islam justifies – even requires – silence in the face of evil if speaking out would lead to a greater evil. This is in keeping with the Islamic axiom that a Muslim may choose to endure the lesser of two evils or commit the lesser of two sins in order to prevent the greater. Such a choice is sanctioned by the Qur'an, and is especially obvious in the story of the prophet Moses and his brother, Aaron, who were commissioned to preach the divine message to Pharaoh and his people. Moses ascended Mount Sinai and left his people with Aaron as his deputy. But as soon as Moses had left, the Israelites began to worship a golden calf as was suggested to them by 'the Samaritan', and refused to listen to Aaron's attempts to dissuade them. Aaron had said to them: "O my people! You are being tested

in this: for verily your Lord is Most Gracious: so follow me and obey my command.” They had said, “We will not abandon this cult, but we will devote ourselves to it until Moses returns to us” (20:90–91).

Finding them adamant, however, Aaron kept silent. When Moses returned and discovered what his people had done, he was angered and grieved. He rebuked Aaron harshly, saying, “O Aaron! What kept you back, when you saw them going wrong, from following me? Did you then disobey my order?” (20:93). Aaron replied: “O son of my mother! Seize [me] not by my beard nor by [the hair of] my head. Truly I feared lest you should say: ‘You have caused a division among the children of Israel, and you did not respect my words!’” (20:94).

Aaron, not wanting to be accused of having made a hasty decision and created discord in the community rather than waiting for Moses to return, viewed the preservation of the unity of the community during Moses’s absence as sufficient reason to remain silent over the people’s waywardness. This is relevant to the hadith, mentioned earlier, in which the Prophet said that he would have destroyed the Ka‘bah and rebuilt it on the foundations laid down by Abraham had it not been for the fact that his followers had only recently abandoned their paganism.

Other examples are to be found in the Prophet’s command to Muslims to endure the injustice of their rulers if they do not have the power to oust them and replace them with righteous ones, lest this create even greater divisions among them and temptations to stray from their faith. After all, such a development could lead to catastrophic results such as the shedding of Muslim blood, the loss of property, and instability, yet without achieving any tangible result. Such rulers may therefore be tolerated unless, of course, conditions reach the point of blatant unbelief or apostasy, that is – as the Prophet stated – “Unless you witness open unbelief for which you have evidence from God.”³³

Such examples point to the error of the dreamy idealists who demand that people either be absolutely perfect in observing Islamic teachings or be excluded from the fold of Islam altogether. For them there is simply no midway. In the opinion of such idealists, direct

action is the only means by which to overcome evil. Meanwhile, they disregard the other two means, namely, words and the heart, as the most suitable approach depending on the individual's ability and circumstances. They seem to have forgotten the fact that Islam does not sanction overburdening people; rather, their varying abilities and circumstances must always be taken into consideration. Indeed, the law of Islam takes people's extenuating circumstances and needs into consideration so completely that it issues special rulings pertaining to them in which the prohibited becomes lawful and obligations are dropped. In an apt discussion of this topic, Ibn Taymiyyah writes,

God has told us in many places [in the Qur'an] that He requires no more of anyone than he or she can bear: "No human being shall be burdened with more than he is well able to bear" (2:233); and, "God puts no burden on any person beyond what He has given him" (65:7).

God has also commanded man to obey Him as best he can. He says, "So heed God as much as you can" (64:16). The believers themselves have prayed to Him: "Our Lord! Lay not on us a burden like that which You laid on those before us. Our Lord! Lay not on us a burden greater than we have the strength to bear" (2:286). And God has fulfilled their request. All these texts show that, contrary to the philosophy of the predeterminist Jahmiyyah, God does not place a burden on a person which he or she cannot fulfill; nor, contrary to the views of the fatalist Qadariyyah and the rationalist Mu'tazilah, does He punish those who fall into error or forget.

The point to be emphasized here, then, is that if a ruler, an imam, a scholar, a jurist, a mufti, etc., employs independent reasoning to the best of his ability and with a genuine fear of God, the resulting interpretation will be that which God has asked of him, and He will not be punished if his verdict is wrong. This is contrary to the predeterminist Jahmiyyah, who view a *mujtahid* as someone who is obedient to God, but who may or may not know the truth with respect to a given question. This is contrary also to both the Qadariyyah and the Mu'tazilah, who hold that whoever exerts himself to the utmost in the exercise of

independent reasoning will arrive at the truth. This position of theirs is mistaken, as we have seen; rather, whoever exerts himself to the utmost in the exercise of independent reasoning merits a reward.

The same applies to unbelievers who heard the Prophet's message in their own lands, recognized him as the Messenger of God, believed in what was revealed to him, and obeyed God as best they could – like the Negus and others – but who could not emigrate to the homeland of Islam or adhere to the entire law of Islam either because they were not permitted to emigrate, or because they were not allowed to practice their beliefs openly and had no one to teach them Islamic law. All these individuals are believers who have the hope of enjoying Paradise. Examples of such people include 'the believer' among the people of Pharaoh, Pharaoh's wife and the righteous Joseph (upon him be peace) who, because the people of Egypt were unbelievers, could not act on all that he knew about Islam. Even so, he called them to faith and monotheism despite their failure to respond. God tells us, "And to you there came Joseph in times gone by, with clear signs, but you ceased not to doubt the mission for which he had come. At length, when he died, you said, 'No apostle will God send after him'" (40:34).

Moreover, although the Negus was the king of the Christians, they did not obey him when he asked them to embrace Islam. Only a small group followed him, and therefore, when he died there was no one to perform prayer over him. However, the Prophet performed the prayer for the dead on his behalf in Madinah. A large number joined the prayer as the Prophet told them of the Negus' death, saying, "A righteous brother of yours from the people of Abyssinia has died."³⁴ The Negus, however, had been unable to adhere to a great number of the teachings of Islam; he did not emigrate to the homeland of Islam, for example, participate in jihad, nor perform the pilgrimage to Makkah. It is also related that he did not perform the five daily prayers, fast Ramadan, or give zakah, because these would have revealed his convictions to his people whom he could not go against. We know for certain that he could not apply the judgments of the Qur'an to his people even though God had commanded His Messenger to apply these judgments

to the People of the Book if they sought him, and had warned him not to let the People of the Book persuade him to deviate from even part of what God had revealed to him.

‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz encountered a great deal of animosity and suffering because of his unwavering commitment to justice. In fact, it is believed that he was poisoned because of this. However, the Negus and others like him are joyful in Paradise although they only adhered to that part of the law of Islam which they were capable of adhering to, and although they applied only those rulings which their circumstances permitted them to.³⁵

KNOWLEDGE AND INSIGHT INTO GOD’S WAYS WITH HIS CREATION

Still another aspect of the kind of understanding of Islam which is so needed today is an awareness of the divine law of gradation, both in the cosmos and in legislation, which includes the willingness to wait for things to mature and reach fruition in their own time.

The haste that marks human beings in general and the young in particular, as well as the speed that is such a salient characteristic of our own age, have made many pious Muslim youth eager to sow seeds in the morning and harvest in the evening. However, this is contrary to God’s ways in His own creation: A tree, for example, goes through stages of growth, short or long, before it bears fruit. The very creation of a human being illustrates this clearly.

As God declares,

Then We made the sperm into a clinging clot; then of that clot We made a [fetus] lump; then We made out of that lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh; then We developed out of it another creature. So blessed be God, the best Creator. (23:14)

A child is born, breast-fed and weaned, then he/she gradually grows from childhood to maturity. Similarly, life gradually moves from one stage to another in a realization of God’s designs (*sunan*).

Islam began as a simple religion, after which gradually the commands and prohibitions associated with it were introduced and legislative matters detailed. Slowly but surely, Islam's structure took full shape, and God's favors and blessings were diffused everywhere. Then the following verse was revealed: "This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you and chosen for you Islam as your religion" (5:3).

Such development and its stages are plain enough, but they are rarely, if ever, observed or acknowledged. Enthusiastic young people are outraged by the corruption that surrounds them as they witness and experience on a daily basis the rapidly worsening condition of the Islamic Ummah. This shared concern leads to the formation of groups among Muslim youth that undertake to reform what has been corrupted and rebuild what has been razed. But in their haste and enthusiasm, they lose clarity of vision, they begin to daydream and build castles in the air, believing that they can blot out all forms of corruption and falsehood and establish the ideal Islamic state overnight. In so doing, they underestimate or disregard the incalculable obstacles and impediments they are bound to encounter along the way. They are like the man who once said to Ibn Sirīn, "I dreamt I was swimming on dry land and flying without wings. So, how would you interpret this vision?" In response, Ibn Sirīn said, "You're a man of many dreams and wishes!" 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib once cautioned his son: "Beware of relying on wishes. They're fools' merchandise!" A certain poet expressed the same truth in the words, "Be not a slave to aspirations; they're the capital of the bankrupt!"

Undesirable realities are not changed by pleasant wishes and good-hearted intentions. In his invaluable book entitled, *Ḥattā Yughayyirū Mā fī Anfusihim* (Until They Change What is in Their Hearts), Syrian scholar Jawdat Sa'īd discusses "patterns or principles of psychological and social change." The book's title is derived from the following two Qur'anic verses: "Verily, God does not change men's condition unless they change their inner selves" (13:11)³⁶ and, "Because God will never change the grace which He has bestowed on a people until they change what is in their [own] souls" (8:53).

True to its title, this book is a thorough-going social and psychological study in light of the teachings of the Qur'an. In the author's introduction he states wisely,

There are those among young Muslims who have the readiness and the determination to sacrifice their lives and wealth for the cause of Islam. Unfortunately, there are only a few among them who would choose to spend years of their lives pursuing serious research, mastering a discipline or clarifying a difficult-to-understand reality, such as the split between Muslims' belief and behavior, between what they profess and what they actually do. Such issues raise questions that call for much-needed objective and well-informed answers without which no constructive change is possible. The sluggish progress in this type of study is due to the Islamic world's long-standing belief that: "The sword is mightier than the pen" rather than, "Look and think before you leap."

Moreover, the conditions for faith have not yet been carefully studied in the Muslim world. This does not mean that Muslims have not learned the fundamentals of faith and of Islam. Rather, by this we mean the psychological conditions, i.e., that which must be changed within the soul, because it is this type of change which causes faith to bear fruit. In other words, we are speaking of the condition that there be conformity between action and belief.

It is still believed that self-sacrifice and the giving of alms represent the highest virtues of faith, yet without serious consideration of what it is that makes such sacrifices of value. Mere sacrifice is not sufficient, since it will yield no results unless certain conditions are satisfied. Failure to understand this fact encourages a willingness in young Muslims to sacrifice their lives and wealth, yet without a corresponding willingness to exert the effort required by ongoing study and deepening comprehension.

Self-sacrifice may result from a momentary impulse, whereas the pursuit of knowledge demands ongoing effort, which in turns requires the

kind of consciousness which, like fuel, makes it possible to persevere. It may be true that many youth, in a moment of enthusiasm, commence projects and studies in various fields, but not long after they start, their enthusiasm begins to wane, boredom sets in, and they abandon what they started the way a lamp goes out once its fuel has been consumed. Hence, we need to take a careful look at such harmful attitudes and seek to discover the causes of such inattention to serious study or, once it has begun, the unwillingness to follow through with it. After all, such phenomena are bound to result from specific causes and factors which cannot be detected by hasty minds.

It is rather ironic that we strive impatiently to change external reality, yet without considering the possibility that this will never come about in the absence of any changes in ourselves. We fail to realize that much of the reality we want to change is due to things within us; in other words, we lack consciousness of our own roles in perpetuating our outward reality. This is what the Qur'an seeks to teach humans by explaining what happens to them and emphasizing that the core of our problems is not an external injustice but, rather, the injustice that we bring on ourselves by virtue of what is inside us. This is the law of history and society which the Qur'an affirms. Failure to realize this plain truth blurs our vision and generates philosophies which are either pessimistic and passive, or despotic and anti-Islamic.

The gravest self-inflicted injustice is, indeed, the failure to perceive the cause-and-effect relationship between human beings, the universe, and society. As a result, man misjudges his own abilities and fails to put himself where he can harness human and natural potential to advantage in accordance with the laws inherent within them. Accordingly, we might say that when confronted with a problem, there are two possible attitudes one might take. The first attitude is based on the assumption that the problem is governed by certain laws and can, therefore, be solved and brought under control. The second attitude is based on the assumption that the problem is mysterious and supernatural and, therefore, not governed by any discernible laws. Between these two extremes there are numerous other intermediate attitudes, each of

which has practical results which are reflected in varying degrees in people's attitudes and behavior.

It is not difficult to see that Muslims are failing to live in accordance with the teachings of Islam. However, once the problem has been acknowledged, the question remains: Which of the foregoing attitudes should Muslims take toward it? Discussion of the issue can be helpful, since it can serve to clarify what attitude a given individual takes toward this problem and help him or her to be aware of this attitude rather than allowing it to remain vague, ambiguous and unacknowledged. In many cases, the two attitudes coexist in a person's mind, with each of them negating the effect of the other and leading the person into a state of paralysis. However, a sound, clear hypothesis offers hope that we can arrive at a solution.

A DIALOGUE ON THE LAWS AND CONDITIONS OF VICTORY

Below is a dialogue which took place between me and a young Muslim enthusiast. He was the questioner and I the respondent:

Q: Isn't it true that we're right and our opponents are wrong?

A: Yes, indeed.

Q: Hasn't our Lord promised us that truth will triumph over falsehood, and faith over unbelief?

A: Yes, and God will never break His promise.

Q: So, what are we waiting for? Why don't we wage war against falsehood?

A: Our religion instructs us that victory is governed by certain laws and conditions to which we must adhere. Otherwise, the Prophet would have declared war on paganism at the beginning of the Makkan period. He wouldn't have been willing to perform the ritual prayer at the Ka'bah when it was surrounded by idols.

Q: So, what are these laws and conditions?

A: First, God does not cause truth to be triumphant simply because it is truth. Rather, He makes it victorious through the united efforts of the righteous and brotherly people who believe in Him. This is clear from the following verse: "He it is that has strengthened

you with His aid and with the believers, and has put affection in their hearts” (8:62–63).

Q: But what about the angels that descended to aid truth against falsehood, such as those that aided the believers during the Battle of Badr, the Battle of the Trench, and the Battle of Hunayn?

A: The angels are there and will come to believers’ rescue when God so wills. However, they won’t descend in a vacuum: there must be true believers down here on earth who strive to make truth prevail and who need aid from heaven to strengthen them. The Qur’an is clear on this issue, as can be seen in the following verse which was revealed during the Battle of Badr: “Remember your Lord inspired the angels [with the message]: ‘I am with you. Give firmness to the believers.’ I will instill terror into the hearts of the unbelievers” (8:12).

Q: If there are true believers, will that ensure victory?

A: They have to spread Islam to the best of their ability, multiply their numbers, and conduct dialogues with their opponents in the hope of convincing them of the truth of their claims. In this way they’ll obtain the power to encounter their enemies. It would be irrational for one single person to attempt to stand up against a hundred or a thousand. According to the Qur’an, the maximum number of unbelievers that a true believer full of vigor and determination, could stand up against is ten:

O Prophet! Rouse the believers to fight. If there are twenty among you, patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred; if a hundred, they will vanquish a thousand of the unbelievers. (8:65)

But in times of weakness, the numbers are different:

For the present, God has lightened your [task] for He knows that there is a weak spot in you: But [even so], if there are a hundred of you, patient and persevering, they will vanquish two hundred, and if a thousand, they will vanquish two thousand, with the leave of God. For God is with those who patiently persevere. (8:66)

Q: But our adversaries are always on the alert; they excel in sabotaging our efforts to spread the divine word.

A: This certifies the claim that there is an indispensable condition without which no victory can be guaranteed, i.e., patience in the face of suffering, perseverance in the face of defiance and provocation. The Prophet told his cousin ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbās that “Patience is a prerequisite of victory!” This is also the advice of God to His Prophet: “Follow the inspiration sent unto you, and be patient and constant until God decides, for He is the Best to decide” (10:109). And in another verse He declares, “And be patient, for your patience is but from God, nor grieve over them, and do not distress yourself because of their plots, for God is with those who restrain themselves and those who do good” (16:127–128); “So patiently persevere, for verily the promise of God is true. Nor let those who have [themselves] no certainty of faith shake your firmness” (30:60); “And therefore patiently persevere, as did [all] messengers of inflexible purpose; and be in no haste about the [unbelievers]” (46:35); “Now await in patience the command of your Lord, for verily you are in Our eyes, and celebrate the praises of your Lord while you stand forth” (52:48).

Q: But we may patiently persevere for too long without ever succeeding in establishing an Islamic state which will apply Islamic law, revive the Muslim Ummah and raise high the banner of Islam once more.

A: But in the meantime, aren’t you instructing the ignorant person, guiding others to the right path, and leading the disobedient to repentance?

Q: Of course.

A: This is a tremendous achievement which brings us closer to our goal. Every person you wrest from the clutches of ignorance and set on the right path will bring us closer to the ultimate goal. In fact, these things in themselves are an aim to be sought. The Prophet said: “For God to guide a single person through you to the straight path is better for you than all the finest bred camels [you might possess].” Furthermore, what is required of us, and what God will hold us to account for, is to invite others to the truth and to strive, but not

necessarily to win victory. Our job is to sow the seed and wait for the harvest from God. On the Last Day God isn't going to ask us, "Why weren't you victorious?" Rather, He will ask us, "Why didn't you strive?!" As the Qur'an reminds us,

And say, "Work [righteousness]: Soon will God observe your work and His messenger, and the believers. Soon you will be brought back to the Knower of what is hidden and what is open. Then will He show you the truth of all that you did." (9:105)

Advice to Muslim Youth

At the conclusion to my previously mentioned study published in *al-Ummah* in which I discuss the positive and negative aspects of the “Reawakening of Muslim Youth,” I emphasize two facts:

First. That this resurgence signifies a natural, healthy phenomenon which is clearly indicative of a return to inborn human nature, to our roots, which – for us in our Muslim homeland – is simply Islam. After all, for us Islam is the beginning and the end, in which we seek refuge from difficulties and from which we draw spiritual strength, hope and guidance. Our Muslim communities have tried solutions imported from West and East, but all have failed to achieve the hoped-for individual spiritual transformation, societal advance, religious reform or material prosperity. On the contrary, the adoption of these imported, alien systems has brought nothing but the setbacks, disunity and disintegration whose effects we are witnessing today in Muslim communities. It comes as no surprise, then, that public opinion now firmly supports the Islamic solution, i.e., the application of Islamic law to all aspects of life, nor that young Muslims are playing their role in this endeavor with forcefulness and resolve.

Second. The manifestations of rigidity and strictness in some of our youth will not be rectified by violence or threats; on the contrary, violence will do nothing but exacerbate their hard-line stances and will increase their determination. Nor will it be rectified through

accusations and attempts to cast doubt on their integrity or beliefs. Indeed, none of us can possibly doubt these young people's good intentions and their sincerity towards God and themselves. Rather, such phenomena can only be remedied by identifying with the youth, understanding their attitudes and thinking, demonstrating confidence in their intentions and aims, working to bridge the gap between them and the rest of society, and entering into patient dialogue with them in order to clarify conceptions, clear up misunderstandings, and identify points of agreement and disagreement.

TOWARD CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE

In pursuance of such dialogues, I have given much advice to Muslim youths. In doing so, I have sought nothing but God's pleasure. The Prophet taught us that believers should always consult with and advise one another, commanding the common good and forbidding evil and undesirable practices with patience and perseverance. These are necessary requisites for achieving success in this life and reward in the hereafter. In offering such advice, my intention is simply to point to signposts along the way which will, hopefully, help direct us toward our goal, enable us to avoid pitfalls and deviation, and ensure the continuity of our march. My advice may be summed up as follows:

a) Show Respect for Those with a Specialization

We live in an age in which specialization has become essential; excelling in one discipline does not necessarily mean excelling in another. Just as a physician cannot be consulted on engineering matters or an engineer on law, it is a mistake to believe that the law of Islam can be interpreted by just anyone. Such a person might claim, for example, that knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence is not the sole province of a select few and that Islam, unlike other religions, does not recognize the existence of a special 'clergy class'. It is clearly true that Islam has never known such a class as the Christian clergy class; however, it fully recognizes the role assigned to scholars with a

specialization in religious matters. Such individuals are referred to in the Qur'an in the words, "Nor should the believers all go forth together. If a contingent from every expedition remained behind, they could devote themselves to studies in religion, and admonish the people when they return to them, that thus they [may learn] to guard themselves [against evil]" (9:122).

The Qur'an and the Sunnah both teach us to refer matters of which we have no knowledge to the learned and the experienced:

Before you, also, the messengers We sent were but men to whom We granted inspiration. If you realize this not, ask of those who possess the Message. (21:7)

When there comes to them some matter touching [public] safety or fear, they divulge it. If they had only referred it to the Messenger, or to those charged with authority among them, the proper investigators would have tested it from them [direct]. (4:83)

Ask then, about Him of any acquainted [with such things]. (25:59)

And none [O man!] can tell you [the Truth] like the one who is acquainted with all things. (35:14)

The Prophet was once informed that a wounded man had been given a fatwa according to which he was required to wash his entire body as others do when they perform total ablutions (*al-ightisāl*), after which he did as he was told and died as a result. In response the Prophet declared, "Since they caused his death, may God cause their death [as well]! Should they not have asked if they were not sure...?"

It is indeed shocking to discover that there are people who, even though totally unqualified, are only too ready to issue legal opinions on the most serious and complex issues, and despite the fact that such opinions may contradict those of both earlier and contemporary Muslim scholars. Such people may dismiss as wrong the legal opinions of other scholars whom they accuse of ignorance, claiming that the gates of *ijtihad* are open to all. This is true; however, *ijtihad*

requires the fulfillment of certain qualifications of which such people possess none. Our forebears criticized even some of the learned who hastened to issue legal opinions without careful consideration and knowledge of the matter concerned, saying, "Some people hastily issue legal opinions on matters which, if they had been referred to 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, would have caused him to consult all the people [who took part in the battle] of Badr." And according to one well-known saying, "Those who are boldest in issuing legal opinions are likewise the boldest in [entering] the Fire."

Despite the profound depth of knowledge possessed by the rightly guided caliphs, they would consult and be consulted by their learned companions when confronted with critical issues. It was out of the body of legal opinions which were arrived at in this collective fashion that there emerged the concept of *ijma'* (consensus) in the first Islamic era. When consulted, some Companions would refrain from making any comment or refer the question to someone else, while others would simply say, "I don't know." 'Utbah ibn Muslim reported that he was once Ibn 'Umar's companion for a period of thirty-four months. During that time, Ibn 'Umar was asked about various important issues and he often replied that he did not know. Ibn Abū Laylā related the following about one hundred and twenty of the Prophet's Companions, most of whom were from among his supporters in the city of Madinah and were Ibn Abū Laylā's contemporaries. When one of them was consulted on a certain issue, he would refer the questioner to another, who in turn would refer him to another and so on until the questioner finally ended up back with the person he had approached first. And not one of the people he approached was willing to report a hadith or be asked his opinion on anything.

Similarly, in describing his contemporaries, 'Aṭā' ibn al-Ṣa'ib related that if any of them was asked to issue a legal opinion, he would tremble as he spoke.

Moving on to the followers of the Prophet's Companions, we find that the most learned of them all, namely, Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyab, would rarely issue a legal opinion, and that when he was obliged to do so he would ask God to deliver him from error and, should he err,

to deliver others from harm on his account. The same caution is observed repeatedly in the practice of the imams who founded the major schools of Islamic jurisprudence. It was the rule rather than the exception for them to reply that they did not know when they were uncertain. Imam Mālik, for instance, was exceptionally cautious and used to say: “If a person is asked about a certain issue, he should think of Heaven and Hell and of his own salvation in the hereafter before he replies.” Ibn al-Qāsim also heard Mālik say, “I have been investigating a particular issue for more than ten years, but I have not made up my mind about it yet.” Ibn Mahdī once heard Mālik say, “Sometimes a matter is brought to me [to investigate], and I spend the whole night [thinking about] it.” Moreover, Muṣ‘ab related that his father was once consulted on a certain issue but, uncertain of the answer, he asked his son to take the questioner to Mālik, whose reply was: “I cannot tell, go and ask those who know better.” Ibn Abī Ḥasan said, “Mālik was consulted on twenty-one issues, but he only issued a legal opinion on two of them, after which he said over and over, ‘There is no strength or power but in God.’”

It is certainly not my intention to discourage young Muslims from the pursuit of knowledge and learning. On the contrary, learning is an obligation which is enjoined upon us from the cradle to the grave. Rather, what I wish to emphasize here is simply that however broad our learning and knowledge may be, we are bound to need those with specialized knowledge as well. The study of Islamic law entails the use of tools which many Muslim youths do not have access to, principles of which they have no understanding, and branches and complementary disciplines which they have neither the time nor the leisure to master.

Furthermore, I feel obliged to point out that I do not approve of the tendency of some youths to abandon the major in which they have enrolled – be it literature, business, medicine, engineering, or anything else – and in which they have made good progress and are expected to do well, in order to specialize in Islamic law.

Such people are ignoring the fact that to pursue knowledge and to excel in a discipline is a collective obligation in Islam. It should

also be observed that the competition between Muslims and non-Muslims for mastery of the secular sciences is at its fiercest. When a Muslim seeks to learn, excel, and acquire insight into such sciences for the sake of God he is actually engaging in worship and jihad.

Let us remember that when the divine message was revealed to the Prophet, his Companions had practiced a variety of professions. The Prophet did not ask them to give up their livelihoods and devote themselves to the study of Islam, except, of course, those who were entrusted with a special mission and who had to adjust themselves to its fulfillment. What I fear is that the tendency to give up the pursuit of other disciplines in order to study and master Islamic law may be motivated by a covert desire for prominence and leadership in meetings, debates and seminars. Such a desire is not easy to detect because Satan has countless ruses and inlets into the human soul, and we human beings are vulnerable to temptation unless we're constantly on the alert. Consequently we should carefully examine our thoughts, motives and actions in order to determine whether they are worldly or spiritual in nature, and whether we're seeking to please God or people. In this way we can avoid deceiving ourselves and move forward with full awareness of our Lord and of our affairs. As God declares, "Whoever holds firmly to God will be shown a way that is straight" (3:101).

b) Take Counsel from People of Piety and Moderation

Since every discipline has its specialists, my advice to young Muslims is to acquire their religious knowledge from trustworthy scholars who combine depth of knowledge with piety, righteousness, and balance in their own lives. The main sources of Islamic knowledge are the Qur'an and Sunnah; however, no one can enrich his understanding and knowledge of these sources without the insights of Muslim exegetes and the explanations of scholars of Islamic jurisprudence who devoted their lives to the service of the Qur'an and the Sunnah and who also established the fundamentals of Islamic jurisprudence, thereby transmitting to us a legacy which only the ignorant and the arrogant would dare disregard.

A person who prides himself on knowledge of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, yet despises the knowledge handed down to us by our learned predecessors, cannot be entrusted with the teachings of Islam. On the other hand, a person who draws only on the findings of Muslim scholars and legists while neglecting the evidence found in the Qur'an and Hadith ignores the sources of Islamic faith and legislation.

There are scholars who specialize in a particular branch of Islamic culture not directly related to the Qur'an and the Sunnah, such as history, philosophy, or Sufism. Such individuals can be useful in their particular fields, but they are not qualified to issue legal opinions or to teach Islamic law to others. Some of these may be born orators and preachers with the ability to persuade others with their eloquence. However, this does not qualify them for scholarly investigation, because they often mix truth with myth, the genuine with the false, the significant with the insignificant. They issue invalid legal opinions on matters which they do not fully comprehend; they confuse issues and priorities; and they unduly exaggerate or underestimate matters. However, people who are enchanted by their style and eloquence unhesitatingly accept their verdicts and opinions. Thus we need to be reminded that rhetoric is one thing and solid understanding is another, and that the person who excels in one thing does not necessarily excel in another.

Furthermore, a person who does not practice what he preaches is not worthy to teach or guide others. Practice is manifested in righteousness, piety, and the consciousness of God, which are the fruits of genuine knowledge. The Qur'an says, "Those who truly fear God among His servants are those who have knowledge" (35:28). Such piety and fear of God will prevent a Muslim scholar from delving ignorantly into religious issues of which he is not knowledgeable, or from using his knowledge in the service of a specific ruler or regime.

A third characteristic which may be observed in a truly learned person is balance and moderation, which are distinguishing marks of Islam. We have been afflicted in the present age by two opposing groups of people: the excessive and the negligent, the extremists and the rejectionists. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī warned that "religion will be lost as a result of the practice of both the excessive and the negligent."

The former tend to prohibit almost everything while the latter make nearly everything lawful and permissible.

Some extremists insist on slavish adherence to one school of jurisprudence and seek to close the gates of *ijtihad*. The lax and negligent, by contrast, defame all schools of jurisprudence and disregard all their efforts and interpretations. At one extreme we have the literalists, who adhere to the apparent meanings of texts without any consideration for their intents or rules, and at the other extreme we have those who try to mold the contents of texts to fit their own whims and desires. And between one extreme and the other, the real issues are lost. What we need, therefore, are people of balance and moderation who have the mind of a legist and the heart of a pious man; those who strike a balance between the duties required of us and concrete reality, who distinguish between what can be expected from the elect and what can be expected from ordinary believers. Such people are aware of the fact that situations in which there is an element of choice and freedom call for one type of ruling, while situations of dire necessity call for another. They also know that when seeking to facilitate matters for believers, one must not blur the boundaries between the lawful and the prohibited; nor should caution lead one to impose difficulties and hardships on people. Imam Sufyān al-Thawrī, well known for his piety and his profound knowledge of hadith and jurisprudence, said, “Dispensations and licenses must be sought from a trustworthy legist; but strict legal opinions can be issued by anyone!”

c) Make Things Easier, Not More Difficult

Young Muslims are advised to eschew excess and extremism and to commit themselves to moderation and facilitation, especially in dealing with lay people who lack the discipline and endurance of those who have a highly developed sense of God’s presence and what He requires of them. A Muslim can, if he so wishes, adhere to the most cautious or conservative stance on one or more issues. However, if he always disregards the easier path in favor of the more cautious and rigorous, Islam will turn ultimately into a set of strictures that

manifest nothing but austerity and hardship. A careful look at the Qur'an, the Sunnah and the practices of the Prophet's Companions will make clear that in fact, God enjoins facilitation and ease for His servants and warns against excessiveness and needless imposition of difficulties on believers.

The following verses of the Qur'an on the subjects of fasting, cleanliness, marriage, and *qisās* [the law of equality in punishment], respectively, demonstrate this point:

God intends every facility for you; He does not want to put you to difficulties [in the practice of fasting]. (2:185)

God does not wish to place you in a difficulty [in the maintenance of ritual purity]. (5:6)

God does wish to lighten your [difficulties as they pertain to marriage], for man was created weak [in flesh]. (4:28)

O you who believe! The law of equality is prescribed to you in cases of murder: the free for the free, the slave for the slave, the woman for the woman. But if any remission is made by the brother [of the slain], then grant any reasonable demand and compensate him with handsome gratitude. This is a concession and a mercy from your Lord. (2:178)¹

With regard to the Sunnah, reference has already been made to several hadiths which recommend moderation and balance and warn against excessiveness in religion. These include the following:

Beware of excessiveness in religion. [People] before you have perished as a result of it.²

“Ruined are those who indulge in hairsplitting (*tanattu'*).” And the Prophet repeated himself three times.³

A Bedouin once urinated in the mosque and people rushed over to punish him, but the Prophet said to them, “Leave him alone and pour a

bucket of water...[over the place where he has urinated]. Your mission is to make things easy and not to make them difficult.”⁴

Whenever the Prophet had to choose between two options he always chose the easier of the two unless it was a sin.⁵ When the Prophet heard that Mu‘ādh had prolonged the communal prayer, he rebuked him, saying, “O Mu‘ādh! Are you putting the people on trial?” The Prophet then repeated what he had said two more times to emphasize that creating difficulties for people or attempting to use force with them always leads to *fitnah* (discord, dissuasion from one’s Islamic commitments).

In striving for what is most perfect and sound, a person has the right to make things difficult for himself; however, he should not impose the same on other people, since in so doing, he may unintentionally alienate them from religion. For this reason, the Prophet used to prolong his ritual prayers when he was alone but shorten them when he led others. In this connection he said,

Whoever among you leads people in prayer should shorten it, for amongst them are the weak, the sick, the elderly, and those who have needs to attend to. However, if anyone among you performs prayer alone, he may prolong it as much as he wishes.⁶

Similarly, the Prophet said, “As I commence prayer I want to prolong it, but if I hear the crying of a child I shorten it for fear of creating difficulties for his mother.”⁷ Muslim reports that when leading people in prayer, the Prophet used to recite short verses from the Qur’an rather than long ones. ‘Ā’ishah also said. “As a gesture of compassion, the Prophet warned people against the practice of *wiṣāl*⁸. The people objected, saying, ‘But you do that!’ He said, ‘I am not like you. My Lord gives me food and drink by night.’”⁹

Facilitation of matters pertaining to life’s demands is necessary in every age; how much more urgently necessary is it, then, in an age like ours, which is immersed in materialism, lost in distractions, and so full of transgressions that they’ve become the rule, and adherence to one’s religious principles the exception. In fact, holding onto one’s

religion has become about as difficult as holding onto a live ember. This is the reason why the Muslim jurists affirm the principle that “hardship and calamity necessitate facilitation.”

In conducting dialogues with non-Muslims and calling them to Islam, young Muslims are advised to follow the approach which has been outlined in the foregoing. Several verses can be cited in this respect: “Invite [all] to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and nice preaching, and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious” (16:125). The above verse commands not only “nice preaching” but ways which are “most gracious.” Therefore, if there are two ways to conduct a dialogue, the more gracious of the two should be adopted in order to win people’s hearts and build bridges between them. One of the approaches is first to focus on points of agreement, to be followed by discussion of points of disagreement. The Qur’an states, “And dispute not with the People of the Book, except with means better [than mere disputation], unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong [and injury]. But say, ‘We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you. Our God and your God is one, and it is to Him that we bow [in Islam]’” (29:46). Any remaining points of disagreement will be judged by God: “If they wrangle with you, say: ‘God knows best what it is you are doing. God will judge between you on the Day of Judgment concerning the matters on which you differ’” (22:68–69).

If this is the way a Muslim should conduct a dialogue with a non-Muslim, how much more graciously, then, should a Muslim speak to his Muslim brother with whom he is united by this great religion? Some of our Muslim brothers confuse frank statement of the truth with a harsh style, although the two do not necessarily go together. A sagacious proponent of Islam is one who conveys and communicates the message to others in a gentle manner and in the “most gracious” terms, without, of course, compromising the content of his message. Factual evidence should teach us that the content of a message, no matter how great it is, is likely to be distorted and lost through a harsh approach. This is why it was said: “He who commands the common good should do so with kindness.” Imam al-Ghazālī wrote in his book, *al-Amr bi al-Ma‘rūf wa al-Nahī ‘an al-*

Munkar, “A person commanding the common good and forbidding that which is evil and undesirable should show compassion, sympathy, wisdom, and knowledge.” To demonstrate this, he relates the story of a man who came upon al-Ma’mūn, the prominent Abbasid Caliph, and began to counsel him concerning vice and virtue in a rough, crude manner with no consideration for his status. Al-Ma’mūn, who had a good knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence, said to the man,

Speak more kindly. Remember that God once sent someone better than you to a ruler worse than me and commanded the former to speak mildly. He sent Moses and Aaron, who were better than you, to Pharaoh, who was worse than me, and commanded them, “Go, both of you, to Pharaoh, for he has indeed transgressed all bounds, but speak to him mildly. Perchance he may take warning or fear [God]” (20:43-44).

In this way al-Ma’mūn was able to respond to his critic, from whom he received no response. Likewise God taught Moses that his message to Pharaoh should be delivered in a gentle manner, saying, “Go to Pharaoh, for he has indeed transgressed all bounds; and say to him, would you want to be purified [from sin]? – and that I guide you to your Lord, so you should fear Him?” (79:17-19). Further examination of the dialogue between Moses and Pharaoh as related in the Qur’an reveals that the former carried out God’s advice very carefully despite the latter’s tyranny, arrogance, insults, accusations, and attacks (see Surah 26, *al-Shu‘arā’*).

A study of the Prophet’s example as it pertains to this theme also reveals gentleness rather than violence, mercy rather than cruelty, and tenderness rather than hard-heartedness. The Qur’an describes the Prophet’s attitude in the words, “Now has come unto you a Messenger from among yourselves. It grieves him that you should perish and ardently anxious is he over you. To the believers he is most kind and merciful” (9:128). It also describes the Prophet’s relationship with his Companions saying, “It is part of the mercy of God that you deal gently with them. If you were severe or hardhearted, they would have broken away from you” (3:159).

One day, a Jew approached the Prophet and greeted him with the words, “*al-samu ‘alaykum*” (which means literally, “death be upon you”) instead of the usual *al-salamu ‘alaykum*. ‘Ā’ishah was angered by this and replied with a curse of her own. But the Prophet’s only response was, “*wa ‘alaykum*” (and upon you). He then turned to ‘Ā’ishah and said: “God loves kindness in all things,”¹⁰ that is, in matters both worldly and spiritual, and in both word and deed. ‘Ā’ishah relates another hadith in which the Prophet said, “God is kind and loves kindness. Hence, He confers upon the kind person that which He does not confer upon the violent or harsh person, or upon anyone else.”¹¹ We also have on the authority of ‘Ā’ishah that the Prophet said, “Kindness is never found in a thing but that it beautifies it; nor is it absent from a thing but that it renders it defective.”¹² Jarīr ibn ‘Abdullah related that he heard the Prophet say, “He who is deprived of kindness is deprived of all good.”¹³ And what punishment could be greater than to be deprived of all good?

I trust that these texts will suffice to convince those youths who have adopted sullen disapproval and violence as their *modus operandi* that they must eschew this harsh approach of theirs and adopt the path of wisdom and tolerance.

d) Adhere to the Ethics of Da‘wah and Dialogue

In what follows I would like to emphasize several points of relevance to the ethics of *da‘wah* and dialogue:

First. Parental and kinship rights must be observed. Neither parents nor brothers and sisters should be treated with coarseness or disrespect on the grounds that they are transgressors, innovators, or deviants. These failings do not nullify their right to kind and lenient treatment. Parental rights in particular are categorically affirmed in the Qur’an: “But if they [your parents] strive to make you join in worship with Me things of which you have no knowledge, obey them not; yet bear them company in this life with justice [and consideration], and follow the way of those who turn to Me [in love]” (31:15). There is no transgression greater than *shirk*, or idolatry, with the exception of attempting to draw someone else away from faith into

idolatry. Yet even if our parents are guilty of this grave transgression, God commands us to treat them with kindness even as we refuse to obey them in such a manner of conduct.

Similarly, one can learn a great deal from the prophet Abraham's gentle and persuasive approach to leading his polytheist father to the Truth as described in *Surat Maryam* (19). This passage teaches how children should seek to call their parents to God, even if they are idolaters. Abraham persevered in his tender solicitude despite his father's brusque and repellent tone. How much more, then, should we approach our parents in this manner if they are Muslims? Even if they have violated some injunctions of the law of Islam, they remain entitled to certain inviolable rights, both as our parents and as Muslims.

Second. Although Islam teaches the equality of all human beings, there are nevertheless certain differences, such as age, which must be observed and which require us to show politeness and respect. Similarly, we must observe the rights of relatives, spouses, neighbors, and rulers. Islamic ethics teach us that the young must respect the old and that the old must show compassion toward the young. There are many hadiths which enjoin such attitudes: "Respect for an elderly Muslim is a glorification of God;"¹⁴ and: "Anyone who does not demonstrate compassion for the young, respect for the old, and gratitude for the learned is not one of us."¹⁵

Third. Consideration must be given to those people who have long experience in the field of *da'wah*. If, for one reason or another, such people become slack and lose their enthusiasm, we must not forget their past contributions, belittle them or deny them the credit they deserve. This is the Sunnah of the Prophet as evident in the story of Ḥāṭib ibn Abī Balta'ah, who sent a message to the pagans of Quraysh requesting protection for his children and relatives left behind in Makkah in return for information about the strategy and weaponry which the Muslims were preparing in order to conquer Makkah. When the message was intercepted and Ḥāṭib confessed, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was so outraged with this treachery that he asked the Prophet to let him cut off Ḥāṭib's head as a hypocrite. But the Prophet refused, saying: "Who knows? Perhaps God has looked

at [the deeds of] the people [who fought in the battle] of Badr and said to them, ‘Do whatever you please, for I have forgiven you [your past and future sins]?’” Ḥāṭib’s early embrace of Islam and his courage and struggle during the battle of Badr led the Prophet to excuse him for what he had done and to remind his Companions of the special status of those who had fought in the battle of Badr, the first battle between the Muslims and unbelievers.

e) Live with Common People Where They Are

I advise the young to abandon their daydreams and their unrealistic idealism. They must come down to earth and identify with the masses, those who live from hand to mouth in the downtrodden parts of the big cities and in the impoverished and totally forgotten villages. In such places one can find the uncorrupted sources of virtue, simplicity, and purity in the midst of life’s harsh realities. There one can find the potential for social change, the opportunities for effort, struggle, movement, help, and reconstruction; there one can mix with the masses and show kindness and compassion towards the needy, the orphaned, the brokenhearted, the weary, and the oppressed. The realization of such objectives, which is in itself a form of worship, requires collective effort, the formation of committees dedicated to eradicating illiteracy, disease, unemployment, lack of initiative, and harmful habits such as addiction to smoking, alcohol, and drugs; and to exposing and combating corruption, deviation, oppression, bribery, and other practices. The struggle to relieve the suffering of the poor and to provide them with proper guidance is indeed an acceptable form of worship the significance of which many Muslims fail to realize, even though Islamic teachings not only encourage charitable deeds but commend them as individual and collective duties.

In my book entitled, *al-‘Ibādah fī al-Islām* (Worship in Islam) I seek to show that Islam has broadened the realm of worship to include numerous actions which it would never occur to many people to view as forms of worship per se. Indeed, charitable deeds done for the welfare of the community are the best forms of worship and

are considered branches of faith as long as those who do them do not seek praise and cheap popularity but only the pleasure of God. Let us remind ourselves of those hadiths in which we learn that numerous acts, ranging from commanding the common good and forbidding what is evil and undesirable to simply removing something harmful from a path, are all charitable deeds.

Abū Hurayrah relates that the Prophet said,

A Muslim is obliged to offer charity on every joint in his body and every day the sun rises. The administration of justice between two men is also a form of charity; so also is helping a man to mount his donkey, horse, camel, etc., helping him load his goods onto his animal; speaking a kind word; every step taken toward the mosque to pray; and removing harmful things from a path.¹⁶

Ibn ‘Abbās relates another hadith to the same effect:

The Prophet once said, “A prayer is due on every one of a person’s joints every day.” A man who heard him replied, “This is one of the most difficult things you’ve ever required of us!” The Prophet then said, “Your commanding the common good and forbidding what is evil is a prayer, your help for the weak is a prayer, your removal of debris from a pathway is a prayer, and every step you take to the [prescribed daily prayer] is a prayer.”¹⁷

Buraydah relates that the Prophet said, “A man has three hundred and sixty joints, and he must give alms for each one of them.” Thinking that he was speaking of alms in the monetary sense, they [the Prophet’s Companions] said, “Who could afford to do that, O Messenger of God?” The Prophet then said: “Heaping earth upon some phlegm on the floor of the mosque is a kind of alms, as is removing an obstruction from a pathway...”¹⁸

There are many hadiths that rank cheerfulness towards other Muslims, helping the blind, the deaf and the weak, advising those who are lost and confused, relieving the distress of the needy, etc., as forms of worship and alms. In this way, a Muslim lives his life as an

overflowing spring of goodness, mercy and blessing. And by doing good and enjoining others to do the same, he guards against the infiltration of evil. The Prophet said, “Blessed is he whom God has made a key that opens the storehouses of goodness and a lock that shuts out evil.”¹⁹

Some enthusiasts may argue that such social activities distract Muslims from the propagation of Islam and the efforts to help people understand it, which are more binding upon us than anything else. My reply is that social involvement is itself a practical form of *da‘wah* which reaches people in their own environment. Or one might say: It is a call to Islam accompanied by action. After all, calling people isn’t just talk; rather, it is participation in others’ affairs and seeking solutions to their problems.

Aware of this fact, Imam Hasan al-Banna established a section devoted to social services and financial assistance in every branch of the Muslim Brotherhood which he founded in Egypt. He understood that the Muslim is commanded to do charitable work just as he is commanded to bow down and prostrate himself in worship to God. The Qur’an says,

O you who believe! Bow down, prostrate yourselves and adore your Lord and do good that you may prosper. And strive in His cause as you ought to strive [with sincerity and discipline]. He has chosen you, and has imposed no difficulties on you in religion. (22:77-78)

These are the three aspects of the Muslim’s mission in life: his relationship with God, which is defined by worship and service of the Divine; his relationship with society, which is marked by performance of charitable deeds; and his relationship with the powers of darkness and evil, which takes the form of jihad. Someone who occupies himself with the doing of good in society is only occupying himself with what God has commanded him to; consequently, he will be rewarded by God and commended by others.

Muslim enthusiasts might further argue that proponents of Islam should focus their efforts on the establishment of an Islamic state which applies Islamic law to all aspects of life within its borders and

works to promote Islam outside its borders. The achievement of this goal, they argue, will automatically solve all the foregoing problems, since it will provide education to all those who need it, jobs for the unemployed, social security for all who are unable to work, the necessities for all who are in need, medicine for all who are ill, justice for all who are oppressed, and strength for all who are weak. We should be striving to establish this state, they say, and not wasting our time on partial solutions and secondary reforms like someone who takes pain relievers rather than the medicines that will treat the causes of his illness.

In response to such individuals we say: The establishment of an Islamic state which applies the law of Islam and strives to unite all Muslims under the banner of Islam is, of course, the duty of the whole Ummah. All proponents of Islam must do their utmost to achieve this objective, employing in the process the best means and methods at their disposal. In order to realize this objective, however, they will need to coordinate efforts, persuade the doubtful of the nobility of this cause, overcome numerous obstacles, bring up a generation of Islamically-oriented youngsters, and prepare local as well as international public opinion to accept their ideology and their state. All this requires time and perseverance. Until this treasured hope is realized, Muslims should occupy themselves with the things they are capable of doing in the service of their communities and the reform of their societies. And such efforts will develop, hone and test the ability of future generations to lead the Ummah.

It is unacceptable for a Muslim who could, if he so wished, provide a cure for a patient at a public clinic or a charitable hospital to refuse to do so because he is waiting for an Islamic state to be established and provide such services. Nor would it be proper for a Muslim who could organize zakah services to be indifferent to the miseries and distresses of the poor, the orphaned, the elderly and the widowed simply because he holds out the hope that the future Islamic state will provide such assistance through a comprehensive system of social welfare. Similarly, a Muslim has no right to show indifference to the tragic and costly disputes among other Muslims on the pretext that these matters will be dealt with by the future

Islamic state, which will reconcile people and fight the aggressor. On the contrary, the Muslim's duty is to strive against evil and work for righteousness to the best of his ability, no matter how limited his capacities happen to be. We read in the Qur'an: "So heed God as much as you can" (64:16). The desired Islamic state might be likened to an orchard planted with olive and palm trees that will take a relatively long time to produce fruit. Does the orchard's proprietor remain idle during the interim, doing nothing and reaping no fruit until the crop of long-awaited olives and dates is ready for harvest? Of course not. Rather, he plants vegetables and fast-growing trees that will bear fruit quickly, thereby fertilizing his land, investing his time, and occupying himself in a way that brings benefit both to others and himself. And at the same time, he nurtures his olive and palm trees in anticipation of their readiness to be harvested.

f) Think Well of Fellow Muslims

My final piece of paternal advice to young Muslims is to liberate themselves from the fetters of pessimism and despair and assume innocence and goodness in fellow Muslims. In adopting such an optimistic attitude, they will be aided by three particular insights:

First. Human beings are not angels. They were not created from light, but molded from clay. Like their forefather Adam, they are fallible. As we read in the Qur'an: "We had already, beforehand, taken the covenant of Adam, but he forgot, and We found on his part no firm resolve" (20:115). It should come as no surprise, then, that people are right part of the time and wrong part of the time, or that they stumble, then pick themselves up again. Our job, then, is not only to warn them of God's anger and punishment, but to strengthen their faith and hope in God's mercy and forgiveness.

God commanded His Messenger "Say: 'O My Servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the mercy of God: for God forgives all sins for He is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful'" (39:53). The possessive pronoun "my" in the phrase "My servants" signifies God's love, concern, and solicitude toward human beings,

as well as His abundant mercy and forgiveness for all sins however great they may be.

Second. We have been commanded to judge people based on what they profess outwardly, not on what we assume them to believe or not believe. Hence, if someone confesses that “there is no god but God, and Muhammad is His Messenger,” we should treat him as a Muslim. This is in keeping with the Prophet’s example. He said, “I have been ordered [by God] to fight against the people until they testify that none has the right to be worshipped but God and that Muhammad is God’s Messenger, and until they perform the ritual prayers consistently and give zakah. If they do all this, their lives and property will be safe from me and they will be accountable to God alone.” This explains why the Prophet would not punish the hypocrites even though he knew for certain that they were plotting against him. When his Companions suggested that he should kill them to preempt their threat, he replied, “I am afraid people will say that Muhammad kills his companions!”

Third. No one who believes in God and in His Messenger can be devoid of inward goodness, however immersed he may be in evil or embroiled in major transgressions. For even the most serious disobedience does not uproot a person’s faith unless the transgressor deliberately defies God and scorns His commands. Here, as elsewhere, we must heed the example of the Prophet, who treated wrongdoers as a physician would treat a patient, not as a policeman would treat a criminal. He was kind to them and always listened to their problems. The following incident may illustrate this point: A teenager from the tribe of Quraysh once came upon the Prophet and asked permission to fornicate. The Prophet’s Companions were so outraged by the young man’s request that they rushed to punish him, but the Prophet’s attitude was totally different. Calm and composed, he asked the young man to come closer to him and asked, “Would you approve of it [fornication] for your mother?” “No,” the young man replied. “Nor would other people approve of it for their mothers,” said the Prophet. Then he asked the young man whether he would approve of such a thing for his daughter, sister, or aunt. Each time the young man answered in the negative, and each time the Prophet

would add, “And neither would others approve of it for theirs.” Then, placing his hand on the young man’s shoulder he said, “May God forgive his sins, purify his heart, and fortify him [against such desires].”²⁰

The Prophet’s kindness toward this young man clearly grew out of his good will toward him and his confidence in the youth’s inward goodness such that whatever influence evil was having on him was only a passing one. As a result, he discussed the issue with him with patience and compassion until he managed to convince him of the wrongfulness of fornication. And not only this, but the Prophet prayed to God to forgive and guide him.

Extremists could argue, of course, that leniency on this occasion was justifiable given the fact that the young man had not actually committed disobedience yet. Let us, therefore, consider the following example: During the lifetime of the Prophet there was an alcoholic who had repeatedly been brought to the Prophet and repeatedly punished, yet he still persisted in his drinking. One day when he was brought again on the same charge and was lashed, a man from among the people said: “May God curse him! How many times has he been brought [to the Prophet to be punished]?” But the Prophet said, “Do not curse him, for he loves God and His Messenger.” In another version of the same hadith it is reported that the Prophet said, “Do not assist Satan against your brother!” In other words, the Prophet prevented them from cursing this man because their action could have created discord and ill-feeling between him and his Muslim brothers.

The above examples and incidents amply illustrate the Prophet’s insight into human beings’ inherent goodness. We need, more than ever before, to study and follow the exemplary pattern that the Prophet has set for us. Those extremists who indiscriminately accuse whoever makes a mistake of unbelief or idolatry need to understand that a great deal of the corruption and perversion they abhor results mainly from ignorance of Islam, bad company, or forgetfulness. Therefore, they have to change their strategy, remembering that the solution is to help people overcome and defeat such problems. To be harsh, to accuse others of unbelief and to find fault with whatever

they do will only serve to alienate and estrange them. A wise man once said: "Rather than cursing the darkness, try lighting a candle for the road."

And this is likewise my advice to the enthusiastic and sincere young Muslims whom I hold so dear. My intention in all I have written here is expressed in the words of the prophet Shu'ayb who said,

I only desire [your] betterment to the best of my power; and my success [in my task] can only come from God. In Him I trust, and unto Him do I look. (11:88)



NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Al-Qaradawi, "The Awakening of Muslim Youth Is a Salutary Phenomenon to be Guided, Not Resisted," *al-Ummah Magazine* (1981).
2. The Muslim community as identified by its ideology, law, religion, group consciousness, ethics, culture and art.
3. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are from A. Yusuf 'Ali's translation of the meaning of the Qur'an.
4. Reported by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.
5. The term *takfir* is derived from the verb *kaffara*, to declare [someone] an unbeliever, and refers to a trend among some Muslims to label any Muslim who disagrees with their views, or whomever they view as being guilty of heinous transgressions, as an unbeliever (*kāfir*, plural, *kuffār*).

CHAPTER ONE

1. In other words, the poet believed

that his tribe had been a safe haven before becoming vulnerable when afflicted by calamities and forced into an extreme position.

2. Reported by Aḥmad, al-Nasā'ī and Ibn Mājah in their *Sunan*.
3. Reported by Imam Aḥmad in his *Musnad*, al-Nasā'ī and Ibn Kathīr in their *Sunan*, and al-Hākīm in his *Mustadrak*, on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās.
4. Narrated by Muslim. Al-Suyūṭī attributes the hadith to Aḥmad and Abū Dāwūd as well.
5. Mentioned by Ibn Kathīr his commentary on Surah 57, *al-Ḥadīd*.
6. Jihad: Literally, striving. Any earnest striving in the way of God, involving either earnest personal effort, material resources, or arms for righteousness and against evil, wrongdoing and oppression. Where it involves armed struggle, it must be for the defence of the Muslim community or a just war to protect even non-Muslims from evil, oppression and tyranny. [ed.]

7. Narrated by Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*.
8. An agreed-upon hadith.
9. These accounts are mentioned by Ibn Kathīr in his commentary.
10. Reported by al-Bukhārī.
11. Reported by al-Bukhārī.
12. An agreed-upon hadith.
13. Narrated by al-Bazzār on the authority of Jābir with a weak chain of transmission.
14. Narrated by al-Bazzār with a chain of transmission consisting of the narrators relied on in collections of sound hadiths.
15. Narrated by Aḥmad on the authority of ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr; according to Shākir, this hadith has a sound chain of transmission.
16. Narrated by al-Bukhārī and al-Nasā’ī on the authority of Abū Hurayrah.
17. Narrated by al-Bukhārī in his ‘Book of Fasting.’
18. Narrated by al-Bukhārī and al-Tirmidhī.
19. Rejectionists, or Rafidites: A sect of Shiites who approve the practice of defaming the Companions. They were first referred to as Rafidites (Arabic, *Rawāfiḍ*, singular, *Rāfiḍ*) because they rejected their imam, Zayd ibn ‘Alī when he forbade them to insult Abū Bakr and ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb.
20. The term *uṣūl al-fiqh*, or the fundamentals of jurisprudence, encompasses the methods of deriving rulings from the sources of Islamic law (namely, the Qur’an, the Sunnah, analogical reasoning and consensus) and of establishing their juristic or constitutional validity.
21. Reported by Imam Aḥmad and al-Bayhaqī on the authority of Ibn ‘Umar, and by al-Ṭabarī on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās.
22. Narrated by al-Bukhārī.
23. Narrated by al-Bukhārī.
24. Narrated by al-Bukhārī.
25. An agreed-upon hadith.
26. Narrated by al-Bukhārī and others.
27. Narrated by al-Bukhārī.
28. Muhammad Asad’s translation.
29. An agreed-upon hadith.
30. Narrated by Muslim.
31. Reported by Muslim.
32. Narrated by Muslim.
33. *Qiyās*: Analogical deduction from the Qur’an and Sunnah as sources of Islamic law; *Al-maṣāliḥ al-mursalah*, or unrestricted interests (sometimes referred to also as public interests): Interests which are not explicitly identified by any text in the Qur’an or the Sunnah but which are generally agreed upon based on circumstances which arise in human society. Examples of unrestricted interests include the paving of roads, the setting up of administrative offices to handle public needs, the use of traffic signals, the construction of sewers and waste

disposal facilities, etc.; *Istihsān*, or juristic preference: A decision, in the process of arriving at a legal ruling, to refrain from applying to a given situation the same ruling which has been applied to analogous situations in favor of another ruling which is more in keeping with the aims of Islamic Law. In other words, juristic preference involves giving human interests and the aims of the Law priority over the results of *qiyās*, or analogical deduction.

34. See Abd al-Rahman Abu al-Khayr, *Dhikrayātī Ma'a Jamā'at al-Muslimīn, al-Takfīr wa al-Hijrah*.
35. Narrated by al-Bukhārī.
36. Narrated by al-Bukhārī.
37. Narrated by al-Bukhārī.

CHAPTER TWO

1. Cf. the works of Emile Durkheim.
2. 2:173.
3. Reported by both Muslim and al-Bukhārī on the authority of 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr.
4. That is, the process of identifying the basis (*'illah*) for a given legal ruling, and/or the situations out of which the ruling arose.
5. See previous note.
6. That is, the animal sacrificed by those undertaking the minor pilgrimage (*al-'umrah*) followed immediately by the major pil-

grimage (al-Hajj), though entering a state of ritual consecration (*ihrām*) separately for each.

7. The animal sacrificed by those who enter, and remain in, a state of ritual consecration for the duration of both the minor pilgrimage (*al-'umrah*) and the major pilgrimage (al-Hajj).
8. *Mahram*: A male relative who, because of kinship ties, is not permitted to marry the woman in question.
9. See Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Fiqh al-Zakāh*, 1:349-358.
10. Abū Bakr ibn al-'Arabī: *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*.
11. In his book, *'Āridat al-Aḥwadhī fī Sharḥ al-Tirmidhī*.
12. *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 2/947.
13. *'Āridat al-Aḥwadhī*, 3/135.
14. The *tashahhud* is the part of the ritual prayer following the second *rak'ah* in which the worshipper states, "I bear witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is God's servant and Messenger" while raising the index finger of the right hand.
15. Reported by Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd, and al-Tirmidhī.
16. The question may have had to do with whether having some mosquito's blood on his clothing or person would require him to change his clothes or repeat his ablutions before performing the ritual prayer.
17. Narrated by Aḥmad; according

- to Shaykh Shākir, the account has a sound chain of transmission.
18. Reported in the *Ṣaḥīḥ*.
 19. Reported by al-Bukhārī and Muslim on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās.
 20. Reported by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.
 21. Reported by al-Tirmidhī.
 22. Reported by Muslim.
 23. An *izār* is a kind of loincloth or wrap.
 24. More detailed information can be found in my prospective book: “The Issue of *Takfīr*”.
 25. Reported by al-Bukhārī on the authority of Abū Hurayrah.
 26. Reported by al-Bukhārī on the authority of Anas ibn Mālik.
 27. Reported by al-Bukhārī on the authority of Anas ibn Mālik.
 28. This term covers a large number of virtues taken together; including self-respect, modesty, scruples, etc.
 29. The Murji‘ah were of the belief that disobedience can do nothing to detract from faith.
 30. Reported by al-Bukhārī on the authority of Ibn ‘Umar.
 31. Reported by al-Bukhārī on the authority of Abū Hurayrah.
 32. Reported by Aḥmad and al-Bazzār.
 33. See his book, *Madārij al-Sālikīn*.
 34. Reported by Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī and al-Ḥākim.
 35. Reported by Aḥmad and al-Hākim.
 36. Reported by Ibn Ḥabbān and al-Ḥākim, who affirms that its chain of transmission is sound.
 37. Agreed upon and reported on the authority of Abū Hurayrah.
 38. Agreed upon and reported on the authority of ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr.
 39. Muhammad Asad’s translation.
 40. I.e., the Kharijites, who were also called the *Ḥarūriyyah* after the place referred to as *Harūrā*, where they gathered and were fought by ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and the Companions of the Prophet who supported him.
 41. Al-Shāṭibī, *al-I’tisām*, 2: 182–184.
 42. See page 35 of Abū al-Khayr’s reminiscences about “Jamā‘at al-Muslimīn,” the name by which the group is known among its advocates and followers.
 43. Reported by al-Bukhārī.
 44. Al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt*, 2:94.
 45. Reported by al-Bukhārī.
 46. Revised Standard Version.
 47. See my book, *Al-Ḥulūl al-Mustawradah wa Kayfa Janat ‘alā Ummatīnā* (Imported Solutions: A Disaster for Our Ummah), (Cairo: Wahbah . Bookshop, 1977), pp. 113–114.
 48. Reported by al-Bukhārī.
 49. See Qur’an 16: 125.

CHAPTER THREE

1. Reported by Muslim and al-Bukhārī.

2. The term *al-bāghy* has been defined as rebellion against the legitimate Muslim ruler based on a mistaken interpretation of Islam and its teachings.
3. *Nayl al-Awtār*, 7: 352–353.
4. See *al-Muwāfaqāt*, 4: 105–106.
5. See al-Qaradawi, *Sharīʿat al-Islām*.
6. An agreed-upon hadith.
7. Reported by Muslim.
8. A *jubbah* is a long outer garment, open in the front, with wide sleeves.
9. *Zād al-Maʿād*, 1: 143.
10. Speculative judgments refer to Islamic legal rulings that deal with matters concerning which: (1) there is no explicit text in the Qurʾan or the Sunnah, (2) the relevant text in the Qurʾan or the Sunnah has a chain of transmission which is not definitively reliable, or (3) the relevant text in the Qurʾan or the Sunnah has a meaning which is not definitively certain.
11. See Taha Jabir al-ʿAlwani, *Adab al-Ikhtilāf fi al-Islām*, 1987. The first edition was published in Kitāb al-Ummah series in Qatar. Two reprints were published by the International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon, VA, USA. The publication of the French and English versions is underway.
12. Reported by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.
13. Reported by Abū Dawud and al-Nasāʾī on the authority of Asmāʾ Bint Yazīd.
14. Reported by Abū Dāwūd on the authority of Abū Hurayrah.
15. Reported by al-Nasāʾī.
16. That is, misguidance and dissuasion from one's Islamic commitment.
17. The passage above is a summary and paraphrase of Imam al-Banna's views on juristic disagreements, and is a testimony to his deep knowledge of Islam, of history, and of reality.
18. The *tarāwīḥ* prayers are the extended communal prayers performed in the mosque following the final evening prayer (*ṣalāt al-ʿishāʾ*) during Ramadan.
19. Reported by al-Bukhārī.
20. *Ifrād* is the act of entering a state of ritual consecration (*iḥrām*) and performing the major pilgrimage (al-Hajj) unpreceded by the minor pilgrimage (*al-ʿumrah*).
21. *Qirān* is the act of entering ritual consecration, performing the minor pilgrimage during the months designated for the major pilgrimage, then following it immediately with the major pilgrimage.
22. *Tamattuʿ* refers to the act of entering a state of ritual consecration and performing the minor pilgrimage during the months designated for the major pilgrimage, being released from one's state of ritual consecration,

- then entering it once again and performing the major pilgrimage.
23. *Zād al-Ma'ād*, 1:144.
24. Cupping is the process of drawing blood to the surface of the body by the use of a glass vessel inside of which a vacuum has been created by the use of heat (usually a candle). It is generally considered to nullify ritual ablutions.
25. See *al-Fawākih al-ʿAdīdah*, 2:181. See also Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Fatāwā Mu'āshirah*, pp. 201–204, Second Edition.
26. Jihād becomes an individual obligation when, for example, Muslim territory on which one resides is invaded by a foreign power.
27. A *dhikr* (plural, *adhkār*) is a gathering in which God is praised and His name is repeated as a form of worship. The word *dhikr* can also refer to the invocation of the Divine Name as a form of individual worship, generally undertaken under the guidance of a shaykh.
28. A *wird* is a verse, or set of verses, of the Qur'an which are recited at certain times or on certain occasions.
29. Reported by Aḥmad, al-Bukhārī, and Muslim.
30. Reported by Ibn Kathīr on the authority of Ibn Jarīr and al-Tirmidhī. Al-Tirmidhī regards it as authentic but unfamiliar (*gharīb*), while Ibn Kathīr notes that the authenticity of this hadith based on a chain of transmission that goes all the way back to the Prophet is a matter of uncertainty. Moreover, a similar hadith is narrated on the authority of Abū Hurayrah and al-Ḥasan.
31. Reported by Ibn Kathīr on the authority of Ibn ʿAwn, who quotes al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.
32. This incident is narrated by Ibn Jarīr in Ibn Kathīr's commentary on the Qur'an, and ʿUqbah approved its authenticity and its chain of transmission.
33. Reported by al-Bukhārī and Muslim on the authority of ʿUbādah ibn al-Ṣāmit.
34. Reported by Muslim.
35. *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 19:216–219.
36. Muhammad Asad's translation.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. Taken from Muhammad Asad's translation of the Qur'an, *The Message of the Qur'an*.
2. Reported by Aḥmad, al-Nasā'ī, Ibn Mājah and al-Ḥākim on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās with a sound chain of transmission.
3. Reported by Muslim on the authority of Ibn Mas'ūd.
4. Reported by al-Bukhārī on the authority of Abū Hurayrah.
5. An agreed-upon hadith.
6. An agreed-upon hadith.
7. Reported by al-Bukhārī.

8. Fasting two or more days in a row without breaking one's fast after sundown.
9. An agreed-upon hadith.
10. An agreed-upon hadith.
11. Reported by Muslim.
12. Reported by Muslim.
13. Reported by Muslim.
14. Reported by Abū Dawūd on the authority of Abū Mūsā with a sound chain of transmission as mentioned in al-Manāwī's *Taysīr*, 1:347.
15. Reported by Aḥmad on the authority of 'Ubadah ibn al-Şāmit with a good chain of transmission (*isnād ḥasan*) with the wording "does not belong to my nation." It is also reported by al-Ṭabarānī and al-Ḥakīm.
16. An agreed-upon hadith.
17. Reported by Ibn Khuzaymah in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*.
18. Reported by Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Khuzaymah, and Ibn Ḥayyān.
19. Reported by Ibn Mājah.
20. Reported by Aḥmad and al-Ṭabarānī in *al-Kabīr*, where the chain of transmission is composed of reliable narrators, and well as in *Majma' al-Zawā'id*, 1:129.

GENERAL INDEX

- Aaron, 28, 129, 130, 152
Abbasids, 63, 152
‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Kinānī, 42, 52
‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ash‘ath, 63
‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbās, 55, 139
‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr, 14, 45, 128, 165, 166
‘Abdullah ibn ‘Umar, 164
‘Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr, 63
ablutions, 119, 120, 143, 166, 168
Abraham (prophet), 27, 117, 118, 130, 154
Abū Bakr, 20, 47, 49, 121, 123, 164
Abū al-Dardā’, 15
Abū Dāwūd, 163, 166, 167, 169
Abū Ḥanīfah, 18, 33, 42, 43, 120
Abū Hurayrah, 127, 156, 164, 166, 167, 168, 169
Abū Ishāq, 37
Abū Ja‘far, 114
Abū al-Khayr, 167
Abū al-Ma‘ālī, 100
Abū Mūsā, 13, 169
Abū ‘Ubayd, 56
Abū Ya‘lā, 10
Abū Yūsuf, 120
Abyssinia, 25, 132
Adam, 11, 30, 127, 159
adultery, 26
Afghanistan, 78
Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, 18, 33, 120, 163
al-‘Abram, 92
‘Ā’ishah, 12, 17, 25, 70, 118, 150, 153,
Albānī, Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn, 113
alcohol, 34, 45, 48, 70, 72, 155
‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, 31, 46, 55, 98, 134, 166
allegorical verses, 57
Amin al-Husayni, 78
‘Ammār ibn Yāsir, 66
amulet, 53
Anas ibn Mālik, 10, 17, 22, 33, 38, 166
angels, 49, 51, 138, 159
apostasy (see *riḍḍah*), 33, 34, 49, 51, 76, 130
apostate, 33, 50, 98
Arabic language, 47, 114
Arabs, 8, 51, 69, 79, 104
arbitration, 35, 55, 56,
Aristotle, 76
Ataturk, 62, 82
atheism, 76
Badr, 138, 144, 155
al-Baghawī, 25
bāghy, 98, 167

- Banū Qurayzah, 110, 115
Basmalah, 117, 118, 119, 120
 al-Bāqillānī, Abū Bakr, 100
 al-Bayhaqī, 49, 112, 164
 beard, 17, 43, 93, 130
 bedouin, 23, 96, 149
 behavior, 8, 18, 19, 20, 25, 26, 32,
 35, 36, 44, 45, 48, 50, 53, 55, 86,
 90, 91, 93-95, 105, 107, 135,
 137
 belief, 3, 8, 9, 18, 21, 24, 26, 29,
 30, 32-34, 48-53, 58, 60, 73, 75,
 77, 79-85
 believer, 11, 18, 26, 27, 32, 33
bid'ah (see innovation), 37
 blind, xi, 68, 156
 bribery, 74, 155
 al-Bukhārī, 12, 46

 Caesar, 76, 89
 Caliphate, 62, 63, 66, 82, 115
 Canada, 44
 capitalism, 60
 categorical texts, 34, 55
 Catholic Church, 74
 charitable work, 57
 charity, 24, 31, 156
 Christian, 9, 43, 44, 52, 74-76, 94,
 132, 142
 Christianity, 74-76, 94
 Christians, 9, 44, 52, 76, 132
 civilization, xiii, 29, 95
 clergy, 76, 142
 collective obligation (see *fard*
 kifāyah), 121, 122, 145
 Communism, 84
 Communists, 82
 compassion, 26, 27, 90, 124, 150,
 152, 154, 155, 161
 conduct, 3, 4, 8, 29, 42, 72, 138,
 151, 154
 consensus (see *ijmā'*), 22, 33, 61,
 107, 112-114, 119, 144, 164
 corruption, ix, 16, 36, 72, 73, 81,
 91, 99, 123, 134, 155, 161
 crusaders, 72
 crusades, 43

da'wah, vii, xi, xv, 70, 80, 89, 153,
 154, 157
 dervishes, 81
 despotic rulers, 75, 81
 despotism, 36
dhabīḥah, 121
dhikr, *adkhār*, 123, 168
 dialogue, vii, xi, 1, 3, 20, 58, 96,
 97, 137, 138, 142, 151-153
 dispensation (see facilitation), 21,
 46, 125, 148
 drinking water while standing, 46
 Durant, Will, 76

 economic forces, 36,
 economic system, 40, 41, 65
 education, xiii, 25, 86, 88, 106, 158
 Egypt, 2, 60, 66, 78, 83, 92, 105,
 114, 116, 128, 132, 157
 Egyptian government, 61
 elders, 95
 elderly, 5, 22, 73, 150, 154, 158
 Eritrea, 78
 ethics, vii, 36, 48, 49, 65, 75, 81,
 113, 153, 154
 ethics of disagreement, vii, 107, 108
 Europe, 44
 evil, 2, 11, 17, 23, 30, 53, 54, 57,
 67, 71, 80, 94, 124, 126-128,
 131, 142, 143, 152, 156, 157,

- 159-161, 164
 extremists, 2, 17, 19, 29, 30, 34, 45,
 55, 58, 64, 68, 86, 89, 97, 98,
 147, 148, 161
- facilitation (see dispensation), 21,
 23, 46, 115, 148-151
- facility, 21, 149
- faith, 6, 9, 12, 24, 27, 36, 40,
 48-51, 58, 69, 72, 73, 75, 77, 82,
 87, 91, 96, 109, 116, 122-125,
 130, 132, 135, 137, 139, 147,
 153, 156, 159, 160, 166
- falsehood, 2, 55, 59, 60, 62, 63, 66,
 72, 88, 89, 91, 98, 99, 134, 137,
 138
- Falangists, 94
- farḍ*, 121, 122
- farḍ ‘ayn* (see individual obligation),
 121
- farḍ kifāyah* (see collective obliga-
 tion), 121
- farewell pilgrimage, 46
- fasting (see *ṣiyām*), 10, 15, 23, 32,
 39, 70, 122-124, 149, 164, 169
- fatalist, 131
- Fāṭimah, 112
- Fatwa (see legal opinion), 143
- films, 25, 73
- fiqh, 97, 100
- fitnah*, 114, 128, 150
- fornication, 26, 34, 48, 70, 127,
 160, 161
- fortune-teller, 51
- Freemason, 29
- fundamentals of jurisprudence (see
uṣūl al-fiqh), 101, 164
- Gabriel, 49, 50
- Genghiz Khan, 62
- al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid, 100, 151
- gold, 104, 111-113, 129
- good deeds, 6, 13, 22, 23, 91, 92,
 124, 126
- Greek philosophy, 76
- Gulf states, 19
- hadith literature, 19, 31, 50
- Ḥaḍramawt, 72
- hady al-tamattu’*, 39
- al-Ḥāfiẓ ibn Ḥajar, 49
- Hajj (see major pilgrimage), 168
- al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, 63, 75
- ḥalāl*, 17, 70, 117, 125
- Ḥamzah, 129
- ḥarām*, 17, 45, 60, 70, 117, 124,
 125
- Ḥarūriyyah*, 57, 166
- Hasan al-Banna, 113, 114, 116,
 157, 168
- Ḥāṭib, 154
- hereafter, 9, 11, 19, 25, 27, 33, 51,
 53, 142, 145
- ḥijāb*, 102
- Hindu, 94
- hippies, 95
- historical materialism, 36
- history, vi, xvi, 15, 29, 36, 38,
 62-64, 66-69, 74, 75, 108, 136,
 147, 168
- Hulagu, 62
- human nature, 12, 26, 141
- humanity, x, xii, xv, 13, 26, 36, 68,
 77, 84, 105
- Ḥunayn, 138
- al-Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī, 45, 63
- hypocrisy (see *nifāq*), 5, 44, 48, 53,
 54
- hypocrite, 59, 154, 160

- ‘ibādah* (see worship), 155
 Ibn ‘Abbās, 9, 12, 14, 18, 20, 46,
 51, 52, 56–58, 118, 127, 156,
 163, 164, 166, 169
 Ibn Abū Laylā, 144
 Ibn al-‘Arabī, Abū Bakr, 41, 42, 165
 Ibn al-Ash‘ath, 63
 Ibn Aṭā’, 31
 Ibn Baṭṭāl, 100
 Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, 49, 109
 Ibn Kathīr, 109, 127, 163, 164, 168
 Ibn Mahdī, 145
 Ibn Mas‘ūd, 31, 127, 169
 Ibn al-Qāsim, 145
 Ibn al-Qayyim, 51, 52, 104, 109,
 110, 118
 Ibn Sīrīn, 134
 Ibn Taymiyyah, 9, 105, 109, 111,
 117–120, 131
 Ibn ‘Umar, 18, 45, 46, 50, 57, 58,
 144, 164, 166
 Ibn Ziyād, 63
 Ibrahim al-Taymi, 56
 Idealists, 130
 Idolatry (see *shirk*), 153, 154, 161
 idol-worshippers, 32
 ijma‘ (see consensus), 33, 144
 ijtihad, xi, xiii, 43, 102, 108–110,
 117, 123, 143, 148
 ‘Ikrimah, 52
 individual obligation (see *fard ‘ayn*),
 121–123, 168
 imitation of unbelievers, 105
 India, 78
 injustice, 27, 52, 73, 74, 81, 89,
 122–124, 129, 130
 innovation (see *bid‘ah*), 21, 28, 29,
 37, 61, 81
 Inquisition, 74
 intellectual terrorism, 21
iqāmah, 119
 Iraq, 40, 45, 114
 Islamic dress, 17
 Islamic history, 63, 66, 68, 75, 108
 Islamic jurisprudence, 18, 41, 45,
 61, 107–108, 112, 113, 120, 123,
 142, 145, 146, 152
 Islamic law (see law of Islam,
 Sharī‘ah), 6, 15, 20, 32, 37, 38,
 41–43, 47, 49, 55, 59, 60, 65, 70,
 73, 75, 76, 80, 82, 89, 101, 102,
 107, 111, 116, 121, 132, 139,
 141, 145–147, 157, 164, 165
 Islamic state, 17, 70, 80, 106, 134,
 139, 157–159
 Israelites, 87, 129
istihsān, 33, 165
Jahiliyyah, 47, 68
 Jahmites (see *Jahmiyyah*), 29
Jahmiyyah, 131
Jamā‘at al-Takfīr wa al-Hijrah, 32,
 66, 165
 jewelry, 112
 Jews, 9, 44, 52
 jihad, 11, 81, 89, 91, 122, 124, 132,
 146, 157, 163, 168
 jinn, 16
 John the Baptist (see Yaḥyā), 64
 Joseph (prophet), 132
 journalism, 106
 justice, xv, 9, 43, 74, 87, 90, 92, 93,
 122, 125, 133, 153, 156, 158
 Ka‘bah, 24, 40, 56, 65, 117, 118,
 130, 137
 Kabshah, 46
Karāmiyyah, 49
 Khabbāb ibn al-Aratt, 72

- Kharijites (see *al-Khawārij*), 32, 55,
 56, 58, 98–100, 166
al-Khawārij (see Kharijites)
 kindness, 26, 44, 122, 151,
 153–155, 161
 knowledge, xi, 1, 4, 5, 17, 27, 32,
 33, 37, 38, 43, 44, 48, 50, 54–61,
 63, 68, 69, 74, 76, 82, 83, 87, 91,
 94, 97, 102, 106, 107, 109, 114,
 116, 121, 122, 125, 128,
 133–135, 137, 142–148, 153
kufr (see unbelief), 34, 47, 48,
 51–53

 Labīd ibn Rabī‘ah, 17
Lamam, 126, 127
 Law of Islam (see Islamic law,
 Shari‘ah), 16
 Lebanon, 78, 94
 legal opinion (see fatwa), 37,
 143–145, 147, 148
 Legislation, 5, 8, 13, 62, 69, 73–76,
 87, 133, 147
 Literalists (see *al-Zāhiriyyah*), 42,
 110, 148

 al-Ma‘mūn, 152
 Madinah, 11, 30, 70, 120, 128, 132,
 144
mahram, 40, 165
 Makkah, 9–11, 39, 40, 63, 65, 66,
 70, 71, 117, 119, 122, 132, 154
makrūh, 22, 45, 124
 Marx, 81
 Marxism, 72, 81
 materialism, 95, 150
 meat, 12, 44, 117, 124
 media, 3, 61, 72, 86, 88, 97
 mercy, x, 17, 19, 26, 30, 31, 77, 84,
 109, 127, 149, 152, 157, 159
 Messenger of God, 10, 12, 14, 15,
 22, 72, 132, 156
 middle course, 125, 126
 misinterpretation, 4, 55, 58, 98, 100
 missionaries, 43
 moderation, v, vii, 1–4, 8–10, 16,
 21, 86, 95, 146–149
 monasteries, 10
 monasticism, 10, 11
 monotheism, 25, 65, 70, 132
 moral conventions, 26
 Moses, 27, 28, 129, 130, 152
 mosque, 3, 24, 25, 60, 63, 75, 88,
 89, 99, 119, 149, 156, 168
 mosquito, 45, 166
 Mu‘ādh, 13, 22, 24, 150
 Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān, 55
mubāh, 45
 murder, 34, 45, 50, 125, 149
 Muṣ‘ab, 145
 music, 19, 106
 Muslim Brotherhood, 77, 157
 Muslim countries, 1, 2, 72, 73,
 78–81, 88, 91
 Muslim culture, 93
 Muslim society, 87
 Muslim youth, ix, xiii, xv, xvi, 1, 4,
 6, 16, 47, 59, 61, 78, 79, 90, 92,
 93, 101, 133, 134, 141–162
 Mustafa Shukri, 66
Mustahabb, 121, 122
 Mu‘tazilah, 49, 131
 Muzdalifah, 9

 Nahrawān, 100
 al-Nasā‘i, 112, 163, 164, 167, 169
 al-Nawawī, 10, 47
 Nazism, 84
 Negus, 132, 133

- New Testament, 75
nifāq (see hypocrisy), 47, 53
 non-Muslim, 62, 68
 non-Muslim countries, 24, 75, 80,
 94, 105, 146, 151, 164
 North America, 24, 25
- oil revenues, 73
 oppression, xi, 26, 28, 60, 73, 89,
 91, 122, 129, 155, 164
- pagan, 32, 65, 69, 154
 paganism, 65, 70, 130, 137
 Palestine, 78
 parents, 4, 5, 28, 44, 66, 122, 125,
 153, 154
 patients, 19, 66, 71, 72, 91, 138,
 139, 142, 158, 160
 People of the Book, 9, 44, 52, 133,
 151
 Persia, 104
 personal freedom, 17, 94
 pessimism, 159
 Pharaoh, 27, 28, 129, 132, 152
 Philippines, 78
 photographs, 43
 photography, 19, 106
 pilgrimage, major (see Hajj), 50,
 122, 165, 168
 pillars of Islam, 24, 99
 politics, 6, 36, 78, 89, 94
 polytheism, 32, 65, 100, 154
 pornographic material, 73
 prayer, 10, 13, 14, 22–24, 32, 33,
 39, 43, 48, 50, 70, 92, 93, 106,
 110, 115, 116, 118–120,
 122–125, 132, 137, 150, 156, 160
 prison, 62, 82–84, 97
- Qadariyyah, 131
 Qatādah, 52
Qiṣāṣ, 149
Qiyās, 33, 38, 41, 110, 165
qunūt, 118, 119
 Quraysh, 69, 154, 160
- Ramadan, 1, 39, 50, 116, 123, 124,
 132, 168
 reconciliation, 55, 122, 124
 regime, 6, 36, 60, 76, 78, 86, 88,
 97, 129, 147
 Rejectionists (see *al-Rāfiḍ*), 147, 164
 religion, 5, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14, 17, 28,
 32, 36, 37, 40, 56, 61, 66, 67, 72,
 74–76, 78, 79, 81, 82, 84, 87–89,
 91, 93, 94, 101, 105, 107, 108,
 113, 115, 122, 123, 134, 137,
 142, 143, 147, 149–151, 157
 religious extremism (see extremism),
 v, xi, 1–5, 8, 12, 15–18, 86,
 92–94
 religious practice, 23, 25
 religious society, 16
 revelation, 52, 57, 58, 70, 103, 151
 revolt, 74, 81
 rhetoric, 6, 147
riddah (see apostasy), 34, 51
- Sa‘d al-Din Ibrahim, 92
 Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr, 57, 63
 Sa‘īd ibn al-Musayyab, 120, 144
 Sa‘īd, Jawdat, 134
 Salmān al-Farīsī, 15
 Satan, 9, 30, 146, 161
 Saudi Arabia, 19
 schism, 37
 secular philosophies, 73, 81
 secular sciences, 146

- secularism, 36, 43, 62, 72, 73, 75,
 76, 81, 82, 129, 146
 al-Shāfi'ī, 16, 18, 33, 114, 120
 Sharī'ah (see Islamic law, law of
 Islam), 75, 167
 al-Shāṭibī, Abū Ishāq, 37, 56, 57,
 102, 167
 al-Shawkānī, 99, 109
Shirk (see idolatry), 48, 53, 58, 124,
 153
 Shu'ayb, 27, 162
Siwāk, 93
 social issues, 90
 social welfare, 158
 socialism, 60
 Somalia, 78
 sorcery, 69, 125
 spoils, 30
 Sufis, 123
 Sufism, 147
 Sufyān al-Thawrī, 148
sunan, vi, 64, 65, 69, 71, 133, 163
 Sunnah, ix, x, xii, xvi, 5, 12, 14–16,
 18, 20, 21, 23, 25, 29, 30, 34, 41,
 45, 46, 56, 61, 65, 75, 81, 87, 89,
 102–104, 107, 108, 115, 116,
 118, 119, 121, 122, 124, 143,
 146, 147, 149, 154
 suspicion, 29–31, 90
 sword, 33, 96, 99, 135
 Syria, 105

Takfīr, v, vi, 4, 31, 32, 55, 66, 97
tawhīd, 52, 124
Ṭawūs, 52
Ta'līl al-aḥkām, 38
 Thamūd, 27
 Thawbān, 112
 al-Tirmidhī, 41, 46, 164–166, 168

 Torah, 87
 torture, vi, 60, 62, 66, 74, 83–85
 tradition, xi, 3, 19, 26, 33, 65, 75,
 88, 102, 108, 113–116, 124
 Trench, the Battle of, 138
 trust, 6, 30, 38, 48, 90
 the Truth, 16, 18, 66, 67, 83, 143,
 154
 Turkey, 82
 tyranny, 63, 152, 164
 tyrants, 64

 'Ubādah ibn al-Ṣāmit, 169
 Uḥud, 64, 67
 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, 42, 70,
 109, 133
 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, 13, 56, 68,
 89, 95, 116, 118, 128, 144
 Umayyads, 63
 unbelief (see *kufr*) 21, 29, 30, 33,
 34, 49–53, 58, 77, 82, 84, 85, 98,
 100, 107, 121, 130, 137, 161
 United Nations, 79
 United States, 44, 79
 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr, 17
 Usāmah ibn Zayd, 33
Uṣūl al-fiqh (see fundamentals of
 jurisprudence), 19, 101, 164
Uṣūl al-ḥadīth, 101
 usury, 61, 125
 'Uthmān, 47

 vanity, 30, 31, 38, 111, 113
 veil, 19, 93
 victory, vii, 62, 65, 66, 72, 137–140
 violence, vi, 26, 82, 83, 85, 94, 95,
 141, 152, 153


- wājib*, 121, 122
 Walī Allāh al-Dahlawī, 109, 111
 war, xiii, 26, 30, 60, 66, 78, 84, 99,
 100, 103, 123, 137, 164
 Western civilization, 29
 wife, 14, 15, 19, 33, 40, 51, 55, 132
 wisdom, ix, x, 5, 19, 25, 26, 28, 67–
 69, 82, 83, 95, 98, 109, 151–153
 wives, 12, 62, 103
 woman, 18, 19, 26, 40, 93, 103, 111,
 149, 165
 women, 19, 40, 58, 62, 63, 72, 73,
 84, 94, 99, 102, 103, 106, 112,
 113, 120, 123, 125
 worship (see *‘ibādah*), 8, 10–12, 114,
 16, 22–24, 27, 32, 38–41, 50, 53,
 75, 76, 81, 84, 87, 92, 119, 120,
 122, 123, 125, 129, 146, 153,
 155–157, 160
 Yahyā (see John the Baptist), 64
 Yazīd, 63, 167
 Yemen, 13, 24, 72, 104, 105
al-Zāhiriyyah (see Literalists, literal-
 ism), 38, 110
 Zakah, 10, 23, 24, 39–42, 50, 70,
 112, 122, 123, 132, 158, 160
 Zakariyyā (see Zechariah), 64
 Zechariah (see Zakariyyā), 64
 Zionism, 43

Intolerance and important book, Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi examines the world-wide revival of interest in Islam and attempts to explain why this interest has led so many among the younger generation of Muslims to tread the path of intolerance and rigid interpretation. An older and more experienced voice, he articulates the wisdom brought on by maturity, sound scholarship, and a deep understanding of both the letter and the spirit of the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

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ISBN 1-56564-428-X



£7.95 - €11 - \$10.95

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