

NOT FOR SALE

**“Our Dialogue”
— *Seventh Edition***

**the Religious Editor
Arab News
Jeddah**

apkar pk

Vol. 1 [G-L]

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We do wish to avoid overseas mailing costs, which are very heavy indeed.

apkar pk

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Hadith —

**Indeed,
the creation of each one of you
is brought together in the mother's belly
for 40 days in the form of a drop of sperm,
then he is a germ cell for a like period,
then an embryonic lump for a like period,
then there is sent to him the angel
who blows the breath of life into him
& who is commanded about four matters:
to write down his means of livelihood,
his life span, his actions
and whether happy or unhappy**

**By Allah,
other than whom there is no God,
one of you may behave like the people of paradise
until there is but an arm's length between him and it,
and that which has been written overtakes him
and so he behaves like the people of hell fire
and thus he enters it;
and one of you behaves like the people of hell fire
until there is but an arm's length between him and it,
and that which has been written overtakes him
and so he behaves like the people of paradise
and thus he enters it."**

(Related by Al Bukhari & Muslim.)

“Our Dialogue” — advice & consent

• Publishing 'Dialogue' answers in book form

Has “Our Dialogue” been published in book form?

I have mentioned that such publication requires an extensive editing work if it is to be done properly. What I mean is that questions should be sorted out according to subject and related ones should be consolidated in a more comprehensive way. This will mean some expansion of certain answers so that they treat the subject rather than the specific case the reader puts. It will also mean grouping together various answers so that the treatment of the subject is more complete. I pray God to enable me to undertake this task at some point in the future.

Meanwhile, I do not permit any publication, which is intended to generate financial profit, without my prior agreement. Those who had produced compilations seeking no profit, but aiming only to make such answers known to people, who may need them, are generous with their effort. May God bless them and reward them. I hope that God will also grant me a share of that reward.

“Our Dialogue” was compiled and printed by some people at their own initiative. I have not had any role in that. They state that copies may be obtained from apkar pk (Muhammad Arif), 404 Qamar House, M. A. Jinnah Road, Karachi - 74000 [Telephone Work/Home 92•21•231 24 95 — Roaming].

Knowing that readers have put majorities of questions to me from the countries of the subcontinent, I realize that if “Our Dialogue” were made available in Urdu, it would serve a good purpose. Therefore, I have no objection, in principle, to its translation into Urdu. [Added: One such compilation in the form of the books called *Islami Tarze Fikr* is also being offered by apkar pk for the benefit of those who prefer that the material be presented to them in their national language. A Sindhi version of these books called *Islami Soch Jo Andaz* is also obtainable.]

[From: Adil Salahi Arab News, Saudi Arabia's First English Language Daily]

apkar pk & “*Our Dialogue*”

Let me introduce apkar pk. Well, apkar is simply an abbreviation from Allied Promoters Karachi, the company I organize, while the suffix pk stands for Pakistan. And under this brand name, we present a series of publications such as you hold in your hand.

A friend, Ateed Riaz, has been involved in copying and gratuitously circulating pages from Adil Salahi’s religious columns of the Jeddah-based paper, Arab News. I was also favored with these pages, and finding them very interesting and deeply thought provoking, decided to start compiling the columns. In 1989, and a hundred pages later, I showed the result of this exercise to some friends, who were very enthusiastic in their response.

We felt that such a compilation would serve as a useful and handy guide for anyone keen to learn more about the ways of Islam, but who could not get convincing answers from accessible Ulema. Several friends even offered to help with the printing of such a book, and the first version of this work, comprising just 125 pages, emerged under the title “A Question and Answer Session, the Religious Editor, Arab News, Jeddah.” This was our beginning.

Encouraged with the response to our first book, I continued with this compiling work and brought out an enhanced version of the same book under the title, “Our Dialogue,” named after the title of the original columns appearing in Arab News, Jeddah. (These columns are now called “Discourse.”) Yet another volume, “Our Dialogue — Volume IV,” contained further selections from the religious columns which have appeared in Arab News, Jeddah up to July 2003. A handy version based on selected quotations from these books — entitled ‘Our Dialogue in a Nutshell’ is also available for those readers who are too busy for voluminous reading. In 1996, a compilation covering ‘Pilgrimage’ was issued and since that year through fine work by Br. Abdus Salam Salami, an Urdu version is also being provided under the title of “Islami Tarze Fikr”. A second volume of “Islami Tarze Fikr” — translated by Br. Kaleem Chughtai — has since been launched in 1999. Since 1998, through initiative of Br. Noor Ahmad Memon, a Sindhi translation of ‘Islami Tarze Fikr’ has been presented under the title of ‘Islami Soch Jo Andaz’.

Alhamdulillah, the scope has been enlarged and improved since, and a consolidated, improved and revised version of all the previous issues of “Our Dialogue” is now presented to you in four Volumes under the title of “Our Dialogue — Seventh Edition”.

Much thought and effort have gone into the body of works presented in the “Our Dialogue” series. All this would come to naught except for the enlightenment provided through the original material presented by Adil Salahi under his worthy columns ‘Islam in Perspective’ in Arab News, Jeddah. We are also deeply indebted to a host of supporters from our very inception. Valued advice and kind assistance has come in varied and special ways from people who are too many to enumerate, but without whose help, this series of books could certainly not have been presented. [A list of supporters is appended on p.7, but we may have missed out to mention some.] May Allah in His Mercy accept the efforts of all of us.

Tasbahoona Alal Khair

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November 2005

Answers to questions in
“Our Dialogue”
are provided by more than one scholar
and edited by
Adil Salahi
Arab News Jeddah, K.S.A.



***There is a main rule in Islamic Law
that a particular regulation,
which is made for a particular reason
is enforced only when that reason
is clearly in evidence***

***“Our Dialogue”
— Seventh Edition***

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Colleagues At My Office & the Members of My Family

AND MANY MORE WHOSE NAMES ARE NOT MENTIONED

** They Had All Suffered Cancer And Have Preceded Us To Their Final Abode.
May Allah In His Infinite Mercy Reward Them Plentiful. Amen*

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Questions on religious matters may be sent to the following address, which will be forwarded to the appropriate channel for reply and clarification.

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Games Of Chance: Lotteries — Islamic View On

1. Is it permissible for a Muslim to take part in the big lotteries which offer very high prizes, amounting to millions of dollars?
2. Is it allowed to conduct raffles or lotteries in order to raise funds for a noble cause?

When you look at Islamic legislation, you realize that the ways in which one person can take the money of another are very limited indeed. They include trade, employment, gifts and inheritance. Beyond this there is not any ground for a person to take someone else's money.

When you consider how lotteries are operated, you find that a company or a government offers tickets and numbers for sale. What is sold in this way is neither tangible nor of any value. Because it comes with a chance to be included in the draw, people are willing to exchange these valueless tickets for a considerable amount of money. A ticket in the Canadian or West German lotteries costs hundreds of dollars. This amount of money is exchanged for an entry in the draw, which again remains of no value, unless a prize is won.

There is an important principle in Islam which states that it is not permissible to sell something which has no benefit to man. This rule applies to lottery tickets; hence it is not permissible to sell them. What is unlawful to sell is unlawful to buy.

Furthermore, a lottery is a method of gambling. All gambling is forbidden in Islam. The prohibition is clearly stated in the Qur'an in the same verse which prohibits all intoxicants. The Qur'anic verse describes intoxicants and gambling as "an impurity of Satan's work." It commands all believers not to come near them and explains that through them Satan tries to create enmity and hatred among the believers.

In lotteries, this is clearly apparent. When it is announced that someone has won the jackpot, all those who have spent some of their money to buy tickets to enter the lottery are full of envy. They declare that the winner has taken their money. When you ask them how they tell you that if it was not for the money of those who have participated in the lottery, no prize would have been offered.

In addition, the company or the government, which runs the lottery, does not engage in it for fun, it stands to win large sums of money. What it offers in return is nothing. It is all a gimmick, which takes money from a very large number of people and put it in the hands of a few. As such, lotteries are forbidden to run and forbidden to enter.

2. Even when there is a noble cause, raising funds for it must conform to Islamic principles. The principles that "the end justifies the means" is simply unacceptable. If we want to serve a noble cause, we must do so by appropriate means.

When people buy lottery tickets, what is the aim behind this purchase? It is clearly to win the jackpot or a high prize. In other words, a person may be willing to pay SR. 100 just to have a chance of winning a prize of, say, SR. 100,000. If he wins it, then he is actually getting 1,000 Riyals for each Riyal he had spent. That is a great gain by human standards. It is certainly to make such gains, or to win such prizes, that

people buy lottery tickets. Little do they think of the cause for which a lottery is organized.

On the other hand, governments organize national lotteries in order to raise funds, which they may use for financing public projects or some other government business. Governments certainly raise large amounts of money in this way. They normally allocate about 30 percent for prizes and around 25 percent for the administration and expenditure, while the remainder goes to finance its projects. People part with their money knowing that they have little or no chance of landing a major prize or hitting the jackpot. But it is to satisfy their dreams of sudden wealth that they are prepared to buy such worthless tickets.

There is no doubt that such an exercise is forbidden in Islam. It is forbidden for a government to organize it and forbidden for individuals to buy lottery tickets. The reason is that, for the major part, this exercise lures people and offers them next to nothing.

If raffles are organized on the same lines, then the same verdict of prohibition applies. However, we can make a distinction here. Suppose a charitable association organizes a dinner or a party and fixes a high price for the tickets. Suppose also that the actual cost of the dinner or the party is SR. 50 per person, while the charitable organization fixes a price of, say, SR. 200. People come forward and buy those tickets, knowing that they are actually helping the cause for which that charity works, but they are getting an outing in the bargain. They do not expect anything more for their money. They are happy to do so because they want to help the charity.

Suppose that the charity organizes a draw offering some prizes, which it received, from companies or other patrons. It uses the tickets sold for that party in the draw. They make the draw and offer the prizes to those whose ticket comes out. That is permissible because no one was expecting such prizes. They only paid [willingly a high price] for the dinner and got what they paid for.

Games Of Chance: Lotteries — Participating In A Telephonic Lottery

Is it permissible to participate in the telephone competitions, which promise large prizes? Many companies, magazines, papers, etc. encourage their readers or customers to telephone and win prizes. The problem is that the numbers to call are of the 700 type, which cost about 4-5 times the normal rate for ordinary calls. There seems to be income for the companies, but only prizes for some of the customers. Please comment.

When you provide a service or sell an article, you must explain to the customer the nature of your service or the type of article you are selling. You should also make him clear of the price he will be paying for that service or article. When there is deception, or even confusion, so as the customer does not know exactly what he is buying, then this comes under what is known in Islamic law as *Gharar*, which renders the sale forbidden.

In this case, the customer is asked to telephone a number in order to claim a prize. Since it is a very expensive call, and the likelihood is that the call will last at least five minutes, then he is parting with a sum of money in return for entering a draw, or getting a prize which is often worth much less than the amount he pays for the call. One or two callers in thousands will get substantial prizes in some sort of a draw. This makes the whole thing akin to a lottery, and lottery is undoubtedly forbidden.

This means that we have two different reasons that make this whole thing forbidden. It is forbidden for the companies running it because they are making a *Gharar* sale, and forbidden for the participants because they are using a lottery system. However,

sometimes the callers are not told how long the call would last and how much it costs and they remain unaware of this fact. May God forgive us all.

Games Of Chance: Played With Throw Of Dice

Sometime back you mentioned that the game known as backgammon is forbidden to play or watch. Could you please clarify whether this prohibition also applies to the modern game Ludo, which is played with dice and movement of pieces?

I do not know the game the reader mentions and how it is played. However, based on the Hadiths that prohibit backgammon and similar games, most scholars agree that all games that purely depend on chance, such as the throw of dice, the drawing of a card or a number, etc. are forbidden. Some do not give a ruling of outright prohibition but say that such games are strongly reprehensible, or Makrooh.

The reason for prohibition is indicated, namely, that playing such games often leads to ill feelings between friends and relatives. When they are coupled with betting, this becomes even more acute. Needless to say, when they involve betting, the prohibition is much stronger and agreed by all scholars. If Ludo depends, as you say, on the throw of dice, then it falls within the same category of games of chance, and these are forbidden.

Games Of Chance: Raffles — Whether Permissible Or Not

1. Could you please tell me whether the following practices fall within forbidden gambling: (a) Gifts offered by shops and stores through a draw of envelopes or raffles; and (b) Selling one's articles or belongings through raffles. May I say that this is the quickest way of selling one's belongings when one is leaving the country? The price is divided into a number of portions, which are sold as raffle tickets and a draw is made to determine who gets the article.

2. Which types of raffle are permissible, and which are not? Do they carry serious punishment?

1. There is no doubt that all forms of gambling are forbidden. However, the first practice, as I understand it, may be no more than a promotional activity by shopkeepers and department stores. If you go to a shop to buy an article, say for 80 Riyals and the shopkeeper tells you if you increase your purchase to 100 Riyals or more, you will be entitled to draw an envelope which gives you a small gift which he does not specify, you have a choice to make. When you increase your purchase, you are not actually paying money in order to draw an envelope, or a raffle, but you are buying an additional article at its normal price. It is true that the shopkeeper does this in order to persuade you to increase your purchase, but ultimately the choice is yours. You are getting your article at their real value. You are not buying the right to draw an envelope, but you are only being persuaded to buy something, which you may not have bought at that particular time. You will not buy something, which is of no use to you. I feel that this is simply a promotional exercise, which gives you a little extra over what you have bought. Whatever envelope you draw will give you a little gift. It is true that some gifts will be more valuable than others, but then it is merely a gift and you cannot choose your gifts at any time.

As for the other practice, I am afraid it is a form of gambling. People buy these raffles and only one of them gets the article. The others lose their money. It is true that the seller receives only the fair price of the article, but what about those who lost their money. They are buying thin air. This is gambling or, at least a forbidden practice.

2. Where raffles are offered as a means of promotion, without putting a price on them, then they are permissible. Suppose a shop offers a draw using the numbers carried by its receipts, and offering a prize like a television set or even a more valuable one, there is nothing wrong with that. The people who enter the draw are those who buy something from that shop. What they pay is the price of the commodity they buy. They do not pay anything for entering into the draw. They receive their money's worth. Such raffle is permissible.

But if you have to pay for your raffle ticket, it is a form of lottery or gambling, and it is forbidden.

Ghayb: Animals Foreboding Natural Disasters

How far is it true that animals generally have a sense of foreboding at times of impending natural disasters? It is said that animals are seen to behave strangely before an earthquake or a volcanic eruption. A popular legend in India has it that if a tragedy is destined to befall a family; it would first affect its pets, if any. For this reason, many families still keep pets in the hope of averting major tragedies, such as death, accidents or theft. What is the substance behind such notions?

The first part is true. Animals generally begin to feel that something unusual is about to happen, in the case of an impending earthquake, volcanic eruption, etc. This is a fact of life that scientists have recorded when they noticed that animals begin to behave in a peculiar manner in the period leading to such a disaster.

I am not aware that any extensive study has been undertaken to find out the causes of the nature of the change of behavior. Nor do I know whether a careful monitoring of animal behavior would indicate the type of natural disaster that is about to occur. You appreciate that to carry out such a study requires prior knowledge of the impending event, which is not possible. But then, some animals have sharper senses than others do. A dog has a much sharper smelling sense than human beings, while birds have far more powerful eyesight. Besides, if you take a bird a long distance from its home, and let it loose, it will fly back without difficulty, although it might never have flown over the area. How does the bird know the direction and what guides it to its right destination are matters that we have not been able to identify yet. Scientists suggest that there is some sort of magnetic sense, which probably works on an in-built compass to direct the bird's flight. That may be true.

God's creation is miraculous. So, we should take every wonderful aspect of God's creation as indicative of His great power.

The second part of your question is no more than a superstition. If God wants something that should befall a certain family then the fact that a family keeps a pet does not stop God's will or divert it. One should never believe in such superstition or allow oneself to be influenced by them.

Ghayb: Going To Fortune-Tellers Akin To Disbelief

A television channel in an Islamic country shows a program called Numerology, in which people from different countries tell about the adverse situations they go through and request to know what the future has in store for them. The host proudly tells them to change something in their names so that they would have a bright and prosperous future. Please comment.

It is in the nature of man that he would love to know what would happen to him in the next hour, tomorrow, next month, the next year and in the rest of his life. However, God has not given this knowledge to anyone. He describes Himself on several occasions in the Qur'an as the one who knows what is concealed, as well as what is apparent. This is of general import, including what is concealed by time, or within a person's mind or thoughts. One Qur'anic verse states: **"No one in the heavens or the earth knows what is concealed except He."**

This being the case, any one who claims to know, or to divine what may happen in the near or distant future, cannot prove his claim. On the contrary, we can prove his claim false by reference to the Qur'anic text. Not only so, but also such people are aware that they have no basis for their claims. Hence, they try to make it a little more convincing by resorting to certain tricks, or giving a false feeling. For example, the program you have described relies on convincing the viewers that numbers or letters of one's name have an effect on bringing him good or bad fortune. Others rely on similarly flimsy grounds, such as the rising stars at the time when a person is born. All that they come up with is nonsense, because neither numbers, nor stars have anything to do with what the future holds for us. It is only the God's will that influences it and God's will is not subject to any influence other than what God decides.

Look at people who claim to be able to predict the future, and ask for money to part with such information. Had they been able to predict anything with any degree of accuracy, they could use that knowledge to enrich themselves without waiting for silly customers who trust them and give them money in return for information. Why don't they predict the winning lottery numbers, or the winning horse, or which company shares will make large profits? The fact is that they are too wise to rely on their claims, knowing them to be false claims.

Because the temptation to trust such people is too strong, the Prophet, peace be upon him, warns us: "Whoever goes to a fortune teller for information disbelieves in what has been revealed to Muhammad." This means that going to such people is a very serious act of disobedience to God and His messenger. We must put any such thoughts out of our minds.

Ghayb: Islamic View On Numerology

Could you please explain the status of Ilm-e-Ghayb in the light of the Qur'an, and the Sunnah. What does it include? A friend of mine is a keen student of numerology. She was able to tell me some amazingly correct things about my past life, which I am sure she did not learn — either from me or from anyone else in the past and in the present, including some very private things. She says that she worked that out from my birth date and some other numbers. I realize that only God knows the future and He encompasses everything in His knowledge, but is numerology similar to palmistry or astrology?

The term Ilm-e-Ghayb literally means "knowledge of what is absent". It is made of two words, the first means "knowledge", and the second, Ghayb, means "absent, hidden, kept away, concealed, etc." It is often used in the Qur'an as part of God's knowledge, who is described as "the One who knows what is absent and what is present." Unfortunately, in Qur'anic translations, this term is often rendered as "knowledge of the unseen", which is a very narrow sense of the word, because Ghayb is not merely unseen. It could be absent or concealed in many different ways. Perhaps a better translation is "that which lies beyond the reach of human perception." But even then, the Arabic term has a wider reference. Believers are described as those **"who believe in the Ghayb and attend to their prayers..."** [2: 3]

What is clear in the Qur'an is that such knowledge is clearly reserved for God and He does not give any part of it to anyone, except to some of His messengers and prophets. Such knowledge He imparts to them to support them as they go about the discharge assigned to them of delivering God's message to people. Thus we read in the Qur'an:

"He alone knows that which is beyond the reach of a created being's perception, and to none does He disclose anything of His unfathomable knowledge, unless it be to a messenger whom He has been pleased to choose." [the Jinn — 72: 26-27]

The statement is very clear, and it occurs in the Surah entitled the Jinn, because many fortunetellers claim that they have contacts with the jinn. This statement refutes their claims by stating that not even the jinn have such knowledge.

An example of how God gives such knowledge to His messengers is found in the opening of Surah 30, Al-Room, which mentions the defeat suffered by the Byzantine Empire at the hands of the Persian armies. It then tells the Prophet, peace be upon him, that 1] the Byzantine will be victorious in a few years time, and 2] the believers will be delighted with victory granted by God. This Surah was revealed in Makkah when the Prophet, peace be upon him, and his companions were a small-persecuted minority, practically without any power. Within a few years, the Byzantine scored a great victory, and on the same day the Muslims won their first major battle against the idolaters, which was the Battle of Badr.

Because of this clear reference to knowledge of what is absent, which includes everything concerning the future, it is strictly forbidden to consult fortunetellers of any type. The Prophet, peace be upon him, describes such people as "liars even when they tell the truth." They will never be able to tell all the truth. They may hit on some aspect of it, but it is always a question of coincidence. It is never based on certainty. Hence, consulting such people is a grave sin. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "Whoever goes to a fortuneteller disbelieves in what has been revealed to Muhammad."

Having said that, I go back to your other point of numerology. I do not know anything about this apart from what is taught as arithmetic and mathematics. To suggest that numbers have an effect on our lives is an exercise of fortune telling. As to how your friend was able to tell you about your past, she must have learned it from other sources. [We have clear advice from the Prophet, peace be upon him, and I repeat here what has been stated earlier here in above. The Prophet, peace be upon him, describes such people as "liars even when they tell the truth. They may hit on some aspect of it, but it is always a question of coincidence."]

Ghayb: Knowledge About Unborn Babies

May I refer to the last verse in Surah 31, entitled "Luqman" which speaks of Allah's knowledge of what lies in the wombs of women. It is now well known that doctors are now able to determine the sex of the child before it is born. Is that not contradictory with the Qur'anic verse to which I have referred.

Let us first look at the verse to which you have referred. It may be rendered in translation as follows:

"Truly the knowledge of the Hour belongs to Allah alone. He sends down the rain and He knows what lies in the wombs. No soul knows what it will earn tomorrow and no soul knows in what land it will die. Most certainly God knows all and is aware of all things." [Luqman 31: 34]

Most people tend to assume that the reference in this verse to God's knowledge of what lies in the wombs actually means that He knows the sex of unborn babies. This assumption has been strengthened by the fact that until recently, it was impossible to know the sex of an embryo. That could not be established even with the use of X-rays. Hence, the statement that God has that sort of knowledge was sufficient to give an idea of the limitless nature of God's knowledge.

Now that doctors have been able to come up with a test which correctly predicts the sex of a child, people tend to think that this acquired knowledge contradicts the Qur'anic verse. Well meaning Muslims have, in many instances, denied that doctors could develop that knowledge. Yet there is no need to adopt such an attitude. What is needed is a proper understanding of the Qur'anic statement. That is sufficient to show that there is no need to deny the newly acquired knowledge of doctors and that there is no contradiction between their knowledge and the Qur'anic statement. Let us first consider what the doctors are able to know about unborn babies.

Doctors can follow the progress of a pregnancy, week by week. They can listen to the heartbeats of the fetus and they look for indications to determine whether the fetus is in distress. Recently, two methods have been introduced which help doctors determine the sex of the fetus. One method is to use ultrasound scanning. It is necessary; however, that the fetus should be in a particular position before a doctor can determine its sex with the help of ultrasound scanning. The other method involves a test, which requires drawing out a sample of the water around the baby. It needs a skilful doctor to get that water, because a clumsy one might puncture the placenta with his needle and thus expose the baby to unnecessary risks. Doctors resort to that test for some medical purposes. They do not care to make it to satisfy a pregnant woman who is keen to know the sex of her unborn child. It should be mentioned, however, that both methods could only be done when the pregnancy reaches an advanced stage. I have also heard of a third method developed more recently, but I do not know enough about it. All these methods simply give a simple point of information about the fetus, namely, its sex. But is that all there is to know about an unborn baby?

Before answering this question, let us say that the Qur'anic verse says that 'knows what is in the wombs.' It does not say that others may share no such knowledge. Had the Qur'anic verse been phrased in a way to indicate that only God knows the sex of an unborn baby and then scientists manage to develop a test to provide them with that knowledge, then a claim of contradiction may be made. [An example may be the use of qualifying word 'only' with 'knows', as we see in the first of the statements in this verse. It reads "*Truly the knowledge of the Hours belongs to God alone*" In yet other statements a more definitive expression "*No soul knows*" has been used. But the Qur'an does not make any such statement. It simply describes God's knowledge as encompassing what lies in the wombs. A brief reflection on God's knowledge in this sphere is appropriate. We can say with absolute certainty that God has infallible knowledge, not only of the sex of the fetus, but of the shape and features of the unborn child, not only while it is in the womb, but also after it will have been born and becomes a grown up. He also knows its nature, manners, temperament and what work it will be doing, to whom it would be married in future, its likes and dislikes, life duration, etc. He knows its development, what events will affect it and what would contribute to shaping its future. He knows everything that will happen to it from the moment of conception to the moment of its death. Moreover, God's knowledge of such an embryo does not begin at a certain point. Indeed, He has all the knowledge not only from the moment of its conception, but well long before that. As we know, God's knowledge is complete and nothing can be added to it. His statement that He knows what lies in the wombs is meant simply that God's knowledge extends even to the most secret of situations. If human beings can make a breakthrough by getting to know sex of fetus, God's knowledge extends far beyond that to include everything and every aspect.

Besides, the Qur'anic statement does not merely speak of human wombs. God's knowledge includes everything that lies in every animal's womb. But it does not stop at that either. If camels have wombs to bear their offspring, other animals have different methods of reproduction. Birds, fish and amphibians, for example, lay eggs. God certainly knows what each egg contains. He knows the offspring of every individual in each species. It is not only that doctors and scientists cannot aspire to achieve such knowledge. They recognize that it is well beyond them. But God's knowledge encompasses all and includes every situation and every individual member of every species. His knowledge is accurate, complete, total, and absolute. Knowing what lies in the wombs represents only a small fraction of it. This is indeed what we understand of the meaning of this verse. We need not worry if the scientists are able to add a simple point of detail to their limited knowledge.

Ghayb: Knowledge Of the Future Belongs To Allah Alone

People in our part of the world go to a person addressed by the title "Baba Ji". This title refers to a person who is honest and respectable, loves Allah and talks to Him. Allah gives him knowledge about people living far away and things that will happen in the future. When people go to Baba Ji, they request him to pray for their better future. Women ask him to pray that they have children, or a baby boy, etc. [Please comment.]

The first thing to remember in connection with this question is the fact that knowledge of the future belongs to Allah alone. There is simply no way that human beings can devise in order to get to know what will happen next year, next month, tomorrow or even one second from now. Fiction writers have imagined the invention of a time machine, which enables people to travel through time. Exciting as this may sound, it will continue forever to belong to the realm of imagination. There is no way that we can learn any fact about the future unless Allah decides to give us that knowledge.

It is important, therefore, to determine whether Allah normally imparts such knowledge to human beings. It is simple logic that if any person is favored with such knowledge, then the prophets, particularly Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon them all] would be the one to be so favored. We do not find in the history of any prophet anything to suggest that he had been given such knowledge. The life of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, has been documented in great detail. Things that he said or did have been elaborately reported and painstakingly verified. Nevertheless, there is no suggestion whatsoever that at any time did the Prophet, peace be upon him, have any knowledge of the future. On the contrary, there are numerous reports, which suggest that when the Prophet, peace be upon him, sent an expedition to attack the enemies of Islam, he was always looking for news about them. He wanted to be sure of their fortune and their conduct. Allah could have certainly given him all the knowledge he wanted, but the Prophet, peace be upon him, always realized that he was only a human being, honored with Allah's message. He had to wait for the news to be brought by its carrier.

This means that if your Baba Ji has knowledge of the future, then he occupies a position with Allah, which is higher than that of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. How else can we explain that a Baba Ji is favored with something that was not given even to Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him?

You say that Baba Ji could also speak to Allah and Allah speaks to him. If we examine this claim in the light of the Qur'an, what do we find? There is a clear Qur'anic statement which says that there are only three ways in which Allah may decide to speak to human beings. That statement may be given in translation as follows:

"It is not granted to any human being that Allah should speak to him except by revelation, or from behind a veil, or through a messenger sent and authorized by Him to make known His will. Exalted is He, and Wise." [Counsel "Ash-Shura" 42: 51]

What this Qur'anic statement tells us is that Allah has chosen not to speak to any human being directly. He could speak to him from behind a veil, and the only case we know like that is the case of Moses, when Allah spoke to him directly from behind a veil. On the other hand, Allah may send him revelations, and these can be vouchsafed only to prophets.

The third method is that Allah sends a messenger, i.e. an angel to give him whatever message Allah sends down to him. Again, this is an honor given to prophets. Now those Babajees in your part of the world claim to talk to Allah. May I ask: In what method? If it is any one of these three then they are claiming to be prophets. We know that Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, was the last of all prophets. No one can be given that status after he had passed away. Or do they claim that they have a different method of talking to Allah? If they do, how can they explain it against the above quoted Qur'anic verse?

The fact is that anyone who claims to receive special knowledge from Allah is an impostor. He is a liar because he claims to know something, which Allah has chosen to keep to Himself. Note how these Babajees claim to know about people living far away. Do you not think that it is only convenient to their deception of simple-minded people that they make such a claim? Why do they not say that they know everything about people living in their community? If they make such a claim, their lies will soon be discovered. Hence, they prefer to claim knowledge that cannot be verified. This is the reason why they say they know about people far away.

There is no doubt that such people acquire some reputation. This is enhanced when events turn out in a way, which can be related to what they have claimed. Suppose that a Baba Ji tells a woman that she would soon be pregnant and give birth to a baby boy. The women might have been married for several years without getting pregnant. If she happens to conceive, either after medical treatment or just naturally, that Baba Ji will be quick to claim that it was through his prayer that the request was granted. If that woman then delivers a baby girl, the Baba Ji will not have much difficulty in over-riding such small inconvenience. He may claim that the woman mistook his reference, or he may put the blame on Allah's door, saying that Allah had changed His mind after He had given him the news. What stupidity!

Because these people are impostors who are never tired of lying and deceiving simple minded people, Islam forbids its followers from going to them, listening to what they say and having any trust in them.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "Anyone who goes to a fortune-teller has denied what has been revealed to Muhammad, peace be upon him." This means that by merely going to a fortune-teller, a person takes himself out of the fold of Islam.

Ghayb: Palmistry & Horoscopes Belie Islamic Belief

Are Muslims allowed to believe in palmistry? Also, please advise whether reading one's horoscope is allowed for Muslims?

God has chosen to keep for himself the knowledge of what the future brings. The next moment and what it may bring is a divine secret of which no one knows anything whatsoever. Since knowledge of the future has always intrigued man and since people have always yearned to know what will tomorrow bring, human societies have always had some people who claim to be able to tell the future. Some have enlisted

the help of the stars, and they claim that the positions of different stars at the moment of birth of any one person affect his life. Others have tried to “read” the palm of a person in order to discover his future. There are also those who “read” tea or coffee cups, and those who draw lines in special sand, etc. The list is endless.

Islam views all these practices as means of trickery. No one can ever discover what God has chosen to keep secret. Hence, anyone who pretends to be able to tell what will happen at any future moment is a liar who cannot substantiate his claim. The Prophet, peace be upon him, has given a decisive and final ruling on this subject when he said: “Astrologers are liars, even when they tell the truth.” This means that even when an astrologer says that something will happen in the future, and it happens as he has described, he would be telling a lie. This is because he had no knowledge whatsoever of what was going to happen. It was only by mere coincidence that what he has said has turned out to be true. His claim of having prior knowledge of it was certainly false.

Hence, a Muslim, believes in God and in the message of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and believes that everything which our Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, has told us is absolutely true. He cannot then combine such a belief with believing in palmistry or astrology or any method of telling the future. Such a belief is contradictory with the faith of Islam. It follows that a Muslim must not read his or her horoscope, which is unfortunately being published in most newspapers and magazines.

It says a great deal when we realize that even the editors of those papers and magazines do not believe their horoscopes. Indeed, those who write the horoscope do not believe a word they write because they are fully aware of the trick they use.

Ghayb: Realm That Lies Beyond the Scope Of Human Perception

Could you please explain whether Bayt Al-Izzah and Al-Bayt Al-Ma'moor are one and the same thing? Where is Al-Lawh Al-Mahfooz located?

Al-Bayt Al-Ma'moor is referred to in this name in Verse 4 of Surah 52 “At-Tur”. It means The Much Frequented House. Some scholars say that it refers to the Ka'abah, suggesting that it is always visited for worship. Other scholars say that it refers to the house of worship in heaven, which is attended by angels. Whichever view is taken, the description is apt.

Bayt Al-Izzah, on the other hand, is not a name mentioned in the Qur'an. It refers to a place where God wills whatever He may choose, but then this is figurative, because God is not limited to any place or time. Al-Lawh Al-Mahfooz, or the Preserved Tablet, refers to a tablet in which God's revelations and His will and decrees are recorded.

The last two, and the first one as well if we take it to mean the angels' place of worship, refers to matters that belong to the realm that lies beyond the reach of human perception [or Ghayb]. We take everything that belongs to this realm as it is stated without going into its details, because God has chosen not to make them known to us. The fact that we do not know them does not affect our ability to fulfil our duty in this life. Therefore, we do not try to find out about them more than what God has chosen to tell us.

Ghayb: What No Human Being May Know

Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

A man from the Amir tribe came to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and asked him: “Is there any part of knowledge unknown to you?” He replied: “God certainly knows

what is good. Some knowledge is known only to God alone.” Then he quoted the verse:

“There are five things that are unknown to anyone other than God: “With God alone rests the knowledge of when the Last Hour will come; and He [it is who] sends down rain; and He knows what is in the wombs; whereas no one knows what he will reap tomorrow; and no one knows in what land he will die.” [Luqman 31: 34]

Related by Al-Bukhari and Abu Dawood]

The question the man asks is about knowledge. The Prophet, peace be upon him, attributes all to God who knows all goodness. He then quotes a verse from the Qur’an that outlines five areas, which are known to God alone:

“With God alone rests the knowledge of when the Last Hour will come; and He [it is who] sends down rain; and He knows what is in the wombs; whereas no one knows what he will reap tomorrow; and no one knows in what land he will die.” [Luqman 31: 34]

The first is that of the Last Hour, when all creation will be gathered before God on the Day of Resurrection. No one, not even a Prophet, peace be upon him, or an angel, is ever given such knowledge.

But it is not merely the timing of the Last Hour that is withheld from our knowledge. What comes next is also known to God alone. This applies to both heaven and hell and whatever God has chosen to create for that life which we have no doubt of its coming.

Secondly, the verse the Prophet, peace be upon him, quotes mentions that it is God alone who sends down rain. When we relate this to knowledge, we may think of the quantity of rain that is sent down each time a cloud sheds its contents.

This is definitely an area which scientists have not even tried to explore. Even if they do, they can only hazard a guess with regard to the volume of rain, or its duration and the area where it falls.

They may develop technology to give them better results. But God knows every drop of rain and where it falls, long before a cloud is formed. Not only so, but He knows the effects of such rain, and whether it will seep through the earth strata into an underground reservoir or pour into a river. He also knows which of His creation will benefit by each rainfall, and how much it contributes to the life of plants and animals.

Thirdly, God knows ***“what is in the wombs.”*** In his translation of the Qur’an, Muhammad Asad adds the following comment: “This relates not merely to the problem of the sex of the as yet unborn embryo, but also to the question of whether it will be born at all, and if so, what its natural endowments and its character will be, as well as what role it will be able to play in life; and life itself is symbolized by the preceding mention of rain, and the end of all life in this world, by the mention of the Last Hour.” We may add that God’s knowledge does not apply to human embryos only, but to the unborn young of all species.

The fourth aspect of knowledge known only to God is that of the future, expressed in the Qur’anic verse in these words: ***“Whereas no one knows what he will reap tomorrow.”*** It is indeed knowledge of the next moment that is kept away from us. No one can ever claim to have clear and certain knowledge of what will happen beyond the present moment, or indeed whether he or she will survive to take another breath.

But everything that will happen to the end of time is known to God in every minute detail.

The final aspect also relates to the future, but it is more closely related to a person's life and its end: *"No one knows in what land he will die."* It is not merely the place of death that is unknown to us. Also its timing and causes are also withheld. We realize this as we see in life that death cannot be predicted for any person, whether he suffers from ill health or he enjoys robust and good health. It may come through the least expected of causes and in the most unusual of ways. The only thing that is certain about it is that it occurs in every case, at the time God has chosen.

Glorification: Counting Glorification On Fingers

A friend of mine told me that we should not use our fingers to count the number of phrases of glorification of God we do, because the Jews do that. He claims that it is not permitted in our religion. Please comment.

There is no such truth in what your friend has told you. Using your fingers to keep count of the number of glorification of God or His praises is neither prohibited nor discouraged. Indeed it is quite the reverse, since it was the method used by the Prophet, peace be upon him, and his companions. In a report by one of the Prophet's companions, the reporter mentions clearly that he saw God's messenger keep count of such glorification with his hand. This is indeed the most practical way of keeping count, since we are recommended to glorify God and praise him repeating each phrase 33 times.

It is very easy to use one's fingers to keep such count, considering that we can use each finger for repeating the praise or the glorification 3 times. If we use the right hand only, as preferable, then going twice over the five fingers makes 30 times and adding one more finger completes the count.

There is no need to use a bead or stones or any other article whatsoever [such as a mechanical counter]. Your hand is with you all the time. This means that you do not miss your glorification by omitting to carry your counting article or device. That is more practical.

Moreover, saying that something is forbidden because the Jews or any other group of people use it is not the sort of attitude Islam encourages. Islam certainly gives the Muslims their distinctive character; but that does not come from rejecting some practices that all human beings may find useful. It is achieved through understanding and implementing the set of principles and values the Islamic way of life is based upon. Their standards, lively conscience, their sense of fairness to all people distinguish Muslims, and, above all, their submission to God with all the practical implications such submission involves.

Glorification: In Private, Vocally Or Aloud

There are several contradictory reports about glorifying God aloud.

Glorifying God is recommended in all situations, whether in private, vocally, or aloud, provided that one does not raise his voice so loud that it disturbs others. However, the best and most rewarding method is to glorify and praise God privately, vocalizing the words. The reason is that since no one knows what we do, our action is more sincere and stems from pure feelings of love of God and being in awe of Him.

What is objectionable is for a group of people to hold special sessions where they engage themselves in chorus-like glorifications. This is a deviation from the Sunnah, since the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not do it neither his companions, nor is there any statement by the Prophet, peace be upon him, recommending it.

Glorification: Specific Number Of Times

I wonder why is it important to mention certain names of God a specific number of times in order for an effect to be produced and why the number is so important. Some numbers go as high as one hundred thousand times. I have been told to mention God's name 'Wali' 111 times after Ish'a, as it helps keep off sin. Who fixes these numbers? Please advise.

If we consider what the Prophet, peace be upon him, used to do, we find nothing of the exaggerations some people insist upon. He taught us, for example, to glorify God and praise him in three forms, two words each, 33 times and finish with asserting God's Oneness 34 times. That makes up 100 glorifications. He recommends that certain supplications be repeated 3 times, and some 10 times. But he never mentioned any great numbers that are difficult to keep, such as reading Al-Fatihah 4,444 times.

These are innovations, as is the report my reader has mentioned. If it were true that mentioning this name of God 111 times preserves us from committing sin, then that could foil the purpose of our creation, which is to test us on the basis of our actions. We need simply to read this word and we will be free of sin. That is far fetched.

God: A Mutual Right With God — Worship Him Alone

Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

The Prophet, peace be upon him, often made concise statements that were far-reaching in significance. He was not given to verbosity. On the contrary, he always referred to broad subjects in the most precise and concise of manners. The Prophet, peace be upon him, refers to this as he says, "I have been gifted with comprehensive speech." When we consider his Hadith from the point of view of literary merits and scope of expression, we find that his description is clearly accurate.

On one occasion, he summed up the relationship between God and mankind in two short statements. Consider the following Hadith reported by Mu'ath ibn Jabal, a famous companion of the Prophet: "I was behind the Prophet, peace be upon him, on his mount when he said to me, 'Mu'ath!' I said: 'I am at your service.' He repeated this address three times and I replied in the same manner. He then said: 'Do you know what right mankind owe to God? That they worship Him alone, associating no partners with Him.' He traveled on for a while and then said to me: 'Mu'ath!' I said: 'I am at your service.' He said: 'Do you know what people earn from God by right if they do that? That He would not put them to any suffering'." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Al-Tirmithi and Abu Dawood]

This Hadith outlines in a most precise manner the essence of faith and what people merit if they truly believe. The fact that the Prophet, peace be upon him, addressed Mu'ath, who was one of the most learned companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him, three times before saying anything about what he wanted to say served to make the addressee most attentive. It was clear that the Prophet, peace be upon him, was preoccupied with something of great importance. Hence, his companion was awaiting his communication with much interest. When the Prophet, peace be upon him, spoke, he certainly gave a highly important message, putting it in the clearest of terms. He stated something owed by all people to God, and described it as a right belonging to God Almighty. Moreover, the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not wait for his companion to say whether he knew the answer to his question; he gave the answer immediately. "People must worship God alone, associating no partners with Him."

This is the basic and most fundamental principle of faith, which admits of no compromise whatsoever. A person may either believe in God's oneness, or he may not. If he believes that all Godhead belongs to God alone, he must guard against any trace of polytheism, in any shape or form. The Prophet's statement suggests that when people fulfill this condition, they meet the basic requirement of faith.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, left his companion to contemplate his statement for a while before he put to him another question. This time he asks whether he knows the result that people could expect. Again the Prophet, peace be upon him, describes this as a right which is owing to people for their fulfillment of their basic requirement. This right is that God would not punish them.

It is a very clear and straightforward bargain, establishing mutual rights: God's right to be worshiped alone, without any claim assigning partners to Him, whether in people's minds or actions; and people's right to suffer any punishment. This means that when people truly believe in God's oneness and worship Him alone, they spare themselves punishment in the Hereafter. This is a great prize, which all people should try to achieve. The way is facilitated for them by this outline the Prophet, peace be upon him, gives them.

But what does this actually mean in practice? Is it sufficient that people recognize God's oneness? The Prophet's statement is precise. It gives two qualities as owing to God: worshiping Him and believing in His oneness. This statement does not stop at mere intellectual and theoretical ideas. The recognition of God's oneness has a practical manifestation in worship. Proper worship is offered in the manner satisfactory to God, which He has made clear to us through His messenger. His oneness means that we allow no trace of associating partners with Him, in worship, legislation or daily actions. It requires an acknowledgment of His sovereignty over both the universe and human life.

An authentic Hadith, on a different topic mentions that the Prophet, peace be upon him, used to visit Umm Haram bint Milhan, who was an aunt of the Prophet, peace be upon him, through breast-feeding. "On one of his visits, she gave him a meal and then she stroked his head and he relaxed and slept. A short while later, he woke up smiling. She asked him the reason for his smile, and he said: 'I was shown in my dream a group of my community Traveling by sea, looking like kings on their couches.' She said, 'Messenger of God, pray God to make me one of them.' He said, 'You are one of them.' He then dozed off again, and woke up smiling. Again she asked him why he was smiling, and he said the same thing. Once more, she said, 'Pray God to make me one of them.' The Prophet, peace be upon him, said to her, 'You are in the first group.' She was subsequently married to Ubada ibn Al-Samit who joined an expedition by sea and he took her with him. On the way back, as she was about to ride a mule, she fell off, broke her neck and died." [Related by all six, Malik and Ahmad]

This is a highly authentic Hadith from which we may deduce several rulings, such as the desirability of visiting a woman related by breast-feeding and treating her as one would treat a blood relation of similar rank. Umm Haram was an aunt of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and as such she was unlawful for him to marry. Hence, he visited her, ate at her place and slept. She stroked his head to make him relax, and waited upon him. She asked him why he was smiling, as would any close relative.

We also find in this Hadith a basis for women going out with a Muslim army to fight or to give support, even though the expedition requires a highly unusual effort. For the Arabs in Madinah, Traveling by sea was felt to be a very hazardous task, because they lived in a city in the midst of a vast desert, far off any coastal area. When the woman felt that the Prophet, peace be upon him, was very pleased with those who would be undertaking such a task, she requested him to pray that she would be

among them. He did so, assuring her that she would be one of them. When she repeats the request after the second nap the Prophet, peace be upon him, had with the same dream, he told her that she would be with the first group.

What the Prophet, peace be upon him, said to her came true. She traveled with her husband, whom she married after this particular incident. Their expedition was by sea during the reign of the third Caliph, Osman ibn Affan. The commander of that expedition was none other than Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufian, a companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, who was later to become the fifth Caliph.

God: Are We Masters Of Our Own Destinies?

Are all events in a person's life predetermined by God? Is this supported by any authentic text? In this case, does this not mean that some people are privileged from birth, and some have the best in this world and in the life to come? If a person is predestined to live a life of sin, how is he made accountable for his sins? If people are free, then when their lives are cut short, say, by a natural disaster, their chance of repentance and mending their ways is removed. May I ask a pointed question for which I hope to receive a direct answer: are we masters of our own destinies?

It is not true to say that God predetermines all human actions, but it is true to say that they take place by God's will. The two statements are widely different. It is God's will to give human beings a free choice in a wide area of their lives. Thus, when they exercise this free choice, they do so by God's will. This does not mean that God interferes directly to force them to make their choices in a particular fashion.

This would be contrary to the very thought of free choice. But we say that free choice is a reality in our lives. Everyone knows and experiences that. We make choices at every juncture, and we do not feel being forced to make a particular choice. We are free to follow what we feel to be the best, or least disadvantageous, or more enjoyable, or in our interest. There is no doubt about this, because it is God's will to grant us that freedom of choice.

Thus, the privilege you are speaking about is not true. In fact, the opposite is that we are all born with the same predisposition to believe in God and follow His guidance. We also have the same ability to turn away from it and follow our desires wherever they lead us. The question here is one of choice, and when we make our choice, God facilitates it for us. Thus, a person must take the initial step to believe in God and follow His message. When a person does that, God makes his path in that direction easier. The same is the case when a person turns away from God and chooses to disbelieve in Him. God makes his way to error easier. But all this is determined by man's own free choice.

No one is deprived of any chance to repent and mend his ways after committing errors and falling in sin. We all know that we are liable to die at any moment. Hence, we must always be on the alert. If we forget and indulge in some forbidden pursuit, we should immediately repent and seek God's forgiveness. This is the mark of true believers. God says in the Qur'an:

"If those who are God-fearing experience a tempting thought from Satan, they bethink themselves [of God]; and they begin to see things clearly."
[Heights — "Al-A'araf" 7: 201]

We must not allow time to pass before turning to God in repentance, because we must always be aware that if we do not do so, death may overtake us and we could end up in disobedience to God. Why do you think that natural disaster or murder deprives anyone of his or her chance, when no one knows whether he or she will live

for another minute? The time for repentance is now. If we lose it, it is our choice not to make use of it.

Having said that, I add that there is an area in life where we have no choice, such as being affected by natural laws and phenomena.

Thus, we contract a disease if we expose ourselves to it. When we have that disease, our immune system will try to defend our bodies against it. The immune system will not wait for our choice to make its defense. If we put our finger in the fire, it burns. If we walk in the rain, we get wet. If we go into the sea and do not swim, we get drowned.

There is no choice in such matters. Are we masters of our destinies? The answer is: "Yes, within the limits God has given us."

God: Chronology Of Existence — the Originator Of All

When we see God on the Day of Judgement can we ask Him who created Him? A friend of mine says that it is tantamount to disbelief.

If a person does not believe that God is the Creator of the universe and all that it contains, and that God is the creator who was not Himself created, then that person is not a believer. The question proposed means that the person who wants an answer for it does not believe that God is the Creator and Originator of every thing. That classifies him as a non-believer, or at least a confused believer. The point is that God, the Omnipotent and Omniscient is the Originator of all. Thus, He Himself does not have a creator. Otherwise, He would not be the Originator of all. The problem which some of us face when they think hard about God is that they do not seem to have an answer to ever-repeated question, "And then what?" When they ask, who created this and that, they carry on and on until they ask, who created God. Similarly, they ask about the chronology of existence, until they realize that God existed before all things. At that point they ask, "but who existed before Him?"

To believe in God is to believe in all His attributes. Thus when we believe that God's knowledge is perfect and complete, we cannot then claim that something was in the past, or is at present, or will be in future concealed from God's knowledge.

Similarly believing that God is the Creator and Originator of all means that He Himself could not have been created by anyone. To be created means that there is another being who is superior to Him. Far be it from us to suggest any such thing. God is the Supreme One who has created all, but He Himself is created by none.

God: Coming Down To the Nearest Heaven — the Concept

1. Please explain the Hadith mentioning that God comes down to the nearest heaven at a particular time and which Qur'anic verses should be read at that time.

2. It is said that God descends to the nearest heaven late in the night. This means that He remains there round the clock as midnight occurs at every moment in one spot or another. Why is it said that God descends, instead of saying that He is always there?

1. A Hadith speaks of God coming down to the nearest heaven every night before dawn and invites people who wish to declare their repentance of their sins promising them forgiveness. What is needed is simply to be genuine in one's determination to stop the sin of which he is repenting and never to revert back to it. It is this resolve that makes the difference between a sincere repentance, which ensures forgiveness and a merely verbal one that is not meant seriously. The Hadith does not mention

any special verses to read at that time. Whatever act of worship we undertake will be highly rewarded.

It is also important to point out here that when the Prophet, peace be upon him, speaks of God coming down, this movement does not apply physically to God. It is a description for our benefit, indicating that God is close to us. Otherwise, God is near at all times. He does not need to come closer for any purpose. The whole concept of place, as we know it, does not apply to God. The same is true with regard to the concept of time. Therefore, when they are used in reference to God, this is only so in relation to us, not to God Himself.

2. We do not know how God descends or comes near to the lowest heaven. What we know is that time and place do not apply to God, because He transcends these. All that is related to God belongs to the realm that is beyond the reach of human perception. However, it is expressed in terms that we can understand. We accept them as they are, but we do not actually know how they happen. Therefore, it is wrong to say that God is always close to the earth, because this means that a place or space applies to Him. However, He is always close to us, watching over us, and watching us. He says that He is closer to every one of us than our jugular veins.

God: Creation Of Heaven & Earth In Six Days

When God wills to create something, He only has to say, “Be” and it comes into existence. However, the Qur’an mentions that God created the heavens and the earth in six days. May I ask why it took six days to create them, and what happened over those six days of creation?

There is no doubt that God does not need time in order to accomplish His will. Whenever God wants to create something, He only has to give the command that it should exist and there it is in full existence. This is clearly stated in the Qur’an more than once. It is true in every sense. Yet the Qur’an states that God has created the heavens and the earth in six days. This is also true. Moreover, there is no contradiction between the two statements. A builder who is able to build a house in three months does not detract from his ability if he builds one in four or six month, or even longer than that.

There is a difference between ability and actual happenings. God is certainly able to create the whole universe in a single moment. There is no limit to His ability. But He chose to create it in six days. The choice is an aspect of His wisdom. We cannot fathom God’s wisdom, but we must believe that He has a reason for every thing, and that reason is, by necessity, wise.

Having said that, I would like to add that scholars have spoken at length about the six days of creation mentioned in the Qur’an. They agree that this period of time is not to be taken according to what we understand by the word, ‘day’, in our world. We must not take it as six 24-hour days or a week less one-day. For one thing, an Earth day results from the position of the Earth in relation to the sun and how long it takes the Earth to revolve. So it does not apply to God in this sense. For another, time or place does not restrict Him. We cannot say that God exists in this place or in such period of time. He is not limited by either.

This is one aspect of His attribute, of His name, The Infinite.

As scholars discuss the six days of creation, they advance a variety of views. Several of these are very interesting and have clear validity. However, I am more inclined to the view, which describes the six days as six stages of creation. Each was accomplished the moment God gave His command to it to exist.

The point that remains to be said in this connection is perhaps the most valid and important. Whatever we say on this matter is our view, which may be right or wrong. It is God who knows best why He chose to create the universe in six days. We do not question His wisdom, but we believe that had He chosen to do so, He would have created them in no time whatsoever.

God: Forgiveness In Advance By God

Can God forgive an offence or a sin a person may commit even before it is committed? We know that God can do what He pleases. My friend speaks of a report, which suggests that God may do that. Please comment.

When the question is put in this way, the instinctive answer is that it could not. Let me first start by giving a translation of the report.

“Ali ibn Abu Talib, the Prophet’s cousin and companion, says: God’s messenger sent me with Az-Zubair and Al-Miqdad, with the instruction: “Go to Khakh Garden, where you will find a woman who has a letter with her. Take the letter from her [and bring it to me].” We went fast on our horses until we arrived at the place and found the woman there. We said to her, ‘Give us the letter you have.’ She said, ‘I do not have any letter.’ We said, ‘You shall give it to us or we shall have you undressed [to get the letter].’ She got it out of her hair. We took it to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and there was written in it: From Hatib ibn Abu Baltaah to some of the non-believers in Makkah. The letter gave them some intelligence of what the Prophet, peace be upon him, intended to do.

“The Prophet, peace be upon him, asked him, ‘What have you done, Hatib?’ He said, ‘Do not judge me hastily, messenger of God. I used to be one of Quraish, although I do not belong to them. Those with you of the Muhajireen [i.e. people who came from Makkah to Madinah with the Prophet] have relatives of their own in Makkah who would protect their families and property for them. I thought that since I did not belong to any important lineage among them, I could do them some favor so that they would not harm my family. I assure you that I have not done that because of any lack of faith on my part, nor because I had entertained any thought of renouncing Islam.’ The Prophet, peace be upon him, said to his companions, ‘He has told the truth.’ Omar said, ‘Allow me, Messenger of God, to chop his head off.’ The Prophet, peace be upon him, said, ‘He had fought in the Battle of Badr. How would you know that God might not have approved the people, who had fought in Badr and said, “Do what you like, for I have forgiven you.”’ [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim and others].”

This incident took place at a time when the Prophet, peace be upon him, was preparing to launch an attack on the non-believers in Makkah after they had violated the provisions of the peace treaty, which the two sides had signed two years earlier. The people of Makkah took part in an attack launched by a tribe allied to them against a tribe allied to the Prophet, peace be upon him. The Prophet, peace be upon him, was keen to give Quraish, the major tribe in Arabia, which derived further distinction from the fact that it lived in Makkah, a lesson on how to respect its treaties. However, he was keen to achieve his purpose with minimum bloodshed.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, took all precautions to make sure that the people of Quraish would be taken by total surprise. All mobilization efforts were completed in total secrecy. People were prevented from coming into Madinah and leaving it. However, it was one of the companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him, who thought of breaking the news to the people of Makkah, hoping that he would be able to hold this as a favor to ensure the safety of his immediate family in Makkah.

That his action was sinful is beyond doubt. The Prophet, peace be upon him, had issued express orders to all his companions to maintain total secrecy. Moreover, it

was a time when war could easily break out. It would have meant a great difference in both; the conduct of the battle and its outcome if the people of Quraish knew in advance of the Muslim army which marched towards Makkah and if they were taken completely by surprise. Yet Hatib ibn Abu Baltaah did not consider any of these aspects. He was only concerned with his own affairs and he feared for his immediate family.

In view of his very serious action, Omar, a leading companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, who was known not to mince words about the importance of abiding by the Prophet's instructions, suggested that the man should be executed. He volunteered to do that if the Prophet, peace be upon him, approved. The Prophet, peace be upon him, reminded Omar that Hatib was one of the soldiers who fought in the Battle of Badr, the first major battle between the Muslims and Quraish. The Prophet, peace be upon him, further suggested that God might have forgiven those who fought in Badr. It is this, which leads to the question whether sins can be forgiven in advance.

The normal situation is that when a believer commits a sinful action, he regrets what he has done and prays God to forgive him. If his repentance is genuine, then God grants him forgiveness. Moreover, forgiveness is hastened by doing a good deed of equal or more importance to the sin committed. Those who fought in Badr were true soldiers of Islam. They faced an enemy with much greater forces than their own. Furthermore, they were ill equipped for battle. Nevertheless, they fought hard and remained steadfast until they achieved victory. What this meant in practice was that those who fought in Badr achieved a degree of distinction which ensured the forgiveness of their past sins, and made them worthy of forgiveness of whatever sins they might commit in future. But the fact that they were worthy of forgiveness does not mean that they would inevitably be forgiven, unless God wills to forgive them.

It is this to which the Prophet, peace be upon him, is referring in this Hadith. Those were people who had strong faith to ensure that they would sincerely repent any sin or future mistake. In the case of Hatib who had done a clear and serious mistake, his repentance would be on the same level. It is for this reason that the Prophet, peace be upon him, stopped Omar from harming Hatib or killing him.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, was keen that any of his followers who slipped would go on to correct his error. This does not mean an automatic forgiveness of all future sins, but it is an indication that those particular people would have what it takes to be forgiven: i.e. genuine faith and the willingness to own to mistakes and rectify them. The Prophet, peace be upon him, did not mean that none of them would ever commit a mistake or a sin. Indeed, if any had committed any punishable sin, the Prophet, peace be upon him, would have inflicted the punishment prescribed by Islam on him. But the Prophet, peace be upon him, who always told the truth was also speaking the truth in this instance. Every single one of those who fought in Badr continued to do his Islamic duties with diligence and give whatever sacrifice was required of him until he died. That was sufficient to ensure God's forgiveness for him, which is always the best guarantee for admission into heaven.

God: Gifts Of Knowledge To the Christians & Ignorance For Muslims

Could you please explain why God has granted the gifts of knowledge and material wealth to Christians while he bestowed only ignorance on Muslims?

God has made no such gifts. It is people's endeavors that have put them in such positions. God has established certain rules for human life. Whichever community conforms to such rules, pursuing knowledge and seeking to gain wealth and power, will achieve that. Communities, which neglect such rules, will live in ignorance and

poverty. Human history proves this. All civilizations, past and new, testify to this universal law. So, people cannot complain. It is all-fair for every nation and all generations.

Arabs before Islam were an ignorant community, split into warring and raiding tribes. When they became Muslims and realized what Islam wanted them to do, they became united and gained strength and knowledge, establishing a civilization that remains the best in human history. When Muslims allowed un-Islamic values to creep into their lives, abandoned Islamic principles of faith and justice, slackened in the pursuit of knowledge and abandoned serious endeavor and the pursuit of knowledge, they reaped the results of such negligence in the form of weakness and ignorance. This is the way that led to the decline of all civilizations in the past, and will continue to do so in the future.

Having said this, I may add that it is not true that Muslims are doomed to ignorance and poverty. There is much wealth in the Muslim world, but, in many cases, it is not administered in the proper Islamic way, which ensures that all people in society share in its benefits. Moreover, Muslims who pursued knowledge were able to achieve high positions both in the Muslim world and in the West. You only need to look at the number of Muslim scientists who occupy very high positions in their respective fields in America and Europe. Nor is it true that Christians are favored with these gifts. There are Christian communities in Africa, Latin America and Asia, which are deprived of these blessings. They also need to follow the rules God has made for human life in order to prosper both in knowledge and wealth.

God: His Existence — Do We Really Need Any Proof Of That?

What is the most convincing way to prove the existence of Allah, the Almighty? Also, what is the proof of the existence of the Prophet?

Do we really need to prove Allah's existence? Perhaps thirty years ago, I might have warmed to such a question and could have written a treatise providing methodical discussion of the subject and giving arguments that the opponents of religion would find very difficult to refute. Now, with the benefit of my life experience, I am more inclined to say that we do not need such a proof any more than we need to prove that the sun gives us heat or that a full moon gives the night superb brightness. Perhaps the best proof lies in the fact that when human nature is free from prejudice, it tends to be a believing nature. Before anyone accuses me of being too subjective, I would like to relate this interesting story.

Imam Al-Ghazali was a highly renowned scholar who rose to fame in an age, which was characterized by its great variety of intellectual and philosophical schools of thought. Many Orientalists consider him the greatest philosopher in Islamic history. Yet he was the one who brought about the decline of philosophical trends in the Muslim world.

It is said that Al-Ghazali was once walking along the street and people were keen to express their admiration and respect of him. A very old woman was not particularly amazed by what she saw. She asked who the man was. Someone answered: "Do you not know him? He is the one who knows one thousand proofs of Allah's existence." The old woman answered: "So what? Had he not had one thousand doubts, he would not have had one thousand proofs." Al-Ghazali overheard this reply. He smiled and offered a little prayer in these words: "My Lord, grant me the strength of faith old people have."

The story is significant in the sense that it is man who determines the level of evidence he requires in order to believe in Allah. If he allows his nature to look freely without restraining or checking it by prejudices, social prejudices, personal desires,

or interests, he will be so much closer to faith. This is indeed the message we understand from the Qur'an. As you realize the Qur'an is above all a book of divine guidance. It concentrates first of all on the basic issue of faith: The belief in the Oneness of Allah and His control of, and supremacy over, all the universe. The Qur'an draws our attention to the world around us and invites us to contemplate on every aspect of creation. It tells us that there are pointers and indications in the universe, which prove without any shadow of doubt, that there is no deity save Allah, the Creator of all. If we were to reflect on these, the only conclusion we would derive from them is that Allah is the Creator of all and the Lord of all.

Such indicators are everywhere in the world, but we tend to overlook them because they are so familiar to us. If you consider how a big tree comes from a small seed and the process of planting the seed, its producing a shoot out of the soil, the way it establishes its roots, and how it grows, blooms and yields its specific brand of fruit, you will conclude that only Allah could have given the seed all these characteristics. But we do not tend to reflect on this, because the planting of trees and plants and waiting for their yield is so familiar to us that we tend to think of it as a simple natural process. It may be so, but who made it so natural? Similarly, the birth of every child is a miracle, but we tend to accept it as the most natural thing on earth. Such birth is certainly a natural phenomenon, but who said that natural phenomena are not miraculous? Since it is beyond man's control, it is definitely subject to the will of a different power, i.e. that of Allah. Man has been studying this process of conception, pregnancy, and birth for centuries on end, but he still cannot influence, amend or change this process. Nor can man determine when to start it or influence its outcome. Not even the best techniques of helping women conceive change the fact that all efforts of man do not amount to more than inducing the start of the process and allowing it to take its course. Otherwise, can man conceive of any method, which would bring children into being, without relying on the process of fertilizing a female egg with a male sperm?

You ask how can we prove the Prophet's existence. Do we need to prove it? How to prove the existence of any historical personality? Is it not by the reports we have about him and the events in which he took part or he helped accomplish? We have a full record of the life of the Prophet, peace be upon him. We also have reports of all his actions, from the most private ones to those of state and public interest. In the case of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, however, we also have the radical change in the Arabian society and in human life as a whole which he brought about.

Perhaps what you actually mean is how to prove that he actually was a messenger of Allah and that his message was the final one addressing mankind as a whole. In this case, I have to refer you to the Qur'an which is the ultimate proof of all that. I have several points to make here but I can only refer to them very briefly, because of the limitation of space. The Qur'an was revealed at a time when the Arabs gave so much importance to literary excellence, particularly in poetry. A poet of high standard was a source of pride for his tribe. In the tribal warfare, poetry was as important a weapon as swords, spears and arrows. When the Prophet, peace be upon him, received his revelations and recited them to the people of Makkah, they listened to something totally new. It was not poetry, but its literary excellence surpassed everything they knew. They realized that it could not have been composed by a human being. Even the staunchest of the enemies of Islam acknowledged that. Moreover, the Qur'an was so different in style, rhythm and use of imagery from the Hadith which was the Prophet's own expression. It is not possible for any human being to use two widely different styles to express the same subject matter and to do that so consistently over a period of 23 years which was the length of the time during which the Qur'an was revealed.

Moreover, the Qur'an mentions certain facts which were totally unknown to mankind at the time of its revelation and only very recently we started to discover them. One

example is the details the Qur'an gives about the various stages of the development of the fetus, from the moment it is conceived to the time of its birth. These details are now scientifically proven by the use of sophisticated technology, such as ultrasound scanning. The Prophet, peace be upon him, had no means of knowing these, except through revelation from Allah, the Creator of man and the universe. Another example is the clear reference to the fact recently proven by scientists: When a strait separates two seas, as the Red Sea is separated from the Indian Ocean by the Strait of Bab Al-Mandab, the two seas are actually separated to the extent that the maritime life in one is so different from that in the other. In Verse 53 of Surah 25 [Criterion "Al-Furqan", the Qur'an refers to Allah as having "**placed a barrier between the two seas.**" In Surah 55, Verses 19 and 20, which may be rendered in translation as follows:

"He has given freedom to the two seas so that they might meet; yet between them is a barrier, which they not transgress." [Beneficent — "Ar-Rahman" 55: 19-20]

If Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, did not receive this from Allah Himself, how could he have known it when he never came near the sea in his life?

Moreover, the Qur'an laid down new legislation in various social matters which represented a great departure from what prevailed in Arabia and in surrounding countries and states. Yet there was no earthly reason for the enactment of such legislation which any reformer would have hesitated to introduce because they were bound to upset the social balance. Perhaps, the best example of these is the high position Islam gives to women, bring them to a level of equality with men, with only a few differences of secondary importance, necessitated by the different role they have to fulfill in human life. In pre-Islamic Arabia and in most societies at the time of the Prophet, women were considered far too inferior to men. Some Arabian tribes considered a widow part of the estate of a deceased man, to the extent that the chief of the clan could do with her whatever he wanted: He could marry her if he wished, without even bothering to ask her or he could pass her to someone else in his family if he so preferred. Women had no share in inheritance. Islam gives them their rightful and fair shares. Furthermore, it gives the woman all the rights to own any type of property and to invest it or spend it as she pleases, without any intervention by her father or her husband or any other man. Why would Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, make such a great departure from the prevailing tradition when no woman in Arabia raised her voice calling for a reform?

As you realize, the Qur'an is preserved intact. Allah has guaranteed that it would remain in its original form for all time. We recite it in prayer and at other times. Its recitation earns us reward. Yet the Qur'an contains a reproach to the Prophet, peace be upon him, for a step he made. If the Qur'an was of the Prophet's own composition, would he have included such reproach? If he recognized his mistake, would it not have been courageous of him just to admit it? Would he have included such reproach in his book of worship? Read, if you wish, this reproach at the opening of Surah 80. A passage which would also make a very interesting reading is the one included in Surah 69 which describes the Qur'an in these terms:

"It is indeed the word of a noble messenger, and is not -- however little you may be prepared to believe it -- a word of a poet and neither is it -- little you may be prepared to take it to hear -- the word of a soothsayer; it is a revelation from the Lord of all worlds." [the Inevitable "Al-Haaqqah" 69: 40-43].

This description is followed by this threat:

"Now if he [whom We have entrusted with it] had dared to attribute some of his own sayings to Us, We would indeed have seized him by his right hand and would have indeed have cut his life vein and none of you could have saved him." [the Inevitable "Al-Haaqqah" 69: 44-47]

If the Qur'an was of Muhammad's own invention, far be it from him to do so, would he have included such a threat to himself?

Moreover, I want also to refer to the fact that the Prophet, peace be upon him, demonstrated his absolute faith in the Qur'an as the word of Allah. The Qur'an tells the Prophet, peace be upon him, that he had nothing to fear from human beings because Allah protects him. Verse 67 of Surah 5 may be rendered in translation as follows:

"Messenger, announce that all that has been bestowed from on high to you by Your Lord; for unless you do that, then you will not have delivered His message. Allah will protect you from all people." [Table Spread — "Al-Ma'idah" 5: 67]

In the battle of Hunain, the Muslim army was in retreat and the Prophet, peace be upon him, in a highly vulnerable position. The disbelievers would have sacrificed any number in order to kill him. Yet, he stood on his horse, calling on his companions to rally to the cause of Islam. He drew very close to his enemy on purpose. Anyone else in his position could have been easily killed, but he did not even try to have any cover.

This sort of attitude demonstrated the strength of his faith. When Allah tells him that he will be protected, he was certain that nothing would happen to him and he went extremely close to his enemies as if he was inviting them to kill him, hoping to persuade them of the truth of his message when they related his action to what is said in the Qur'an. No one other than a messenger from Allah and a prophet would have done that.

These are only a brief examples of what the Qur'an contains of evidence proving that the message of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, was truly and genuinely a message from Allah.

[But again as was earlier said it is man who determines the level of evidence he requires in order to believe in Allah. If he allows his nature to look freely without restraining or checking it by prejudices, social prejudices, personal desires, or interests, he will be so much closer to faith.]

God: His Favors To Unbelievers & Believers Alike In This World But

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Why is it that God shows mercy and compassion to those who disobey Him, and even to those who are unbelievers? We are people who indulge in the pleasures of this world are enjoying many blessings, while some of those who are true believers and God-fearing are deprived and suffer many types of hardship.

The Islamic view of this life is that it is a test for mankind. It is their performance in this test that decides what happens to them in their life to come, which is endless, everlasting. People either go to heaven or hell as a result of what they do in this life.

The test that we have to go through is not uniform. People have different things to contend with, and it is how they cope and perform that determines whether they have passed or failed. If the test was uniform for everyone, then it becomes of little use.

Hence, some people are tested with affluence while others with poverty. Some have comforts and luxuries, while others have pain and hardship.

Some have to contend with oppression and persecution, while others are given influence and high position. Whatever a situation one finds oneself in, it is a test. What is more is that God has given us guidance on what to do in order to cope with the test and ensure that we come out with the right results.

He sent us a message, which He has guaranteed to preserve intact, safe from distortion for the rest of time. Not only so, but He has also given us immediate reward for following His guidance. The reward comes in the form of contentment we feel whatever the difficulties we have to endure. Thus a poor person may be much happier than the one who has enormous wealth: an advocate of divine faith imprisoned and tortured for his belief finds life easier to cope with than one who has a high position in government, particularly when he shares in the exercise of oppression.

Whatever the situation we find ourselves in, we must remember that the life of this world is of no value in God's measure. We do well to remember the Hadith, which says: "Had this world been equal, in God's measure, to the span of a mosquito's wings, He would not have allowed an unbeliever a sip of water." Since we find that unbelievers are given riches and power, we realize that the life of this world is of much lesser value than a mosquito, or indeed a mosquito's wing.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, explains this very concisely: "God may give riches, pleasures and luxuries of this world to believers and unbelievers alike, but He gives the Hereafter only to those who truly believe."

Allah is very Kind to His servants: He gives whatever He pleases to whom He wills: He is the All-Strong, the All-Mighty. Whoever seeks the harvest of the Hereafter, We do increase his harvest; and whoever seeks the harvest of this world, We do give him of it here, but in the Hereafter he will have no share whatever. [Counsel — "Ash-Shura" 42: 19-20]

In the Islamic view, this world cannot be taken on its own and as an end. It must be viewed in conjunction with the Hereafter. Hence, we cannot judge people's positions with God in the light of their lot in this world alone. We have to take into account what becomes of them in the Hereafter, remembering always that God is the most fair of judges and He does not allow the good deeds of any of His servants to go to waste.

God: His Love For Mankind

In a class of psychology, a Muslim student mentioned the Islamic view that this life is a test, which will distinguish the good from the bad, and determine their positions in the Hereafter. This was challenged by someone who asked why should God test us? Why does He not love us as we are?

That this life is a test which will distinguish the good from the bad among people is certainly a fact. That God needs to test us is wrong, because God does not need to know anything about us as a race or a species, or as individuals. His knowledge is absolute which means that it is perfect and does not increase as a result of any event or any occurrence. He knows everything before it takes place.

If we find this difficult to understand, we should remember that time, as we know it, is coincidental to the earth and it results from its position in relation to the sun and its movement around itself and round the sun. As such, it does not apply to God. So, why the test if God will not know anything new as a result of it? The test is for us, so that every one of us may prove himself or herself, and none is punished before he or

she has had a chance to follow God's guidance. In the Qur'an, God makes it clear that He has sent His messengers to mankind so that they are fully aware of what course they should follow. Otherwise, if a catastrophe should befall them on account of what they do, they would be able to protest that they have had no messenger to teach them what is right and what is wrong. So, God has granted people the right to receive guidance before they are held to account. God does not punish anyone for any wrong he does, if he has had no knowledge of the divine message.

The question that is raised about God's love betrays total lack of knowledge of the Islamic view. Certainly God loves us as we are, and the best evidence of His love is the fact that He has sent us messengers to teach us how to keep to the path of good which earns us God's great reward. The fact is that God knows our potentials and our failings. He sends us messengers and provides us with His message, which He guarantees to keep intact, free from distortions, so that we can always follow it. He also provides us with the clear example of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and his conduct in every situation in life. When we follow that guidance, God places us in a position higher than that of angels. Is there a greater evidence of God's love of mankind?

It is important to understand that the whole idea of testing mankind relies on the fact that human beings have been given the freedom of choice. This is what distinguishes man from other types of God's creations. Therefore when man follows the guidance provided to him by God, he deserves reward, and when he chooses to ignore that guidance and follow his caprice, he deserves punishment. Indeed the fact that man has been created with this ability is a mark of God's love, as this is a unique position.

With all that God has given man to help him make the right choice, there is no doubt that God has shown how much He loves human beings. It is left to human beings to demonstrate how much they love God by believing in Him, accepting His guidance and following His messenger, Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. When they do that, God's love is manifested in an everlasting way when He admits them to heaven where they enjoy eternal bliss and suffer no hardship whatsoever.

But there is another aspect to God's love of human beings, which is seen most clearly in the way God rewards good deeds and how He punishes for bad ones. It is often repeated in the Qur'an that a good deed is credited at 7 times its value, but this is the standard reward. God may, if He so pleases, multiply that to 700 times the value of the good deed, and may give even greater credit. On the other hand, a bad deed is recorded against the offender exactly as it is. It is never multiplied. Moreover, when a bad deed is followed by a good one, the latter erases the former, and the slate is wiped clean.

Furthermore, God has given us means and methods to seek His forgiveness of our bad deeds, and He has promised to forgive those who seek His forgiveness after repenting having done them. He bestows on them His mercy.

This point is very important, because God describes Himself not only as compassionate and merciful, but as One who bestows His grace very often. Indeed, the derivations of mercy and grace as attributes of God are quite a few and they range from bestowing these in the normal way upon those who pray to God for mercy, to ones which signify frequency and multiplicity. This means that when we pray God to forgive us and have mercy on us He answers our supplication, and also bestows on us His grace to reward us for our supplication and for our repentance. If we are not satisfied with all this as evidence of God's love, then I do not know what should satisfy us.

God: His Name Allah — Was It Known Before Islam

Considering that the Prophet's father's name was Abdullah, may I ask if God's name, Allah, was known before Islam?

Yes, God's name, Allah, was known for a long time in Arabia. We find it in Arabic poetry dating back many centuries prior to the advent of Islam. It is perhaps the name used by the Prophets Ibrahim and Ismail.

To the Arabs who lived shortly before Islam, it signified the overall God who controlled the universe. However, they thought their idols to be His partners who would listen to their appeals and bring them closer to God.

God: His Name, Its Origin, & Equivalent In Other Languages

May I ask what is the name of Allah, and where has this word come from, and what does it mean? What is its equivalent in English? What are the correct names of the Prophet Abraham and Jesus? Why have they changed from their correct versions?

The word Allah is the Arabic name of God. Etymologically, it consists of two words: "Al" and "Ilah." The first one is the definite article, while the second means "the being who is worshipped." When the two words were joined, the glottal stop "i" at the beginning of the second word was omitted for easier pronunciation and the two words became inseparable. Its full meaning is "the supreme being to whom all creation turn for the accomplishment of all their purposes, and to whom they appeal to alleviate their hardship, and whom they address in all their needs, just like a little child does to his mother." We cannot ask where has this word come from because this is not asked about any word in any language.

In English we use the word "God" to refer to the Supreme Being. It has practically the same connotations although in a Christian context it may refer to The Trinity. There is nothing wrong with using the terms other languages use when we refer to Allah. There is no need to retain the Arabic version. Thus, the French-speaking Muslims may use the term "Dieu" while those who speak Urdu may use "Khoda," etc.

In the Qur'an the name of "Ibrahim" is used to refer to the Prophet Ibrahim, and the name "Eissa" refers to the Prophet Jesus. You may realize that Ibrahim was raised among people who spoke an old Semitic language, perhaps Aramaic. How his name was pronounced in that language, we have no means of telling. However, since, the Qur'an uses "Ibrahim" we must conclude that it is very close to the original pronunciation of his name. The same applies to Jesus' name in Hebrew.

That these names have different versions in different languages is not surprising, because every one of us will hear his own name pronounced differently by people speaking different languages.

God: His Ninety-nine Names Or the Attributes

I read in a note posted in a mosque that the person who memorizes Allah's 99 names is certain to go to heaven. I am always repeating those 99 names after Fajr and evening prayers. [Please comment].

Most of Allah's 99 names denote His attributes. Thus, a name like Al-Khaliq denotes the attribute of creation, which belongs to Allah, since Al-Khaliq means, "the Creator". Al-Raziq on the other hand, denotes the attribute of providing sustenance to his creation, since Al-Raziq means, "the Provider". The same applies to Allah's other names. Hence, knowing them all helps us formulate a clear concept of Allah and His essential attributes. This is important for a Muslim to have. Moreover, it helps him adopt the right attitude when he is faced with a problem or a difficult situation. Say, for example, a person finds himself in a situation where he is in bad need of even a small amount of food, as in the case of refugees who flee from their homes as a result of war or famine. A refugee who is well aware of Allah's attributes realizes that it is Allah who provides sustenance for all His creatures. Hence, he turns to Him for help and prays Him to provide him with such sustenance.

Having said that, I should add that there is no great virtue in repeating Allah's attributes like a parrot. Islam tries to make its followers fully aware of their position and responsibilities. This is not done through the memorization of the verses of the Qur'an or Allah's names, but through acting on them. Hence, it is a great virtue to be aware of Allah's attributes, but that virtue is not obtained through repeating His attributes like a parrot.

God: His Predetermination — Can Human Beings Avoid That?

When something unfortunate happens, most people say that it has been impossible to prevent it, because what is written cannot be changed. May I ask whether Muslims generally are afraid to accept the blame for their mistakes? We believe that giving life and taking it away is controlled by God only. What can we say about birth control, which enables individuals to determine the number of children they have? On the other hand, life is lost in riots, when blind mob goes on the rampage and kills opponents at will. Please comment.

It is certainly true that the giving of life and taking it away are actions that take place only by God's will. It is He alone who originates life, takes it away and brings it back. It is He who created the first human being and devised the system of procreation so that generations of human beings would succeed one another to maintain human life on earth until the day ***"when God will inherit the earth and all those living on it."***

When God created man, He wanted him to be in charge of the earth and gave him a will of his own to make his life a trial. He has made it clear that our life on earth is not the final chapter in our existence. After we die we are brought back to life at a time determined by God when we are given our reward for our good deeds or punished for our bad ones. It is most important, therefore, to take the chance of this life in order to ensure our happiness in the life to come.

It is God's own will that our life span on earth is kept secret from us. No one can ever tell when his moment comes and how he will depart from this life. Very recently, a group of people survived a plane crash and a bus accident in two different countries within the same weekend. Either accident could have seen them all killed, but they survived. As human life is shaped by God, people die at all ages. Children may die when they are yet newborn, in their early years and before they reach adolescence. Young men die in wars and by accident. Young women die in childbirth or succumb

to killer diseases. These days, people die in the prime of life as a result of contracting AIDS. Those who live to old age eventually wither away. No one can say whether he will survive the next moment or live for another forty or fifty years. That should be enough motivation for anyone to try to be always ready to meet God, having passed the test of life.

While we certainly cannot say when we are going to die, we can influence certain causes of death. This does not challenge or alter God's will, but works within it. It is God who has set into operation the law of cause and effect. It is He who has given fire the quality of burning. If a human being is caught up in a burning house, he will certainly die, unless the fire brigade arrives in time. This is because for a human being to die by burning or to suffocate by the fumes caused by a fire takes some little time. If he is taken away within that period, and given the right treatment, he will survive. In the first situation when he is caught in the fire, he is subject to the effects of certain causes in a particular situation. After the fire brigade has taken him away, he is subject to the effects of another set of causes which help preserve life rather than destroy it. In each situation he is subject to God's will which remains in operation.

Infant mortality rates throughout the world have been significantly reduced through the implementation of the immunization program. Incidence of the major childhood diseases has been controlled, but does that mean human beings have taken over the control of childhood mortality? By no means. What has happened is that children have moved from one set of prevailing conditions to another. Before they were immunized, they could easily suffer any of the childhood diseases, which can cause death or disability. After a child is immunized, he is better able to fight those viruses and escape those diseases. The process of immunization does not function in isolation from God's will. In fact, it functions by God's will. This is exactly what Omar ibn Al-Khattab said to Abu Ubaidah, another companion of the Prophet, when the latter questioned him about his order preventing entry to and departure from an area where the plague was widespread. Abu Ubaidah asked him: "Are we trying to escape from God's will?" Omar answered: "Yes, we try to escape from God's will with God's will." This means that if we avoid certain causes of death we remain subject to God's will, because avoiding them and preventing certain causes of death is also part of God's will.

We apply this law everyday in our lives. We know, for example, that drinking clean and purified water will help us stay healthy. On the other hand, drinking polluted water can cause illness and death. Therefore, governments try to make drinking water safe. When we travel to an area where we are not sure of the quality of water, we drink either bottled or boiled water. Do we, as a result, avoid disease and death? The answer is yes, indeed. But do we prevent the operation of God's will? Certainly not, because we are taking precautions in order to produce new effects of another set of prevailing causes. In other words, we are benefiting by the operation of the law of cause and effect, which is part of God's will. In the same vein, people who resort to birth control methods are likely to have a smaller number of children than those who do not. That is because such people resort to certain causes, which have the effect of preventing conception. It is also His will that a female egg will not produce life unless conception takes place.

This is not different from a woman remaining childless if she does not get married. Similarly, those who are killed in wars or riots would have survived if they did not happen to be at the receiving end of a bullet or shrapnel, or have not been too close to where a bomb exploded.

These days, many Muslims understand this fact in a very narrow sense. They have learned that when a human being is still an embryo his life duration and means of livelihood are written down. They understand this impossible position from which

they cannot be released. Hence, they are not ready to do anything that does not take their fancy. They wait for things to happen to them because whatever they do is not going to affect them. This attitude is not acceptable from the Islamic point of view. Indeed, God has encouraged us to take every possible means to improve the quality of life. This applies to all aspects.

The examples we have cited are mostly concerned with health, but if you look at social life, you find that the Islamic system provides social security through the working of Zakah, and ensures that wealth is not concentrated in the hands of the few while the overwhelming majority of people suffer poverty and deprivation. If Muslims implement that system then they have taken steps, which have the effect of making their social life much better and happier. It is unfortunate that the majority of Muslim communities today do not take such measures and steps to improve the quality of life. They try to put the blame for their suffering on God's will.

The early Muslims understood the operation of God's will in a very positive way. Hence, they were able to deal with every situation and try to ensure a better life for their community and the next generation. They took the fact that the duration of a person's life is written before his birth in a definitely positive manner. When they faced tyrants they stood up to them. They realized that tyranny couldn't shorten their life span. They will die at their time known to God. But if they remained idle, they would still die at the same time. [This rectitude provided them with deeper faith to stand up against tyranny.]

It is as the Qur'an says to those who were reluctant to join the Muslim army at the time of the Prophet, because they feared death: ***"Say, Had you been in your own homes, those who might have been killed in war would have died in bed."*** That is because going to war, or a campaign or jihad, does not shorten a life God has determined to be long. To die in war is to die at the end of one's life, as it had been determined by God. A person who stays at home would also die at the end of his life. Only the means of death may be different.

God: His Predetermination — Last Minute Change Of Course

The last verse of the short Surah entitled The Earthquake states "that whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it (on the Day of Judgement) and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it then." To my mind, this suggests a fair method of accountability, taking into consideration even the smallest of actions, whether good or bad. However, I have recently read a Hadith which says, that "a person may behave like the people of paradise until there is but an arm's length between him and it, and that which has been written overtakes him and so he behaves like the people of hell-fire and thus enters it." The same thing applies in reverse, ensuring heaven for a person who does good only at the last stage of his life, having been an evildoer for a very long time. According to my limited knowledge, there are only three sins, which Allah does not pardon: Suicide, murder and associating partners with Allah. Committing any of these crimes abrogates any other good deeds the person may have made. Other actions are weighted and the destiny of people is determined by the result of such balance. Could you please explain whether there are any particular good deeds, which ensure heaven in the same way as these three, ensure hell? Could you also throw some light on this whole question?

Let me correct you on your point that there are three actions, which abrogate all good deeds, which ensure hell for their perpetrator. You have named these as suicide,

murder and associating partners with Allah. This statement of yours is not correct. Allah states in the Qur'an that the only sin or act of disobedience which cannot be forgiven is the association of partners with Allah. He says: "**Allah does not ever forgive the association of the partners with Him. He may forgive whomever He wills whatever else may be committed.**" This means that he forgives such cardinal sins as murder and suicide. The Prophet, peace be upon him, has explained this by relating the story of a man who had killed 99 people. He then went to a scholar and asked whether Allah would accept his repentance. The scholar told that he could not see that he could ever be forgiven after having committed all those murders. The man, then, killed the scholar and completed the number of his victims to 100. He then went to another scholar and asked him whether Allah would accept his repentance. This scholar told him that there was no reason why his repentance could not be accepted. He advised him to repent immediately and not to do any more crimes. When the man complied, the scholar advised him to go to a particular town, which was full of good people. He would have there a good environment, which would enable him to strengthen his resolve not to disobey Allah anymore. The man was on his way to that town when Allah caused him to die.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, then explains that the angel of paradise and the angel of hell disputed among themselves to which party the man belonged. The angels who are charged with administering punishment to sinners argued that the man never did a good deed, but the others argued that he repented and started acting on his repentance by traveling to this city. Allah sent to them an angel who advised them to measure the distance between the city of evildoers, which the man had left, and the distance to the city of good believers to which he was going. If he was nearer to the first, then he was still a sinner and should be punished. If he was nearer to the city of good believers, he should be counted among them. The Prophet, peace be upon him, then says: "When they began to make their measurements, Allah ordered the city of evil to move away and ordered the city of goodness to draw nearer. He was found to be closer to it [the city of goodness] and his soul was taken by the angels of mercy. He was forgiven."

This Hadith gives a clear example that Allah forgives all types of sins, with the exception of associating partners with Him. Forgiveness may be granted on the Day of Judgement through the intercession of the Prophet, peace be upon him, on behalf of his followers. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says that he extends his intercession "to those of his followers who commit cardinal sins". Let us then broaden our minds and not give a narrow interpretation of anything that Allah has willed to keep unrestricted.

The Hadith, which you have mentioned about a change of direction in people's deeds, which causes the eventual change of destiny in the hereafter, is an authentic one. It may be given in translation as follows: "A person may do the deeds of the people of heaven until he is only a yard or so away from it, but then his destiny overtakes him and he does what the people of hell do and he is thrown in it. On the other hand, a person may do what the people of hell do until he is only a yard or so away from it, and his destiny overtakes him and he does what the people of heaven do which ensures his admittance into it." How can we reconcile this Hadith with the principle of balancing people's action?

The first point to make is that, this process of balancing of the good deeds against the bad ones benefits only the believers, because their faith ensures that they have their good deeds credited to them. As for non-believers, their lack of faith means that their good deeds avail them nothing. Allah does not accept any good action unless it is founded on faith. A person who denies Allah and associates partners with Him may do as many good deeds as he wishes, but he will receive no credit for them, because he lacks the very basis which ensures that he receives any reward from Allah. On the other hand, a person who has faith always hopes for Allah's forgiveness.

We can understand from the first Hadith on the basis of this principle. The first person that has done many good deeds betrays himself at the end of his life and shows that he really lacks faith. Hence, his actions do not merit any credit. Yet, he would have benefited by them, had he moved towards the establishment of faith in his heart. Instead, he chooses the opposite way and does something, which takes him away from the faith altogether. He condemns himself and renders all his past good deeds worthless. His action must be of the type, which cannot be reconciled with having any degree of faith. That is the only way to condemn him to hell-fire.

As for the other person, he moves in the diametrically opposite direction. Toward the end of his life he realizes that he had spent all his time in error. He believes in Allah and allows faith to establish itself within him. As you know, when one accepts Islam and believes in Allah, all his past sins are forgiven. He opens a new page and he is given a chance to prove himself. Allah does not question anyone who accepts His message and believes in Him about what he had done prior to that. Since this person has become a true believer at the end of his life, he is assured of being admitted into heaven.

God: His Predetermination — Life Expectancy

It is our firm belief, supported by the Qur'an and the Sunnah, that a man's life is predetermined by Allah. Nevertheless, people say that in such and such country, life expectancy is longer; or, if this and that are done, people can live longer; or if such and such precautions are taken, a person or a group of people would have been saved, and so on. By leading a simple and disciplined life one can have a peaceful go, but cannot cross the "deadline". Please comment.

There is a simple law, which applies to human life as well as to the universe in general. Indeed, it has a direct bearing on the task Allah has assigned to man when He first created him, namely, building human life on earth. That is the law of cause and effect. No individual or community can ignore this law or its implications without suffering disastrous consequences. Let us take a simple example: When a certain area has a good rainy season, agricultural produce is bound to be plentiful. A drought means shortage of supply and, in consequence, higher prices, poverty, hunger and even famine. If a country knows from experience that it has a "dry" winter every two or three years when rain is scarce, it can plan ahead and preserve certain supplies in order to alleviate the effects of the drought. Allah gives us in the Qur'an a very good example of this when He tells us that Prophet Yousuf foretold the king of Egypt that after seven years of good harvest, the land will go through a patch of terrible drought lasting another seven years. A program of preparedness for the forthcoming emergency was devised and put into operation. It was Yousuf himself who supervised it and the people of Egypt and the surrounding areas were able to live through the drought period without much affliction.

If someone suggests that without that program of preparedness which meant stocking more than half of the harvest, in the first seven good seasons, the population would not have suffered any consequences and those who managed to live easily would have continued to live in the same way and no one would have starved, then we can only tell him that he does not know what he is talking about.

A drought of seven consecutive years will play havoc with the lives of the population of any country. However, the people of Egypt were able to stand this long hardship because of the wise policy adopted by Yousuf, peace be upon him. That was a good example of how the law of cause and effect works. What we need to know is that it does not contradict Allah's will because it is part of it. It is Allah who set that law in operation and allowed its consequences to be fulfilled. It only needs a little stretch of

the mind to understand that this law is also part of predestination, in its broad, Islamic sense.

Let us take another example. Until recently smallpox was a major childhood disease which caused death and a great deal of suffering to millions of victims every year. As a result of a worldwide campaign of vaccination, smallpox has disappeared from the face of the earth. It is now 16 years since the last known case of smallpox was recorded in Somalia. Many of us remember friends, relatives or schoolmates who fell victim to this disease. Some of us still have its effects on our faces and bodies. Without that long campaign of vaccination, smallpox would have still been with us, causing untold suffering to our children. There is no doubt that smallpox has disappeared by Allah's will, but the medium of its eradication was the vaccination campaign undertaken by man in fulfillment of Allah's will. Can anyone suggest that smallpox would have disappeared from the face of the earth in 1977 whether the campaign of vaccination was organized or not?

A similar effort of immunization of children against six major childhood diseases is going on, with the eradication of one of them, polio, being clearly in sight. As efforts of monitoring the effects of the program show, incidence of these diseases have dropped with increased coverage of children with immunization. Since most of these diseases could kill their victims, the fall in occurrence has meant a commensurate drop in child mortality as a result of these illnesses. You have only to look at facts and figures to realize that in a certain country, the number of children dying with, say, measles, is half what it was ten years ago after the rate of coverage with vaccination against measles has reached 50 percent of the children of that country. Are we not required by Islam to relate these facts to each other and draw the appropriate conclusions, which will tell us that 100 percent coverage of children with immunization will inevitably mean that the occurrence of the disease will be minimal if not stopped completely?

Human beings fall ill and then they do recover. Do we ask ourselves how and why? When a person falls ill, he is required by Islam to seek medical treatment if it is available. The Prophet, peace be upon him, tells us to seek medical treatment because, as he puts it, "Allah has not created an illness without creating a cure for it." This is a good example of cause and effect. When you take a medicine, you are cured by Allah's will, because He has put into that particular medicine the qualities, which enable the human body to overcome a certain disease.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, tells us that "a human being cannot fill a worse container than his stomach." He also advises us that if we want to eat our fill, let us divide our tummy into three portions, one for food, one for drink and one for breathing. By giving us this valued advice, the Prophet, peace be upon him, is certainly showing us one way to avoid disease. Medicine has established for certain that the consumption of particular substances is associated with certain diseases. Cigarette smoking, for example, has been established as a direct cause of lung cancer, cardiovascular diseases and other types of cancer. On the basis of this certainty, the majority of scholars are giving rulings that tobacco consumption is forbidden in Islam. They argue that Allah would not permit us to use a substance, which is likely to cause killer diseases. Does not their ruling tell us that Islam recognizes the fact that by avoiding such a substance, we spare ourselves the possibility of falling victim to these diseases? Similarly, a healthy diet is important for health. When a person eats "rich" food which means that his diet has a large proportion of fat and sugar, he is liable to put on weight and if he is in the habit of "washing down" his fatty meal with a couple of drinks, he exposes himself to increased risk of a heart attack. Are we not, as Muslims, required to relate these scientifically proven facts to the Hadith, which I have just quoted? When we do so, we conclude that Islam likes its followers to have a balanced diet, which also means that they should not eat too much.

But why would Islam want us to do so when what has been written will take place whatever we do? If the death of a particular person will occur at a particular moment of time, whether he follows a healthy lifestyle or not, why should it matter what he eats, drinks, smokes, etc.? Is it true that there is a "deadline" which no one can cross?

May I ask in this connection why does Islam prescribe capital punishment for a murder? And why is a martyr rewarded with heaven in addition to forgiveness of all his past sins? If the victim of a murderer would have died any way when the weapon of the murderer caused his death and if the martyr would have died at the same moment whether he was fighting for Allah's cause or not, then the severity of the punishment in the first case and the abundance of the reward in the second can be called into question. There is no doubt in my mind that the punishment for murderer is the right one and the reward of a martyr is the one which is most befitting with Allah's grace and generosity. It is true that a murdered person died at the point in time when his life ended, as it was known to Allah long before the creation of man. But if the murderer did not pull the trigger and the bullet did not hit the victim, that victim would not have died at that particular moment. Read, if you will, the Hadith, which states, "He who likes to have his provisions increased and his life extended should be kind to his relatives." Here the Prophet, peace be upon him, is speaking of an extended life duration. We should not explain his statement away as meant figuratively, because it is not. What he tells us is the truth.

All the above examples can be easily understood within the general framework of the law of cause and effect, which Allah has set into operation. Therefore, it works with Allah's will and as a means of bringing about what He determined. Most of our actions are done by our free will. This means that it is up to us to do them or not. It is up to me to sit at this moment of time and write this answer to your question. I can easily stop and go and do something else. Similarly, you could have decided not to send your question to me. If you did not, I would not be writing on the subject. By the same token, the murderer could have refrained from pulling the trigger and his victim would have lived. That does not mean that he would have violated Allah's will because it is also Allah's will for a man to live if he is not hit by a bullet in his head or in his heart. The same man will meet his death sometime later when a different cause of death will have occurred. Its occurrence is also part of what Allah has predetermined.

If all the people on earth have access to safe drinking water and proper sanitation to dispose of their waste and if all people have their children vaccinated, a 50 percent reduction in the incident of diseases would be achieved. You will probably agree if half the illnesses suffered by mankind are avoided, the other half will cause less deaths. What that means in your terminology is that "the deadline" for the end of the life of many of us would be changed by Allah's will as He has already predetermined for man's life.

God: His Predetermination — Life Span & His Perfect Knowledge

May I take issue with you regarding an answer you had given concerning observation that life expectancy is much higher in Europe than it is in Muslim countries. In your answer you said that lifestyle is responsible for such differences. This is not true because it is reported in a Hadith that sometime after conception an angel is sent to the fetus to write down its provision, life span, and actions and whether he or she will be happy or miserable. Hence, the duration of every-one's life is determined by what has been written at that time. Therefore, nothing that he does or omits to do will affect that. A person may smoke, eat fatty food, be lazy or do the opposite things, and his span of life will not be affected. Your answer was

not based on any Islamic information, but on the so-called modern science. You would have done better to confine yourself to answers that are based on Islamic teachings.

No sir, my answer has taken Islamic teachings into account, because God has instructed us to look around us and learn from the lessons that life events may place before our eyes. He says in the Qur'an: **"Say: Reflect on what there is in the heaven and on earth. But of what benefit can signs and warnings be to the community that would not believe."** The Qur'anic verses and the Hadiths that call on us to study, reflect, take heed and learn are numerous indeed.

Besides, we have learned from Islam as well as from what we see around us that there is a law of cause and effect which operates by God's will. For example, fire burns. Therefore, when you put something close to a fire, it is burned. If you light up a match and put your finger on top of its flame, you will immediately feel a burning sensation. If you do not, you will experience no such feeling. This is an example of the working of the law of cause and effect. You do not place your finger close to the flame of a match and say that God's will may prevent the fire from burning it. It is certainly true that God may stop the action of the fire, but it is His will that fire should burn. Therefore, when we place things in a fire they are burned.

This applies to everything and all conditions and situations in life. A person who smokes has a much higher risk of suffering one of the serious diseases that smoking causes, such as a wide variety of cancer, cardiovascular diseases, chronic bronchitis, etc. Most of these are fatal. Therefore, the effect of being a heavy smoker is likely to be the suffering of one or more of these diseases, any of which can cause death. That same person would most probably not suffer from the disease which kills him if he does not smoke. If we were to say that he would still have suffered the same disease which is caused by nicotine or carbon monoxide, when he did not have either of them through smoking, then we are saying that an object could be burned without a fire, or drowned without coming near water.

Perhaps you would say that he might not have suffered that disease, but he would still die at the same moment, by some other reason. I would say that we do not know that, but most probably he would have lived longer, because he would be enjoying better health over a longer period of his life.

Here we come to the Hadith, which you have mentioned, and which is at the center of this argument. There is no doubt that the Hadith is authentic. Let us not speak about the details of the writing and why it should be written, or where it is written etc. We know that an angel writes down four things, including the duration of the life of the yet unborn baby. Now, the angel does not determine that duration. It is God who determines it, according to His knowledge, which is perfect, absolute, unlimited by the confines of time or place. I have explained on several occasions that God's knowledge is perfect and complete. Nothing is added to it as a result of any event, because time does not apply to God in the same way as it applies to us. When God instructs the angel to write these four things, He is fully aware what the person concerned will be doing in his life and what harm he will cause to himself and what damage to his health he may perpetrate. He takes into account the effect of all these on his health and knows whether he will have lung cancer as a result of smoking or coronary heart disease as a result of drinking, or he would be obese as a result of overeating and lack of exercise. So He gives him forty or fifty or sixty years of life in accordance with the effect of so many factors on his health and on his life as a whole. God will certainly give longer life duration to a person whom He knows will be following a healthy lifestyle.

Now the choice of lifestyle is a personal choice, which we do by our own free will. Had our actions been imposed on us by God's will, then God would not have held us

to account for what we do in this life. It is because He has given us free will that He subjects us to His judgment on the day of resurrection. He knows that what we do is our own personal choice. Therefore, we cannot escape the consequences.

Moreover, there are authentic Hadiths, which speak of prolonging life. In one of these, the Prophet, peace be upon him, is quoted as saying: "He who likes to be given an increase of provisions and a longer duration of life should be dutiful to his parents." Another Hadith, which uses the same wording in its first part, mentions that the results of increased provisions and longer life depend on being kind to one's close relatives. Again, dutifulness to parents and kindness to relatives are things that we do by our own free will. They are not imposed on us. But we should reflect that both the things that depend on them — increased provisions and longer life — are written down by the angel when every one of us is still a fetus. Scholars have explained this and given two points by way of explanation.

The first is that they point out a fact to which reference is made in Verse 39 of Surah 13 which includes this statement: "God may erase or confirm whatever He pleases." This is in direct reference to what is written concerning the future. So, what has been written may be changed as a result of what we do.

The other explanation is that when the angel is given his instructions to write down four things, he is told to write: "This person shall live for sixty years if he is not dutiful to his parents, but will continue to live until he is seventy if he is dutiful to them." Now, God knows in advance that the person concerned will be dutiful or not dutiful and at what moment exactly he will die. The angel does not know. Therefore, the extension in the person's age as a result of his actions is true in relation to all creatures, including human beings, angels and all living things on earth and in the wide universe. God knows the extension in advance.

Could we not say that the same thing applies in relation to the lifestyle that we follow. To my understanding, the way God has created us and the world around us makes it clear that it is His will that we will be affected by a wide variety of causes. Therefore, if we lead a healthy lifestyle we are likely to live longer than if we are heedless of all the lessons that life brings to us.

God: His Will & Consequences Of Our Actions

Verse 99 in Surah 10 states that all people on earth would have been believers had it been God's will for them to be so. Hence no compulsion should be exercised to make them believe. In commentary on this verse, the translator speaks of man's limited free will. I want to think that man's free will is unlimited. It is up to man, with much freedom of will, to accept God's messages or reject them. Please comment.

Some people try to shift the blame for their lack of faith away from themselves. They like to think that it is God's will that they should be disobedient to Him, or unbelievers. They say: "***Had it been God's will for us to be believers, He would have guided us to believe.***" In saying so, they confuse issues.

[The verse 99 read with verse 100 of Surah 10 may be rendered in translation as:

Had your Lord willed [that all the people of the world should be believers] all the dwellers of the earth would have believed in Him. Will you, then, force the people to become believers? No one can believe without Allah's permission and Allah's way is that He throws filth on those who do not use their commonsense.[Younus — 10: 99-100]

What these verses contain is the firm statement of the Authority of Allah and His Power, which cannot be denied. It cannot be construed to mean that Allah has predetermined the faith of His creatures.]

If we were to say that it is God who makes a person believe or disbelieve, then we are saying that He predetermines that some of His creatures will suffer in hell by His will, while others will enjoy heaven by His will. That makes the destiny of mankind beyond their control, or, in other words, the result of God's predetermination. That would lead us to ask how justice is done when people have no control over their fate? The fact is that people do have that control, because they take the actions which leads them to either heaven or hell. It is a human being's own choice whether to be a believer or not. God has given us guidance, and placed numerous pointers and indicators in the world around us.

He has also made us all equally susceptible to belief. It is in our nature that we should seek to know Him and to believe in Him. He has also given us our free will so that we determine our choice whether to accept His faith, which He has given us through His messengers.

Moreover, God gives every person a number of occasions when the issues of life and faith are clear in front of his eyes. If in spite of all this a person denies Him, then he does so by his own will. He deserves the fate he is certain to experience.

Now, is a human being's will limited or unlimited?

The answer is that it is free in certain matters and restricted in others. It is not within man's ability not to be influenced by the world around him and the natural phenomena that are in his environment. Moreover, his choices are limited by the abilities he has been given. A human being may wish to fly but he cannot do that, no matter how strong is his will to do so. But in matter of belief and actions, his will is certainly free. Hence, it is only fair that his destiny should be determined on the basis of his choice.

God addresses the people of heaven saying: ***"This is heaven which you have inherited as a result of what you used to do."*** It is clear from this verse that the basis of admitting anyone to heaven is his or her actions in this life.

God: His Will & His Foreknowledge

A person who loses his job or money as a result of his negligence may blame Allah for that, saying that it is His will. Allah already determines the total earnings of a person in his lifetime. Why should a man work, then? Please explain what powers Allah has given to man. Normally we find hard workers well off while lazy people are poor.

Sometimes people find it easy to put the blame on Allah's will for what happens to them through their own faults. The example you have mentioned is a typical one. A person may be warned once or twice by his employers about negligence, but pays no heed. Eventually he finds himself out of job. He then starts to justify the whole thing as something that would have happened anyway, because it is Allah's will which cannot be stopped. But what is Allah's will in the matter?

What we have to understand is that Allah has placed man on earth and charged him with the task of building human life. He had given him his freedom of choice, which makes him able to choose, in any situation, his course of action. This ability of man is part of Allah's will. Hence, it has to operate in human life. If it did not, and then man would have been exactly like animals that have no say in how they live and how they are affected by the world around them. Allah has also willed that the law of

cause and effect will operate to the full in human life. Thus, if a man exposes himself to severe wintry weather, he gets cold and he feels himself in need of having a fire or a source of heating nearby. It is Allah's will which makes man affected by weather conditions. It is also Allah's will to give man the ability to think about what sort of action he could take to reduce the severity of the situation in which he finds himself. He thus thinks about having some sort of heating. It is Allah's will to make the man able to decide whether to switch the heating on or not. But whether man chooses to switch it on or not is his own action, determined by his free choice. If he does, he gets warmer. If he does not, he continues to suffer in the cold. There maybe some constraints which motivate man to act in a certain fashion, but it is he who weighs up the possibilities open to him and makes his own decision. If a man decides not to switch his heater on, he cannot blame Allah's will for being cold.

You can say the same thing about almost everything in life. A person who stays at home doing nothing will earn no wages from anywhere. He cannot blame Allah or His will for not having enough to live on. It is his own decision not to go out to work and, consequently, not have any wages. Had he sought some employment or started some trade and, having had it, continued to discharge his duties and do his work to the best of his ability, he would have his salary or profit, as the case may be. It is Allah's will to organize human life in such a way as to make work a means to earn a livelihood. But it is a man's choice whether to work or not.

We have to differentiate here between what Allah knows beforehand of what will happen to us during our lifetime and what He has predestined for us. He has certainly determined in advance the life duration of every one of us. He has written when and how each one of us dies. According to an authentic Hadith, when a human being is still an embryo in his mother's belly, an angel is sent to him to breathe spirit into him. The angel also writes down his life duration, livelihood and whether he will come out of this life happy or miserable. But this does not mean a predestination with regard to what a person may earn in his life. This is only a reference to Allah's advance knowledge of what will happen to each one of us. As you realize, time, as we know it, does not apply to Allah. The succession of night and day, by which we calculate months, years, etc. is a natural phenomenon caused by the position of the earth in relation to the sun and the fact that the earth is in a continuous movement round itself and, at the same time, moves in orbit around the sun. Hence, time is a very accidental phenomenon. It does not apply to Allah.

Allah's foreknowledge of a man's livelihood does not mean that a man will end up having the same amount of money, whether he works or not. To believe this is to take a very naive attitude. The fact is that man's earnings are dependent on his work, but Allah who has full knowledge of everything knows in advance what sort of work every person will do and how much he will earn for it. The knowledge of Allah does not impose on a man a certain level of earnings.

We can compare this to the productivity of the earth. Allah has given the earth the ability to be cultivated and to yield all sorts of agricultural produce. If man makes use of this quality, which Allah has given to the earth, every one will have enough to eat. However, if man does not cultivate the earth, its surface will be covered with wild plants, few of which are edible and many are not. If man then goes hungry, he cannot put the blame on Allah. If two neighbors share a plot of land and one of them plants apple trees in his part, while the other does not, the latter cannot say that Allah's will has prevented him from having apples in his land. Indeed, it is Allah's will which has given the first one his apples, but the realization of Allah's will has come about through man's effort.

God: His Will & Man's Choice

When something happens, we say that it has happened by Allah's will. But then we say that man is required to abide by Islamic teachings and he will be either rewarded or punished for his actions. I realize that certain things like health and illness, birth and death, etc. are out of our control. But I have also heard it being said that with regard to financial earnings, a man cannot exceed what Allah has fixed for him. It is up to him to earn his money through legitimate or illegitimate means. At the same time, when someone has a large number of children, people will say Allah will provide for them. Could you please comment on these points?

No believer will question the fact that it is Allah who has created the universe and who has set all the rules of nature in operation. On the basis of this common acceptability, everyone agrees that weather conditions, birth and death as well as effects of natural forces and conditions on man happen by Allah's will. We are not considering here the argument of non-believers who try to explain these phenomena away, by saying that they are the product of natural forces and natural laws. When you ask them who has devised these natural laws and set them in operation, they have no convincing answer. But to a believer who accepts that all these have been put into existence by Allah's will, no conflict arises between the divine will and his own choice.

What is very important to remember is that it has been Allah's will to create man with the ability to determine his own actions. Moreover, human life is made in such a way that man is influenced by his own actions. When you do something, its results must affect you in one way or another. If they were to have no effect at all on you, then you lose the motivation or the incentive to do anything at all.

The point you have mentioned with regard to a person's earnings is rather misleading. A government employee who can get away with embezzlement of funds and remains in his job for several years will be able to amass a wealth, which he could not hope to have received otherwise. We cannot say, therefore, that he would have ended up with the same amount of money whether he resorted to embezzlement or chose to be honest and not to take a single Riyal in an illegitimate way. If this is true, people will sit idle and wait for their provisions to come their way. Similarly, a person who drinks or smokes will have the ill effects of both substances. A smoker is likely to develop lung cancer or heart disease or any one of the other diseases associated with smoking. If he does not smoke, the likelihood of him suffering any of these diseases is greatly reduced. The same applies to alcoholic drinks and their effects on health. We cannot, then say that whatever man does, he will end up suffering the same diseases. Nevertheless, you have accepted that our health condition is part of Allah's will. How can we reconcile these two sets of facts?

The answer is simple. Everything operates according to Allah's will. Nicotine, which is the poisonous substance in tobacco, produces its effects by Allah's will. It is He who has given it its qualities. Therefore, when man inhales this substance, he cannot escape its cumulative effects on his health. This effect is, therefore, produced by Allah's will. What this means is that when man inhales nicotine he sets up Allah's will to operate on him in a certain manner. When he refrains from smoking, he sets it to operate in a different manner. In both cases, he is subject to Allah's will, but the end result is widely different.

The other point, which we have to clarify here, is Allah's advance knowledge of what we are going to do in our lives. Allah knows before He creates any man or woman or indeed any creature what this creature will do and what others will do to it and what will happen to it at every moment of its life. He knows who of us will be a chain

smoker and who, like myself, cannot stand the smell of tobacco. He similarly knows who will have lung cancer as a result of smoking and who will be spared that agony. This knowledge does not interfere with man's choice. It is not the way that Allah has created a particular person that influences, which make him, take up this dangerous habit. In the final resort, it is his choice, which determines what happens to him.

As you see, there is no conflict between Allah's will and man's choice. Man's choice is indeed part of Allah's will, in the sense that it is He who has given man this ability, told him of its effect on him and allowed him to exercise this freedom of choice throughout his life. This is what makes man accountable for his choices. If his choice was not a free one, accountability would not come into it, in the same way, as all animals are not accountable for their actions. They do not have free choice.

As for children and what Allah provides for them, again this is a simple matter. Allah tells us in the Qur'an that everything that walks on earth will have its provision set for it by Allah. Nevertheless, if we were to stop working and consume what the earth produces of vegetables, fruit and cereal, etc. we will very soon go through all that is available on earth and find out that we have nothing to sustain us for another day. At the same time, when we work we are able to increase production manifold.

If you were to ask any scientist one hundred years ago whether the earth will be able to support five billion people, his answer would have been a decisive 'no'. Nor would he have imagined that the population would reach this figure in 1988. His answer was most probably according to his knowledge of the potentials of the earth. He could not have imagined the effects of electricity and other sources of energy on man's productivity. The earth could not have supported this number of people if we were still using the same agricultural and industrial techniques we were using one hundred years ago. In this example, man's work is a very important factor in the equation of productivity and consumption. It is the means with which we are working that make all the difference. Allah has certainly given us the potential to earn our living and the living of our families. But He will not just send us an extra sum of money every month which will come to us through a special post simply because we have another child. When you have a large family you have to work harder in order to earn more to support your wife and children. When you do work harder, Allah gives you the fruit of your work.

Having said that, I must clarify that I include within "working harder" what every one of us tries to do when he is coping with a greater responsibility, namely, to look for more opportunities to help one's family. That such opportunities do occur is part of Allah's will. Whether we take them up or not is our choice.

God: His Will & Man's Doings

When Muslim armed forces fight a war, they are fighting to defend their country. Their victory or defeat is not result of their effort but dependent upon God' will, over which they have no control. Please comment.

Allah has committed Himself to grant victory to those who support His cause and fight to defend His faith. But this is conditional on certain things: that the whole concept of faith must be deeply entrenched in their hearts, that the practical implications of faith must manifest themselves in their organization and behavior and that they must equip themselves with all the means to achieve victory and exert their maximum effort. This is the law of nature which Allah has set in operation and which gives favor to no one. When the believers fall short of meeting any of these conditions, they have to accept the consequences. The fact that they are Muslims does not mean that the laws of nature should be suspended or abrogated for their sake.

Everything in this world takes place in accordance with Allah's will and His predestination, and serves His overall purpose. Man's thoughts, movement, action and will are part of Allah's law which He uses in order to accomplish whatever He wishes. Nothing of man's thoughts, movement, action or will lies outside of, or in confrontation with, the law and rules of nature.

God: His Will & the Iraqi Invasion Of Kuwait

As I understand it, everything [that] takes place in the world comes from Allah. Does this apply to events such as one country invading and occupying the other?

When we say that everything comes from Allah, we mean two things: Allah knows of it before it takes place and it happens according to the laws of nature Allah has set in operation. We, however, do our actions. Hence, we are accountable for what we do. We cannot put the blame on Allah for our wrong actions. It is we who take such action and we are responsible for them. Allah, however, has created us and He created the world, in which we live and has given us our minds to think, reflect and decide what actions to take.

He has told us that stabbing a person with a knife close to his heart or in his abdomen may result in his death. Therefore, if a person stabs another and kills him, he may face the capital punishment for the murder he has committed. He cannot defend himself by saying that this has come from Allah. Allah has made the law, which causes the death of a person when he is stabbed in these areas. But the stabbing was an action taken freely by the person who has committed it. Hence, he is accountable for it. The same applies to the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq. The Iraqi ruler took his decision when he was conscious of its effects. He is, accountable for it. We cannot condone his actions as something that has come from Allah. It is his doing.

God: Human Perception Of God Confined To Only What Is Familiar

I have been thinking of a scientific explanation of God's existence and I would be grateful for your comments. Time is eternal. It has neither a beginning nor an end. When there was nothing in the universe, there was time, which will still remain when there will be nothing as well. This is the universal time, not the one that we know, because our time is relative. Space is also eternal, without any end line. From time immemorial, there was space and after the destruction of the material universe, there will be at least space. Energy can neither be enacted nor destroyed, but it can change from one form to another. According to scientists, mass can be converted into energy, and energy into mass. All forms of energy, whether in gravitational, electromagnetic, nuclear form, etc. are derived from God Himself who remains the only source of energy.

I am not a scientist to be able to make any critical judgment of this approach, although it sounds to me much too simplistic. What we have here is a statement of certain scientific facts in order to assert or prove God's existence. But there is a big question mark that arises. The conclusion where it leads actually makes a definition of God in terms of time, space and energy, or indeed a combination of all three. From the Islamic point of view, such a definition is not particularly appealing, because we believe that God cannot be limited or confined within any particular framework. I realize that the framework, which we have here, is eternal in all its three dimensions of time, space and energy. But then, how do you account for God's other attributes such as absolute knowledge, compassion, provision of sustenance, etc.? Scientists tell us that a source of energy need not have a will of its own. How can a combination

of all three dimensions explain God's will, which works according to His elaborate planning and faultless designs?

I am only asking these questions to show that we cannot think of God's nature except in terms that are familiar to us. We have to perceive things in order to create an image or define a particular identity. But God's nature, and indeed His existence, are not limited to what is familiar to us in our small corner of the universe. It is for this reason that the Prophet, peace be upon him, has ordered us not to think about God's entity. Such a pursuit will lead us nowhere.

The explanation that my reader has presented seems to be appropriate, and it may, when elaborated, appear to many people as both convincing and conclusive. However, some scientists who prefer an agnostic or atheistic approach may have some counter arguments, which may appeal to other people as also convincing. Where will we stand then? If we are to require a scientific explanation for God's existence and, consequently, a scientific argument in support of faith, then we are likely to put ourselves in a very difficult position. One reason for that is the fact that science is in a continuous process of development. It proves today what it used to deny, and may reject tomorrow what it accepts today. Hence scientific arguments are not to be taken as final in matters which relate to God, His existence, power, will, etc.

It is far simpler and more appropriate to say that the entity and nature of God are questions that relate to what lies beyond the reach of human perception. Therefore, we do not involve ourselves in discussing them in terms that relate to our own world. That is simply not possible. As an English poet puts it: "How can finite reach infinity." Our own minds have a finite scope, but God is infinite in His attributes. Hence, our minds cannot truly perceive the exact nature of God or His entity.

That, however, does not make believing in God difficult at all. There are numerous signs and pointers in the universe around us that indicate not only God's existence but many of His attributes as well. God says in the Qur'an: "***We will show them our signs in all fields and within themselves until they come to realize that it is the truth.***" Numerous are the phenomena which cannot be explained except by saying that God has willed them to exist and to function in their particular ways. There are numerous aspects testifying to the greatness of the Creator when look within us, and how we exist and function in our own world. These must be studied and we can immensely benefit from understanding them to confirm our belief in God's existence and His overpowering will. But we do not take these as indicative of His nature or assume they point out His entity. These are matters that we will not be able to perceive. Why, then, indulge in such an idle pursuit? There need not be any scientific theory or argument to prove or indicate God's entity. We accept the fact of His existence and the fact that He is in absolute and free control of the whole universe without questioning. That is all that is required for us to have peace with ourselves, our world and the universe around us. Hence we stop at this.

God: Is He Everywhere?

A scholar who has studied in a Saudi university stated in a lecture recently that it is not right to say that God is everywhere. Instead, he says that He is in one place, which is above the seventh sky. This has caused unnecessary confusion among a group of my friends.

The two ideas need not be viewed as totally contradictory. When we say that God is everywhere, we do not mean that He is physically present in every portion of place or space. To suggest this is not to observe the proper manners a Muslim must maintain in his relationship with God. Nevertheless, God described Himself in the Qur'an as present with us wherever we are: "***He is certainly with you wherever you are.***" It is perhaps this description which has led many people to say that God is everywhere.

What this means is that He sees and hears and watches us regardless of the location we happen to be in. But that does not signify physical presence.

It is more accurate to say that neither the concept of time nor that of place applies to God. It is well known that time is measured in days. Because the night follows the day in endless succession, it is easy to calculate time. But the fact that our days last 24 hours is accidental to the position in relation to the sun and how often the earth rotates round itself. Other planets have shorter or longer days according to their position in relation to the sun. How can such accidental motion apply to God? When we say that the earth dates back to so many million years, we are talking in terms of a particular phenomenon, which is the product of certain conditions. We know that God has always been in existence, before the creation of the sun or the planets, and therefore, before the creation of time.

Similarly, the notions of place and space are accidental to our conditions. Therefore, they do not apply to God. It is certainly wrong to try to apply these notions to God and say that He is everywhere or in a particular place. He is, indeed, high above every thing of His creation.

In his concept about the presence of God, your scholar relies on verse 16 in Surah 67, entitled Al-Mulk, which refers to as "*the One in heaven*". Some times the Arabic word is used to denote "heaven" and "sky". This is the case in this particular instance. Therefore, some scholars, especially those who interpret Qur'anic statements at their face value, maintain that God is in a certain place in the sky. They say that is in the seventh heaven or sky because the Qur'an, refers to the creation of seven skies, one on top of the other. However, the Arabic word also denotes height and elevation. So, it is quite possible to read this Qur'anic verse as describing as being "on high". It emphasizes His highness and supremacy. This is more important as an attribute of God than to say that He is in the seventh heaven or above it or anywhere else. To be so high does not preclude being everywhere in the sense we have already explained, which means that He watches over us wherever we are.

God: Pleasing God For the Fulfillment Of Wishes

What should we do to please God so that He would give us what we hope to have: Good wives, bright children, sincere friends, good employees and mates?

An important point in the Islamic concept of life and religion is that we do not bargain with God, trying to do things in order that our wishes or desires are fulfilled. We have to remember that our whole world and all that it contains is worth nothing in God's sight. A sacred or Qudsi Hadith quotes God as saying: "My servants. If the first of you and the last of you, and the human among you and the jinn among you were to gather together in one plane and pray Me for whatever they want, and I give each one of them everything they ask for, this will not decrease My Kingdom except in as much as a needle takes out of the ocean when dipped in it once." Hence, God gives of the good things of this world to believers and unbelievers alike. His gifts in the life to come, however, are made only to those who believe, and associate no partners with Him. Whatever He gives us remains a form of a test, as this whole life is. We have to redeem ourselves through this test.

When we realize this, we will know that the whole idea of pleasing God in order to get our wishes is not really Islamic. It is not like human relations whereby you do someone a favor hoping that it will be returned. God needs nothing from us. Even our worship does not benefit Him. It benefits us, making us better people. However, we are always in need of God's grace. Therefore, we must pray Him to grant us what we need. It is best that our prayers should be preceded by a good action, so that when we pray Him, we are humble, knowing our position in relation to God. We can pray

Him for whatever we need, and He will answer. However, He chooses what is best for us. He either answers our prayers as they are or gives us something better, or else, He reserves it till the life to come when He rewards us for our requests very generously that we would wish He did not answer a single prayer we said in this life.

God: Reference To God As 'We' In the Qur'an

I have noticed when reading the Qur'an, that God refers to Himself in the plural form 'We'. I know that Judaism and Christianity accept the plural formula in referring to God. Islam, on the other hand, insists on God's oneness. Please explain.

Your observation is correct. God often refers to Himself in the plural form, and this form is often interchangeable with its singular counterpart. There is no problem with that, because we treat this in the same way as the usage of the royal "we" in many languages. It is often the case that a reigning monarch uses the plural form in referring to self. While we are not comparing monarchs to God, for nothing bears any similarity to God, the usage of the pronoun is the same.

The usage of the plural form does not imply any sense of plurality, and it has no particular benefit as far as God is concerned.

However, it benefits the addressees, i.e. human beings, because it generates a stronger sense of God's greatness and His control of all matters in the universe. On hearing it, a Muslim does not feel any sense of anyone being in a relationship of partnership with God. Yet he feels that God is too great to be fully comprehended by us.

God: Reference To God Is In the Masculine

Why do we refer to God in the masculine, although He has no gender?

Human language knows only two forms of nouns: masculine and feminine. It does not provide for anything other than these when it speaks of animate objects. Therefore, when we talk about any living being, we have to use either the masculine or the feminine form. Generally speaking, human language attaches, even implicitly, a higher status to the masculine. Hence, all human languages tend to refer to God in the masculine gender. Not only so, but you will find that in languages like Arabic, where masculine and feminine have different forms, God's name and attribute generally take the masculine form.

God: Using the English Name God For Allah

1. Recently I have come across the English translation of Volume 30 of 'In the Shade of the Qur'an', and I find that the English name, 'God', is used for Allah. I would have preferred that the name of God be retained in its Arabic form. In support of my view may I quote Mr. Pickthall who writes in his translation of the Qur'an: "I have retained the word Allah throughout, because there is no corresponding word in English. The word has neither female nor plural, and has never been applied to anything other than the unimaginable Supreme Being. I used the word God only where the corresponding word *ilah* is found in the Arabic." Please comment.

2. I have noticed that you use the word God in reference to Allah. May I ask why you do not stick to the name Allah, which is the Islamic one?

Mr. Pickthall, may God have mercy on his soul, had a certain view, which he developed after some reflection. That was his prerogative. Other scholars have had a

different view. For instance, the late Yussuf Ali and the late Muhammad Asad have both used the English name, God, in their translations of the Qur'an. Both views have some valid points. We in Arab News are convinced that the use of the English name, God, in our English writings about Islam, is better. It leads to recognition of the concept of God's oneness among non-Muslim English readers. It also dispels any notion that Muslims have a special God who is different from the Supreme Being other Divine religions believe in. This notion is obviously untrue. It establishes in the minds of western people the fact that Islam is a monotheistic religion, which is important to do. Hence, we prefer to use the name God, rather than its Arabic equivalent, since we are writing in English. We do not say that the other view is wrong. It has its validity, but we simply have a preference. We hope we are right.

2. The Arabic word is God's name in Arabic, while the English word also refers to Him in that language. Since we write in English, we use the English word. God says in the Qur'an:

“Never have We sent a messenger otherwise than speaking the language of his own people, so that he might make [the truth] clear to them.” [Ibrahim — “Ibrahim” 14: 4]

This means that every prophet used the name of God used in his own language. This is only natural, because he needed to explain things to his people in complete clarity.

If a prophet advocated belief in God's oneness and used a different name of God that would be confusing to the addressees.

If we insist on using the Arabic name, people who are not very familiar with Islam would think that we believe in a special God whom we call Allah. In order not to create such confusion, we use the English name God.

God: Wonder Where Is God

I just wonder where God is. It is all fine and accepted that God is every where but even then I wonder where God is. Please comment.

It is natural that people should think of God and His various attributes. One thing that people always wonder about is where is God. Normally, scholars say that God is not limited to a time or place, as He is infinite. He has created both time and space, and He may not be limited by either dimension of time or place.

I have received many letters over the years concerning this aspect. Yet people do not wonder as much about other attributes of God, which are absolute as well. When we say that God's grace and mercy are infinite, people do not ask how or what does that entail? Yet limitless is a basic characteristic with God. His mercy may be applied to all situations and all sins, with the single exception of the gravest sin of all; namely associating partners with Him. It is something beyond our imagination to think of God's mercy in these terms. But because time and place are so much important in our own world, people wonder where is God, and when He came to be. The answer to such questions is that He is not limited by time or space.

Having said that, I would like to add that in Surah 67, entitled Sovereignty, God refers to Himself as being in heaven. Verses 16 and 17 of this Surah may be translated as follows:

“Are you confident that He who is in heaven will not cause the earth to cave in beneath you, so that it will shake to pieces and overwhelm you? Are you confident that He who is in heaven will not let loose on you a sandy

whirlwind? You shall before long know the truth of My warning". [the Sovereignty — "Al-Mulk" 67: 16-17]

These are clear statements, which suggest that God is in heaven.

The question then arises here is what is meant by heaven, particularly when we remember that the Arabic term used here is the one that refers to the skies. We can speculate a great deal without reaching any conclusive result. We should not engage into such speculation. We should accept such statements as they are, taking them at face value and saying that God knows best the exact meaning of every word. Any discussion in great detail will not be of advantageous to the fulfillment of our task, which God has assigned to us, namely to build human life and society on the basis of faith in God and the implementation of His message, i.e. Islam.

Guidance: From Beyond the Qur'an & Sunnah

You have mentioned on several occasions that God has not placed hardship on us in matters of religion. I believe that if we follow the Qur'an and the Sunnah we will find our life to be much easier. Rigidity comes from following others. I have written to you on several occasions pointing out the responsibility you bear when you answer readers' questions, but these seem never to reach you hands. My advice to you has always been that you should follow the Qur'an and the Sunnah in your answers, and take nobody else's views, so that you do not copy other people's errors or fall into error yourself.

I am grateful to you for your advice and your letters, which I have read with interest. I have not included a reply in the paper, because I thought they were meant as advice to me which I certainly value. May I assure you that no letter to me is disregarded without careful examination? We sometimes take the liberty of not publishing a letter when the same question has only recently been answered. We believe we could not repeat questions too often. Therefore, we wait for a while before we publish the question again, particularly if it is of the type that people frequently ask.

It is certainly the best option for any person to follow the Qur'an and the Sunnah, because that is the guidance that God wants us to follow. Moreover, it is the light, which gives us the ability to make the best choices in life. Furthermore, it is the path of ease, because God has not placed any hardship on us with regard to the practice of our faith, or what He requires from us. It is people who make things difficult for themselves and for their communities.

The best example to quote in this regard is that of Mo'adh ibn Jabal, the Prophet's companion whom the Prophet, peace be upon him, appointed as governor of Yemen. As Mo'adh set on his first journey to Yemen to take up his post, the Prophet, peace be upon him, walked by his side and asked him how he would judge in matters or disputes put to him. Mo'adh told him that he would base his judgment on what is in God's book, i.e. Qur'an. The Prophet, peace be upon him, asked him what he would do if he found nothing in the Qur'an applicable to the question in hand. Mo'adh said that he would rely on the Prophet's Sunnah. The Prophet, peace be upon him, put the same question again, and Mo'adh said that he would strive hard to make an enlightened judgment. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Praise be to God Who has guided the emissary of God's messenger to what pleased God and His messenger."

This conversation provides very important guidance to all Muslim generations. It recognizes that there are issues and disputes for which we may not find ready answers in God's book and the Sunnah. This is indeed what Muslim scholars have

done ever since the early days of Islam. When the Prophet, peace be upon him, was alive, they could put to him any question, and he would give them the ultimate solution. After he had passed away, we no longer have that ready source of final judgment. We have to rely on what he has left for us of his guidance, knowing that God has perfected our religion and made it complete, as He says:

“You are forbidden carrion and blood, the flesh of swine and of that animal which has been slaughtered in any other name than that of Allah, and of the strangled animal, and of that beaten to death or killed by a fall or gored to death or mangled by a beast of prey — save of that you duly slaughtered while it was still alive — and of that which is slaughtered at [un-godly] shrines. It is also unlawful for you to try to find your fortune by means of divining devices, for all these try to find your fortune by means of divining devices, for all these things are sinful acts. Today the disbelievers have despaired of [vanquishing] your religion: therefore do not fear them but fear Me. Today I have perfected your religion for you and completed My blessing on you and approved Islam as the way of life for you. [Therefore, observe the limits prescribed by Law]: if however, one, dying of hunger, eats of any of these forbidden things, provided that he is not inclined towards sin, he will find Allah Forgiving and Compassionate.” [Table Spread — “Al-Ma'idah” 5: 3]

In this area the role of the scholar is of vital importance. He has to show the way of how to relate the texts to present-day problems and identify practical solutions. That is what scholars have done throughout the fourteen centuries of Islamic history. That is how schools of thought have been enriched with every new generation of scholars. That is why we find within the same school of thought varying opinions on very similar issues. Imam Al-Shaf'ie himself gave numerous new opinions on many issues when he moved from Iraq to Egypt, because the change of situation and community give him new insight into many questions. This should remain a source of light motivating scholars to deal with new problems.

Sometimes we find well-meaning people calling us to reject every thing which is not clearly stated in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. They overlook the fact that by so doing; they abandon some of the Prophet's guidance of flexibility and making things easy as long as that does not contravene any clear order by God. Their attitude brings an element of rigidity, because they take every Hadith as final, without relating one Hadith to another which also speaks of the same problem, or looking at the historical context in which the Prophet, peace be upon him, made his statement.

My reader gives me one example, insisting that women must cover their faces when they go out. In this he dismisses the ruling I have explained more than once that women need not cover their faces or their hands up to their wrists. I have discussed this question on several occasions, pointing out all four schools of thought have the same view, as do other scholars of high repute.

The view is supported by the Prophet's own action and by incidents reported as taking place in his presence, without him providing any clear statement to suggest that what was practiced was wrong. My reader mentions a report attributed to Ayesha to the effect that she and other Muslim women used to draw their veils down when men passed by them, and lifted them again when men had passed. This cannot be considered a convincing evidence to support his view.

To start with, this is not a Hadith; it is a statement attributed to Ayesha. Secondly, it is an action which is not required, because it mentions that they did this when they were in consecration, and a woman is required to leave her face and hands uncovered when she is in the state of consecration, or Ihram. Thirdly, and more importantly, the report is classified as very weak by scholars of Hadith. Hence, it

cannot be taken as evidence. But most important of all is that it is in conflict with Prophet's guidance.

Guidance: From the Divine Books

Since all divine books have been available for the last three thousand years, it has been easy to answer any question with reference to these books. But what about the period preceding Judaism when there was no actual source of divine book to provide the truth for millions of people over countless generations. Is it possible that people were left to act freely for such a long period without any guidance? Moreover, all four divine books seem to have been revealed in the Arabian land. What about the rest of the world? Does any other book require people to become Muslims? May I also ask whether it is possible through Ijtihad [or the use of scholarly discretion] to introduce improvements in Islamic law for the benefit of the Muslim community? This can always be considered well justified. It will be based on all previous beneficial experience and will suit the needs of the age. Please comment.

It is not true to say that all-human history that predates Judaism lacked divine guidance. Indeed, divine guidance was provided for mankind ever since Adam was placed on earth as vicegerent. Adam himself was a prophet who received the faith of monotheism to his children who conducted their lives in accordance with the divine guidance.

Thereafter, God has sent prophets and messengers to all communities. He states in the Qur'an that ***"there has been no community without having a Warner"***. That Warner must have been a prophet or a messenger or a person endowed with the knowledge of the guidance provided by earlier prophets. Besides, the Qur'an mentions the names of several prophets sent to different communities long before the appearance of the Prophet Moses.

These include Prophets Noah, Hood, Saleh and Idris. God tells Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, in the Qur'an that there were many other messengers about whom He has chosen not to tell him.

"We have certainly sent messengers before your time: Some of these We have mentioned to you, and some We have not mentioned." [the Believer — "Al-Mu'min" 40: 78]

So, God has not left people without guidance. It is they who have chosen to turn their backs on His guidance. They went even further than that and distorted messages conveyed to them by their prophets.

God also tells us in the Qur'an that He made a covenant with all prophets that should His final messenger appear during their lifetimes, they would certainly follow him and give him all the support they can. All prophets and messengers conveyed that same message to their peoples. They told them that they should follow Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, whenever he begins to convey his message. Indeed, there are references in all divine scriptures to Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, indicating how he may be recognized and where he will appear. The Jewish tribes that settled in Madinah in pre-Islamic days went there only because they recognized Madinah as the place to which the last messenger would emigrate. They wanted to follow him to ensure their salvation.

However, when the grandchildren of those Jews realized that Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, was not an Israelite, and his appearance signified the transfer of

the line of prophet-hood from them to the Ishmaelite branch of Ibrahim's seed, they rebelled and put a stiff opposition to Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and his message. That opposition continues today with a most determined fight against Islam led by the Zionists everywhere.

Moreover, all prophets and messengers conveyed basically the same message of submission to God and associating no partners with Him.

Since this principle takes its fullness and its most perfect form in the message of the Qur'an, it is imperative that followers of previous guidance should embrace Islam because it endorses what they have and improves on it.

In your question you refer to religions as though they were philosophical creeds put forward by philosophers and men of knowledge. You may expect a philosopher or an economist to come up with a new doctrine that takes into account the results of human experience with previous creeds and doctrines. You may say, for example, that socialism was devised in order to overcome the social disadvantages of capitalism, in the same way, as the latter was an improvement on feudalism. But that does not apply to religions revealed by God, the Almighty.

When you consider God's attributes you will find among them His perfect knowledge. What you have to understand is that God's knowledge is not liable to increase as a result of events that may take place at present or in the future. God knows these events long before they take place. Indeed, the notion of time adding to knowledge does not apply to God whose knowledge is absolute and perfect.

Therefore, it cannot be said that a later religion is an improvement on a previous one, benefiting by the human experience with the earlier religion. God does not need that experience in order to reveal a perfect religion. Indeed, Islam is a faith that remains applicable to all human generations until the Day of Judgement. Moreover, Islam, in its broadest sense, which signifies of all divine faith, has been applicable right from the moment when Adam and Eve were created and placed first in heaven, before they fell to earth.

Nor can there be any "unsuccessful" parts in the divine faith. People's application of certain parts may be improper, but that is their own failure, not the failure of the faith itself. Improvements may be achieved in their approach to religion, but not in the teachings of religion themselves. Human maturity will not add to the truth of religion, but it can draw better advantages from the implementation of the divine faith. Ijtihad, or the use of scholarly discretion, has certainly a wide area in the context of implementing the divine faith. But Ijtihad cannot be extended to the area of changing what God has revealed or what He requires of His servants. There are people who call for such amendment to religion, particularly among some politicians in some Muslim countries. Such politicians do not have any strong faith. They want to follow their own line of action, but they try to appear in a guise that satisfies the Muslim masses. Therefore, they speak of "modernized" or "liberalized" or "enlightened" Islam.

Some want socialism to be Islamic and others want Western democracy to be given an Islamic color, etc. Let us be clear about one thing: Islam is a faith and a code of living revealed by God. It does not need to borrow any guise or appearance. People either take Islam as it is or leave it. Let them not try to give it a guise other than God has imparted to it.

If they want to follow a line, which is different from Islam, let them go and do what they want. But they must not try to give their practices or philosophies an Islamic appearance, when they have none. Islam will never be Socialist or Western Capitalist. It will always be Islamic.

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Hadiths: Account Of Prophet's Deeds, Sayings Or Tacit Approval

You often speak of the importance of Hadith and Sunnah. It is well known that the best compilations of Hadith are those made by the six famous scholars. However, I have read in some of these books reports of the type that the Prophet and his wife, Ayesha, used to take a bath together and pour water on each other. There are many similar narratives, which set you thinking if they could ever be true. They are repulsive to human dignity, sensibility and logical thought. I refuse to accept them. If some of these Hadiths, or even one, is untrue or doubtful, how are people like myself expected to believe in the rest? How is a normal Muslim, with average knowledge, expected to sort the true from the false in thousands of these Hadith? If this is not possible, then what other sources of Hadith and Sunnah remain?

Professor Mustafa Azami has written a short but invaluable book entitled *Studies in Hadiths Methodology and Literature* which is published by the American Trust Publications, 7216 Madison Avenue, Suite 8, Indiana, U.S.A. I recommend you to read this book because it throws ample light on Hadith and how it was documented. In giving an answer to your question within the limitation of this column, I begin with a brief summary of the first chapter in this book before I discuss the report you have quoted.

The Arabic word Hadith literally means "communication, story, conversation; Religious or secular, historical or recent." Whenever used as an adjective, it means "news;" it occurs 23 times in the Qur'an in the sense of story or communication.

According to scholars of Hadith, it stands for "what was transmitted on the authority of the Prophet, his deeds, sayings or tacit approval". Thus, Hadith literature means the literature, which consists of the narration of the life of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and the things approved by him. However, the term was used sometimes in a much wider sense covering the narration about the Prophet's companions and their successors.

Sunnah, according to Arabic lexicographers, means: "a way, course, rule, mode, or manner, of acting or conduct of life." In the Qur'an the word Sunnah and its plural have been used 16 times in the sense of an established course of rule, mode of life, and line of conduct.

In Islamic history, the Arabic definite article "Al" was affixed to the word Sunnah in order to denote the Sunnah of the Prophet, while the general use of the word continued, though decreasing day by day. At the end of the second century, the word began to be used almost exclusively in the legal books to denote the norms set by the Prophet, peace be upon him, or the norms deduced from the Prophet's norm.

The two words, Hadith and Sunnah soon began to be used interchangeably, though there is a slight difference between them. The science of Hadith was developed to evaluate every single statement ascribed to the Prophet, peace be upon him. The aim

of this branch of Islamic study is to make clear which Hadith is authentic and which is not.

The scholars are unanimous that the authority of the Qur'an is binding on all Muslims. The authority of the Prophet, peace be upon him, comes next only to the Qur'an. His authority is not derived through the community's acceptance of the Prophet, peace be upon him. It is Allah who has outlined the Prophet's position and his authority. It is expressed through divine will.

Allah states in the Qur'an that He has sent down His revelations to the Prophet, peace be upon him, that he "may explain to mankind what has been revealed for them." Thus, the Prophet's task is to expound and explain the Qur'an to people. To give one example, the Qur'an commands us to attend regularly to our prayers, but does not tell us how to pray. It was the Prophet's task to demonstrate the form of prayer in word and practice.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, also has been given a position with legislative powers. Allah describes him in the Qur'an in these words: "He [meaning the Prophet] will make lawful for them all good things and prohibit only foul things. He will relieve them of their burden and the fetters which had encumbered them." There are several examples of actions or practices initiated by the Prophet, peace be upon him, and later sanctioned by Allah.

In his actions and practices, the Prophet, peace be upon him, provides a model to be followed by the Muslim community. All Muslims have to follow the Prophet's example in every way, particularly since they have been specifically commanded by Allah to do so. Allah states in the Qur'an that obedience to the Prophet, peace be upon him, is a duty required by all people. Numerous are the Qur'anic statements, which require us to obey Allah and His messenger: "**Believers, obey Allah and obey the messenger and those in authority among you.**" [Women — "An-Nis'a" 4: 59] Also: "**Whatever the messenger gives you, take it; and whatever he forbids you, refrain from it.**" [Exile — "Al-Hashr" 59: 7]

From these Qur'anic references we conclude that the Prophet's authority does not rest on acceptance by the community or on the opinion of certain lawyers or scholars, or the founders of the schools of thoughts. This point has been made absolutely clear in the Qur'an. For this reason, the Muslim community has accepted the authority of the Prophet, peace be upon him, from the beginning of his mission and has accepted all his verbal commands, deeds, tacit approval as the way of life, a binding duty and a model to be followed. All the Prophet's activities have been covered by the Sunnah which remains one of the main sources of Islamic law, second only to the Qur'an.

From this summary of what Professor Azami has written, it is clear that following the Sunnah is part of our religion of Islam, which cannot be disregarded. It is simply not possible for a Muslim to deny the Prophet's Sunnah and hope to win acceptance by Allah. That is because such disregard of the Sunnah flies in the face of clear and decisive Qur'anic orders requiring us to implement the Prophet's Sunnah.

As Hadith and Sunnah were reported from one generation to another, there was bound to be some inaccuracies of reporting. In addition, people hostile to Islam started to fabricate statements and attribute them to the Prophet, peace be upon him. Hence, scholars recognized that it was their duty to sort out the true from false in what is attributed to the Prophet, peace be upon him. This has led to the establishment of the science of Hadith, which is a unique branch of Islamic study that has won the admiration of scholars throughout the world. Muslim scholars of Hadith studied the character and history of every person that has been known to report even a single Hadith and established whether he was a man of trust and

honesty or not. If they found him trustworthy, truthful, accurate in his reporting, God-fearing, then they accepted what he has reported, provided that he had heard it from a similar trustworthy person.

Thus we have a chain of transmitters for every Hadith. Each one of them must be of the highest caliber. Otherwise, the reported Hadith would be classified as weak, doubtful or false.

Among those scholars of Hadith, Al-Bukhari and Muslim stand out as the most reliable and perfectionist in their work. The other four, At-Tirmithi, Abu Dawood, An-Nasa'ie and Ibn Majah occupy a position close to that of Al-Bukhari and Muslim. Hence, the compilations made by these six have acquired a higher status, since they include Hadiths of the highest authorities. However, there are many other scholars, some of whom lived earlier than these six, most notably Al-Shaf'ie, Malik and Ahmad ibn Hanbal who were also scholars of Hadith in addition to their eminencies as scholars of Fiqh or Islamic law. The last of these three, Imam Ahmad, was one of the greatest authorities on Hadith.

You have mentioned that some of the Hadiths you have read in these books are not acceptable. You have used descriptions, which suggest that you are a very strict person with a very keen and restrictive sense of propriety. This is commendable when it comes to matters of religion, provided that it does not exceed the proper limits. When you use such words to describe a practice attributed to the Prophet, peace be upon him, by highly renowned scholars of Hadith, then you have actually overstepped your limits. You have to ask first how is it possible that the Prophet, peace be upon him, is reported to have done so and so? Is such a practice to be judged in such a strict light?

The story, which you have referred to, is a very simple one. What you have to remember is that we have learned many of the very intimate aspects of the life of the Prophet, peace be upon him, because his life served as a model or us to follow. When he is reported to have done something, then that very report indicates very clearly that such a practice is permissible. Hence, no one with an exaggerated sense of propriety can tell us that it is not permissible.

Therefore, if a man and his wife take a bath together in the privacy of their own home, when no one else sees them, and they pour water on each other's heads, no one can tell them not to do so. If they derive pleasure from that, they are welcome to it. The Prophet, peace be upon him, and his wife did it. Who, then, can suggest that such a practice is unacceptable? If we know certain practices of the intimate life of the Prophet, then we have to thank Allah for that, because such knowledge tells us how far we can go without contravening Islamic teachings.

Hadiths: Authenticity Of Hadiths — the Conditions Established

Is there any Hadith, which is included in the two collections of Al-Bukhari and Muslim, which can be described as "weak"?

Scholars look at each Hadith, or statement attributed to the Prophet, from two angles: its chain of reporters and its text. As you realize, by the time the great scholars of Hadith such as Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Al-Bukhari and Muslim, made their valuable collections, each Hadith should have been reported by four or more reporters. This is what we call sanad or chain of reporters. Before each text, you will find Al-Bukhari or Muslim or any other scholar of Hadith stating who told him the Hadith he is quoting and from whom that person heard it, and on whose authority that second person is reporting it, and so on until he reaches a companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, who says: "I heard Allah's messenger saying..." The text of the Hadith then follows.

Scholars have laid down five conditions for the acceptability of any Hadith. Three of these conditions relate to the sanad or chain of reporters and two to the text. The first three are:

- 1] The reporter must be intelligent and accurate and must report the Hadith exactly as it was reported to him;
- 2] The reporter must be known for his high moral standards, his piety and scholarly work which makes him reject all types of distortion;
- 3] These two qualities must apply to all reporters in the chain. If either or both are not met by a single reporter in the chain, the Hadith is considered to lack in authenticity.

The other two conditions, which relate to the text, are that the Hadith must not suffer from:

- a] An oddity or
- b] A defect which detracts its validity.

What is meant by oddity with regard to the text of a Hadith is the case when a reliable reporter is found to be at odds with an even more reliable one. In other words, there is no question of the reliability, intellectual standard or accuracy of either of the two reporters. Indeed both are acceptable and the Hadith they report are taken as correct in the first instance. But when we find the reporter giving us a text, which we find to contradict another text reported by someone who is even more reliable, then the case is certainly odd.

On the other hand, there are defects, which may detract the validity of a particular Hadith. The clearest example of these is when the text of a particular Hadith is found to contradict a statement in the Qur'an.

The five conditions together provide a system, which enables us to establish the authenticity and accuracy of every statement, attributed to the Prophet, peace be upon him. Indeed, no other creature has ever had his statement subjected to such a thorough system of verification and establishing authenticity and accuracy. The important thing is, of course, that the system should be well applied.

Scholars of Hadith like Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Al-Tirmithi, An-Nasa'ie and most others concentrated mainly on the sanad, or the chain of reporters, establishing the correctness of the chain of reporters of every Hadith and making a thorough study of each reporter. They classified each reporter according to a scale they had established. If they learned that a particular reporter had told a lie in any situation, then they left aside what he had reported, unless it was collaborated by other reliable reporters or they had the same Hadith through another chain of reporters. If they learned that a particular scholar of Hadith seemed not to be so accurate in his reporting when he attained old age, they would draw a line saying that they would accept what he reported before a particular year, but reject what he reported later.

The system is very thorough and the study of reporters is extremely detailed. Therefore, when they establish that a particular text has been reported by a chain of reporters, each of whom was both reliable and accurate, they judge the Hadith to be authentic. Moreover, each of the great scholars of Hadith, like Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood, At-Tirmithi, Ibn Majah and others worked on their study of reporters on the basis of a set of conditions which they had established.

Some of these scholars have been far more strict than others. Therefore, a Hadith, which may be described as "Saheeh" by someone like At-Tirmithi, may be only described as "Hassan" by Al-Bukhari. The two terms indicate grades of authenticity;

with "Saheeh" meaning "highly authentic". It goes without saying that the set of conditions established by Al-Bukhari was the most stringent of all. Therefore, when he classifies a particular Hadith as authentic, it means that there can be no doubt as to its being properly reported by a chain of reporters who are all highly reliable.

Speaking strictly from this particular angle, we can say that there is no "weak" Hadith in either of the two authentic collections of Al-Bukhari and Muslim, both of which are known by the name "Saheeh."

It was the job of scholars of Fiqh to study the texts of Hadith and put aside any which suffer from oddity or defects. It is important to realize that this can only be done on the basis of thorough knowledge of the Qur'an and other branches of Islamic scholarship as it requires a profound insight into the study of Hadith itself so as to compare texts which speak of the same subject and so on. In this respect, the work of scholars of Fiqh complements the work of scholars of Hadith. Together they have provided a standard of research in scholarship, which is unparalleled, the whole world over.

It is possible that a Hadith may be authentic as far as its chain of reporters is concerned, but it may suffer from a defect or an oddity. Some of the Hadiths included in Al-Bukhari and Muslim may fall in this category. In this case, they are authentically reported but have defects, which make a scholar of Fiqh, put them aside. I will give you an example to explain how this could happen.

It is authentically reported that after the battle of Badr resulted in a spectacular victory for the Muslims, the Prophet, peace be upon him, ordered that those who were killed from the hostile army of Quraish be buried in a single grave. When this was done, he stood near the grave and addressed them by name and asked them whether they had realized that Allah's promises came true. His companions asked the Prophet, peace be upon him, how could he speak to people who were dead. His answer, as reported by more than one of his companions, was: "You cannot hear me any better than they do, but they cannot answer me."

When this was told to Ayesha, the Prophet's wife, she rejected it altogether, although she was not present. The basis of her rejection was the Qur'anic verse, which says to the Prophet: "You cannot make the dead hear." To Ayesha, the reported statement contradicted a clear statement of the Qur'an. Therefore, she rejected it. She said that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said on that occasion to his companions referring to the dead of Quraish: "They now know that what I used to tell them is the truth."

You see how a Hadith which is authentically reported, may be rejected by a great many scholars, like Ayesha [did in this case], because of a defect which shows it to contradict a Qur'anic statement. Perhaps I should add that, in this particular instance, Al-Bukhari mentions Ayesha's objection to alert his readers to it. I hope, however, that my answer gives you a clear idea of how authentic the Saheehs are and how thorough Islamic scholarship is, particularly in the study of Hadith.

Hadiths: Authenticity Of Hadiths

When I read Hadiths in some of the six compilations of authentic Hadiths, I have strong doubts about the authenticity of some Hadiths included in them. How is it that inauthentic Hadiths were included in these books?

Those great scholars who compiled the six books of authentic Hadiths spared no effort in making their selections complete. You must not forget that they were human beings and, as such, liable to error. It is true that a few entries in each compilation remain less authentic than the rest, but we have to assume that an eminent scholar

such as Al-Tirmithi or Abu Dawood must have concluded that they were authentic. If he was mistaken in that, this mistake does not detract from the value of his work.

Moreover, each of these scholars set himself certain rules and criteria, which he applied to each Hadith in order to determine its authenticity. The rules and criteria set by Imam Al-Bukhari were much stricter than those set by others. Hence, you find some entries in their collections, which are not as authentic as those included in the Saheeh of Al-Bukhari or Muslim. Indeed, you have such a classification of Hadiths as "Authentic according to the conditions and criteria set by Al-Tirmithi, or Abu Dawood." Such Hadiths should be considered authentic, unless there is reason to classify them otherwise.

Hadiths: Following Prophet's Example Even In Non-Religious Matters ***Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News***

It is always important to remember that following the Prophet's example in everything is a highly commendable effort. Even in matters that has no relevance to religion, if we learn that the Prophet, peace be upon him, did something in a particular way and we follow his example with no intention other than taking him as a guide showing the way to what is best, we earn reward from God. Our attitude would be an implementation of the Qur'anic verse which states:

"In God's messenger you have a good example for everyone who looks forward to God and the Last Day, and remembers God unceasingly." [The Clans — "Al-Ahzab" 33: 21]

However, we have to differentiate between what the Prophet, peace be upon him, did by way of demonstrating how Islam is implemented, which applies to matters that have a religious nature or have some relevance to religion, and matters that belong purely to the life of this world. In such latter affairs, we are neither encouraged nor discouraged from following the Prophet's example. Thus, in his habits of sleep, eating, dress, attention to normal things that one encounters in every day life, God has not placed on us a burden by requiring us to conduct these in a particular fashion. Nevertheless, if one learns that the Prophet, peace be upon him, did something in a particular fashion and he follows him with the intention of doing what the Prophet, peace be upon him, did, without considering this to be an Islamic obligation or recommendation, one earns a reward. But when an action has a religious significance, then following the Prophet's example is highly recommended. This is the reason why the Prophet's companions were keen to report and follow every action of the Prophet, peace be upon him. Hadith scholars also gave this aspect particular attention, so as to verify what is reported and confirm what is authentic.

Jabir ibn Abdullah reports: "When the Prophet, peace be upon him, wanted to clean himself from the state of Janabah, or ceremonial impurity, he used to pour over his heads three handfuls of water." Al-Hassan ibn Muhammad said to Jabir: "My hair is too thick." He answered: "The Prophet's hair was more plentiful and beautiful." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim and Al-Nasa'ie with slightly different versions].

It is well known that removing the state of Janabah, or ceremonial impurity, requires washing one's whole body, from head to foot, with water. In our present time and modern living, taking a shower is the best way. A dip in a pool, river or the sea is also good enough for the purpose. However, in situations where water is not available in plenty, it is better to economize with water. Hence, the report that using one's hands to take three handfuls of water and pour them over one's head is sufficient for washing one's head. This should be followed by pouring water over the rest of one's body.

Some people, however, impose on themselves a more rigid approach, or they may suffer from a kind of obsession with cleanliness. Therefore, guidance is provided for them in the Prophet's own action. It is clearly stated in this Hadith that a small amount of water, such as a bucket, should be sufficient. This is symbolized by how the Prophet, peace be upon him, washed his head.

The man who pointed out to Jabir his own difficulty, having thick hair, was the grandson of Ali ibn Abu Talib, the Prophet's cousin, but his grandmother was Ali's second wife whom he married after the death of Fatimah, the Prophet's daughter. Jabir, a companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, who related a large number of authentic Hadiths replied that the Prophet's own hair was more plentiful. If three handfuls were sufficient for him, then they are sufficient for anyone.

Another Hadith on a totally different subject makes it clear that following the Prophet's example is required. The Hadith reported by Jabir, states: "The Prophet, peace be upon him, fell off a horse in Madinah and landed on the trunk of a felled date tree. His foot was dislocated. We used to visit him in an open space outside Ayesha's home. We came once when he was praying seated, and we joined him in his prayer but we stood up. We came another time and he was offering an obligatory prayer, also seated. We joined him in congregation, standing, but he signaled us to sit down. When the prayer was over, he said to us: "If the imam prays seated, then pray seated, and if he stands up, then pray standing up. Do not stand when the imam is seated as the Persian do, glorifying their leaders." [Related by Al-Bukhari].

There are several points that merit discussion in this Hadith. The first is the Prophet's companions' action on both occasions that they visited the Prophet, peace be upon him. When they saw him praying, they immediately joined him in congregation. This shows how keen they were to join him in prayer on every occasion, whether he was offering a voluntary prayer or an obligatory one. It is well known that a prayer in congregation is granted 27 times the reward of a prayer one offers, on his own.

We also note that on both occasions the Prophet's companions prayed standing up, as this is the normal position, while the Prophet, peace be upon him, was seated as he prayed. On the second occasion, he signaled them to sit down, but he did not do so in the first. But we note from the Hadith that the second prayer was an obligatory one, which means that the first was not. Hence, we may conclude that in a voluntary prayer, the congregation may choose to stand or sit, if the imam is seated, while in an obligatory prayer, they must do like him. Again we know that voluntary prayers may allow concessions that are not allowed in obligatory ones.

However, on this point we may add that this illness of the Prophet, peace be upon him, was at the end of the fifth year after his migration to Madinah. Several years later, shortly before his death, the Prophet, peace be upon him, offered an obligatory prayer in the mosque, when he was seated and the whole congregation were standing up. He did not order them to sit down. It is a general rule of Islamic law that a later practice supersedes an earlier one. As the permissibility of taking a different position is given later, then this is the final ruling. Moreover, the Prophet, peace be upon him, makes the reason for his earlier teaching very clear. The important thing is not to give leaders of the Muslim community a position of glorification. A leader should certainly be treated with respect, and his orders should be obeyed, but he is not to be glorified or exalted to a position where people make themselves too inferior to him. There is no superiority or inferiority on account of position, but there are duties on both the ruler and the ruled. When these duties are fulfilled, then that is all that should be said and done.

Hadiths: Hour Of Doom

I have read two Hadiths in a book, but their full text is not given. I wonder whether you could mention where I could find them in their full texts. The first speaks of the end of the world and that it is preceded by a fight between two groups claiming the same thing. The other speaks of the country where the horn of Satan will appear.

Both Hadiths are authentic. The first is No. 7121 in the 'Saheeh' of Al-Bukhari. Abu-Hurairah quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "The Hour does not strike until two great groups making the same claim have fought each other ferociously, and until there has been liars and impostors, around 30 in number, each one of them claiming that he is Allah's messenger. [Prior to the strike of the Hour] learning will become scarce, earthquakes frequent, time short and strife will prevail. There would be much killing and such abundance of wealth that people would be at pains to find someone to accept their Zakah. They would offer it to others, but the latter would tell them that they have no need for it. Moreover, people would construct high rising buildings; a man would pass by the grave of another and say: I wish I was in his place; the sun would rise at the west, and when it has risen and been seen by people, they would all declare themselves believers. At that time, no one can benefit by accepting the faith unless he has already been a believer or has earned good deeds as a result of his faith. When the Hour strikes, two people may be holding a garment between them, but they neither complete the deal nor put the garment away. The Hour will strike when a man has milked his she-camel, but does not drink it. The Hour will strike when a man has repaired his water basin and he does not drink anything out of it. The Hour will strike when a man has lifted some food to his mouth but does not eat it."

As you realize the Hadiths mention several signs of the impending arrival of the Hour of Doom, making it clear that the Hour strikes all of a sudden, when people would be engaged in their daily activities, unmindful of its arrival, but when it strikes, they cannot complete what they have started, not even finishing a bite one may have lifted to his mouth.

The other Hadith is No. 7093 in the 'Saheeh' of Al-Bukhari. Abdullah ibn Omar quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as having said that he was facing the East: "Strife and discord lie there, where the horn of Satan appears." There is no indication that the Prophet, peace be upon him, meant any particular place, but he simply pointed an easterly direction. We cannot, therefore, pinpoint the Hadith as meaning any particular place or country.

Hadiths: Misunderstanding — About Compiling Of Hadiths

In recent discussion with friends, a written text from a book entitled Maqam-e-Hadith by Mr. Pervez was provided to me. It states that there is firm evidence to suggest that there should be no text to rival the Qur'an. He quotes three instances of the erasing of Hadith. The first is an order by the Prophet, peace be upon him, to his companions to erase any statement of his they might have written down. The second speaks of Abu Bakr asking his daughter to bring him any Hadith written down and then destroying it. The third speaks of Omar asking all Muslims to bring over all that they had of Hadith written down and when it was all collected, he ordered that it should all be burned. While this raises doubt about the very existence of Hadith, it is in clear conflict of what we have learned that Qur'an and the Hadith are the sources of the Islamic faith, its principles and details.

This is the gist of a letter that I received and my reader seems to be very disturbed by what he has read. Let me tell him that such writings are both numerous and frequent. They come up from time to time to question the position of the Hadith and the Sunnah, suggesting always that only the Qur'an is the text to be implemented, and that Muslims should pay no attention to anything else. However, such writers do not seem to understand the Qur'an, which they claim to revere. They do not know what they are talking about when they suggest that they do not want anything to detract from the sanctity of the Qur'an by being considered as complimentary or a rival to it.

The first thing to be said in answer to such writers is that no Muslim, not even the most articulate defenders of the position of Hadith, puts Hadith on the same level with the Qur'an. There is no such thing as a rivalry between the Qur'an and the Hadith in any sense whatsoever. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that we are presented with a Hadith which is in clear disagreement with a clear text in the Qur'an, and we are told at the same time that all Hadith collections confirm it as authentic, what do we do with such a Hadith?

We simply disregard the Hadith without hesitation because of its being in conflict with the Qur'an. At no time did the Prophet, peace be upon him, say anything that may be considered to disagree with the Qur'an. In fact, all that he said or did provide us with guidance on how the Qur'an should be implemented in practical life. When we take the Prophet's Sunnah, whether it is verbal or practical, we find nothing in it that does not serve the proper implementation of the Qur'an. Hence, we conclude that those who raise doubts as to the importance or the position of the Sunnah in Islamic life do not wish the Qur'an to be implemented.

God tells us in the Qur'an:

“Whatever the Prophet bids you take it: and whatever he forbids you, refrain from it.” [Exile — “Al-Hashr” 59: 7]

“Obey God and obey the messenger.” [Light — “An-Noor” 24: 54]

There are many examples of clear Divine orders instructing us to obey God's messenger, Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. They confirm that by so doing we obey God Himself. If we were to disregard the Hadith and claim that it has no position in Islamic legislation, how are we to implement God's orders? If we claim that the Hadith was destroyed and no longer exists, how are we to explain these repeated orders by God to obey the Prophet, peace be upon him, when there is no statement by the Prophet, peace be upon him, to obey?

In fact, this effects every aspect of our faith. For example, God commands us clearly to offer our prayers. He does not tell us in the Qur'an how or when to pray, or the number of prayers we should offer each day. The Prophet, peace be upon him, has given to us all this in statements he said and in action he did. He says: “Pray in the manner you have seen me pray.”

If we were to say that the Hadith has no validity, or no position in Islamic legislation, or that it was destroyed and no longer exists, then it does not matter whether we pray once a day or once a week. Or we perform our prayers in the way Christians, Jews or Buddhists offer theirs, because the order we have in the Qur'an tells us only to offer prayers without indicating any details. It is the Sunnah that provides all these details. But some people want to do away with it. In fact, they want to change the whole religion of Islam, and make it a skeleton without flesh. But God foils their attempts and preserves His religion intact.

Moreover, God tells us clearly in the Qur'an that the Prophet, peace be upon him, does not say anything of his own accord. It is all revealed to him.

“He does not say anything based on his own desire. It is all but revelation that has been revealed to him.” [the Star — “An-Najm” 53: 3-4]

This applies to everything that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said that is relevant to the Islamic faith. Scholars divide revelations into three types:

1 - The Qur'an, which is revealed by text and meaning. Every word in the Qur'an is the word of God, and it has been revealed as it is. It does not admit any change at any time. Its recitation is a form of worship. It is recited in prayer which is unacceptable unless it contains some portions of the Qur'an.

2 - The Hadith, which is an expression in the Prophet's own words of meanings that are revealed to him from on high.

3 - The sacred or “Qudsi Hadith”, in which the Prophet, peace be upon him, quotes a statement attributing it to God.

The last two types are not read in prayer, and their recitation is not a form of worship. Besides, God has not guaranteed their preservation in their original forms like He preserves the Qur'an. He left this task to the Muslim community, and its scholars like Al-Bukhari, Muslim and others have certainly done a good job of it.

Let us now consider the instances Mr. Pervez mentions in his book. The first is a statement by the Prophet, peace be upon him, requiring those who had written down Hadith to erase it. Every statement must be taken within its context. This, the Prophet, peace be upon him, said in the early days of Islam, when the Arabs, mostly unlettered people, were receiving the message directly from him, and the Qur'an was in the process of revelation.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, feared that in the situation that prevailed at that time the Hadith might be confused with the Qur'an. Therefore, he wanted to ensure that what was written down was only the Qur'an. The Hadith was meant to be learned and reported verbally. He was available to correct any mistakes that might have occurred. Later on, when Muslims were better aware of the text of the Qur'an, and the number of people who could read and write increased, the Prophet, peace be upon him, allowed his companions to write down the Hadith. Many of them did. None of them said to him that they would not do so because he had earlier told them not to write the Hadith. Why do people nowadays say something to that effect? Why would they obey the first order, but not the second?

Besides, who says that writing down the Hadith is the only form of preserving it. In fact, committing it to memory, particularly in the early days of Islam, was far more important. When we rely on written text only, and do not support that with good memory, we run the risk of distortion. The Qur'an itself was memorized more than it was written down. When Osman sent copies of the Qur'an to the main centers of the Islamic state, he wanted these to be a sort of reference to confirm what people memorized. There were far more people who learned the Qur'an by heart than copies of it. Yet no one suggests that the Qur'an is not valid because it was not written on paper in sufficient number of copies.

The scholars of Hadith have done a marvelous job in ensuring that every statement attributed to the Prophet, peace be upon him, is verified, and only when it has been proved as authentic it is implemented. By doing so, they have facilitated for all Muslims generations to follow the Divine instructions to obey God's messenger. Yet writers, like Mr. Pervez, want us to disregard all this heritage of unrivaled

scholarship, although it means in practice a willful negligence of God's order to obey His messenger. We, as Muslims, know that their argument has no sound basis. We continue to obey God's Messenger, because by doing so we obey God Himself, as He says: ***"Whoever obeys the messenger is obedient to God."*** [Women— "An-Nis'a" 4: 80]

As for the other two incidents the writer mentions, we say that even if they were correct, they are actions by the Prophet's companions. Their actions or view represent their own discretion. They are not binding on other generations of Muslims. All the Prophet's companions reported Hadiths and considered them as basis for actions they did. When they were asked why they did certain matters in a certain fashion, they answered that they either saw the Prophet, peace be upon him, doing it in that fashion, or heard him recommending or ordering it. This applies to Abu Bakr and Omar as well as all the companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him.

When we declare that we are Muslims, we state that we believe that there is only one God, and that Muhammad is God's messenger. What does the second half of this statement mean? It simply means that we take from Muhammad, peace be upon him, whatever he taught, as he is the person through whom God has conveyed His message to us. How can we decline that and say at the same time that we believe in him as God's messenger? To reject his Hadith is to reject him as a Messenger. That takes any person outside the fold of Islam altogether.

Hadiths: Misunderstanding — Of Different Sorts

1. I visited my relatives in the US and I was shocked by some of their practices. An important issue was their assertion that the Sahih of Al-Bukhari was compiled a few hundred years after the Prophet, peace be upon him, had passed away, and that Abu Hurairah, a major source of Hadith was once flogged for lying. Another issue they raised was their assertion that the Qur'an, need not be read in Arabic all the time. They claim that its being in Arabic is incidental to the fact that the Prophet, peace be upon him, was an Arab. They claim that we should be able to offer prayers in our own language. Please comment.

2. I would like to ask if the compilation of Hadith began in the days of the Prophet, peace be upon him, how come God did not guarantee its protection as He did for the Qur'an? Secondly, how is it that there are two Hadiths saying that the Prophet, peace be upon him, had ordered his companions not to write anything from him except the Qur'an, then how come that in spite of this Al-Bukhari had the courage to write down the Hadiths? Does it not constitute a defiance of the Prophet's instructions?

1. Our reader is right to be concerned about the relatives and how they have changed certain aspects of religion. They may have acquired this through the influence of the society in which they live, or through misguided teachings of some people who claim to have developed an 'enlightened' approach to Islam. Be that as it may, they should remember that religion should be learnt through the Prophet, peace be upon him, since he is the one whom God has sent to mankind to convey His message to them. This is indeed implied in the second half of the declaration by which a person becomes a Muslim. He declares: "I bear witness that there is no deity except God, and that Muhammad is His messenger." What does a messenger do if he does not deliver a message? If the message is from God, it must certainly be implemented. Otherwise, the declaration becomes a mere word with no real substance. That is not what it is meant to be.

Some people try to appear more devoted to Islam by saying that they accept every thing in the Qur'an, but nothing else. They try to justify that by saying that had God

wanted us to observe something, He would have said so in His revelation, i.e. the Qur'an. They forget that the Hadith, or Sunnah, is also revelation from God. Addressing the Prophet, God says in the Qur'an:

“And upon you have We bestowed from on high this reminder. So that you may make clear to mankind all that has been bestowed upon them [through revelation], and that they may reflect.” [the Bee — “An-Nahl” 16: 44]

The word “reminder” in this verse refers to the Sunnah, or Hadith, which is clearly defined here as having been “bestowed from on high,” for the purpose of making clear to people what God has revealed in the Qur'an. Besides, numerous are the verses in the Qur'an, which give a clear order that we must obey God's messenger, and that such obedience is part of obeying God. To give just one example, we quote the following verse:

“Whoever obeys Prophet obeys God thereby. As for those who turn away, We have not sent you to be their keeper.” [Woman — “An-Nis'a” 4: 80]

Our reader's friends try to cast doubt on the authority of Hadith by saying that Al-Bukhari lived several hundred years after the Prophet, and speaking ill of one of his best learned companions, Abu Hurairah. There is much that is inaccurate or false in their statements. To start with, Al-Bukhari was born in 194 A.H., not several hundred years after the Prophet, peace be upon him. The science of Hadith reporting and authentication was started much earlier than Al-Bukhari, Imam Malik compiled Al-Muwatta, the first of the major compilations of authentic Hadiths, long before that. Malik was born in 93 and died in 179 A.H. Over these two centuries, this discipline was developed until it reached a high zenith at the time of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, who was born in 164 A.H. It was perfected by Al-Bukhari with his Sahih, as he stipulated very elaborate conditions for accepting any Hadith as authentic. It is sufficient to know that for such a great imam who devoted himself entirely to the service of Hadith, the task of compiling his Sahih collection took no less than 16 years.

It is not right to say that Abu Hurairah was flogged for lying. Far be it from a companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, to do so, or to incur such a punishment. The truth about that is Omar ibn Al-Khattab rebuked Abu Hurairah for his reporting of many Hadiths in succession. Omar wanted him to take more care in allowing his audience to learn each Hadith separately so that the number of Hadiths recited in succession does not confuse them. It was merely a point that concerned a method of teaching, not the accuracy of what was being taught. Yet people try to make a fuss of that. Those who deliberately do so have a wicked aim of trying to undermine Islam. But some people repeat their insertion in ignorance, unaware that by doing so; they help the enemies of Islam.

How is Islam to be practiced and implemented if we disregard Hadith and the Prophet's teachings? God has told us to offer prayers and pay Zakah, without telling us how to pray and how much to pay in Zakah. We have learnt that from the Prophet, peace be upon him, through authentic reporting by his companions and successive generations of scholars. If we cannot attend to the most important duties of Islam, such as prayer, Zakah and pilgrimage without referring to Hadith, how are we to practice the rest of Islam?

As for reading a translation of the Qur'an, in prayer, that is totally unacceptable. In prayer, we read God's word, which is the text of the Qur'an, as revealed in Arabic. That, and only that, is the text which the Angel Gabriel brought to God's messenger, Muhammad, peace be upon him. The angel did not read it in any “angelic” language, but recited it in Arabic.

When it is translated, the new text is merely the language of the translator, reflecting his understanding of the original. That cannot be read in prayers. Our reader should ask her friends, since there are more than 20 English translations of the Qur'an, which one would they use in prayer? What would they do when translators disagree, as they often do, in the rendering of a specific verse?

One last word to my reader's friends. Islam is a religion revealed by God through His messenger. If we disregard what His messenger has taught, how are we to know what God wants us to do?

2. To start with, every Muslim knows that the two sources of Islamic law are the Qur'an and the Sunnah. The latter includes everything that is reported authentically as having been said, done or approved by the Prophet, peace be upon him. Hence scholars have taken diligent care to establish the authenticity of every Hadith attributed to the Prophet, peace be upon him. This process began at the time of the Prophet's companions, shortly after he had passed away, and culminated in the great efforts by the masters of Hadith scholarship, such as Malik, Al-Shaf'ie, Yahya ibn Mu'een, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Al-Bukhari, Al-Nassaie, Al-Tirmithi, Abu Dawood and Ibn Majah. These are listed in chronological order, although some of them were contemporaries. There are many other scholars who worked hard on the verification and authentication of every reported Hadith. Thus, we have a wealth of Hadith scholarship, that gives us practically all that we need in order to establish how to lead our life so that we remain within what God approves.

Referring to the question why has God not guaranteed to preserve the Hadith as He did with the Qur'an, the answer is simple. He preserved His word, which constitutes the essence of the Islamic faith and left the preservation of the Hadith to us. We cannot say that since its writing began at the time of the Prophet, peace be upon him, then God could have guaranteed its preservation. He could have done that anyway, without its being written down. He does not need that it should be written on paper in order to preserve it.

Yes, the Prophet, peace be upon him, instructed his companions at first not to write anything other than the Qur'an. This was done for a period of time, when he feared that recording his statements might be confused with recording of the Qur'an. Later, when this fear was no longer operative, he allowed the writing down of Hadith. There were many of his companions who wrote down whatever Hadith they heard from him. Most remarkable among them was Abdullah ibn Amr. So, Al-Bukhari did not defy the Prophet's orders. Indeed he complied with them and did a great service to Islam by documenting the Hadiths he was certain to be of high degree of authenticity, as did Muslim and the other scholars of Hadith. The whole Muslim community over more than 12 centuries remain indebted to them.

Hadiths: Misunderstanding — Prophet Addressing the Dead

After the burial of the unbelievers killed in Badr, the Prophet, peace be upon him, addressed them. Ayesha denies this on grounds that the Qur'an mentions that the dead cannot hear. Please explain.

It is reported that the Prophet, peace be upon him, addressed the dead unbelievers after their burial asking whether they have found out that God's promises and warnings have come true. People asked him how could he speak to the dead. It is reported that he said: "You cannot hear me better than they."

It is to this statement that Ayesha objected on grounds of verse 22 of Surah Creator — "Al-Fatir" 35 which states: "***You cannot make the dwellers of the graves hear.***" Ayesha said: "The Prophet, peace be upon him, did not say that you cannot hear me better than they, but said: you cannot be better aware of what I say than they." This is

true, as they would have met their destiny that confirmed everything the Prophet, peace be upon him, had told them.

Hadiths: Misunderstanding — Wife Stealing From the Husband

You quoted a Hadith, which suggests that it is permissible for a wife to steal from her husband. Is it possible that the Prophet, peace be upon him, could have permitted theft? What sort of Islam are you propagating? Suppose that the husband has brought the money home to pay an outstanding debt only to discover in the morning that it is all gone, because the wife has stolen it to buy some luxuries. What would you say to that?

We only preach what we have learned from and through God's messenger, Muhammad, peace be upon him, and we will say what we believe would please God Almighty. Therefore, we take whatever is authentically reported to us of Hadith. And then giving always the first priority to the Qur'an, we act on it. But also, when we read a Hadith, we try to understand it within its context. We cannot treat a text said on a particular occasion without first considering the occasion to determine whether the statement attributed to the Prophet, peace be upon him, has a general or special application.

In this particular case, the woman concerned was Hind bint Utbah wife of Abu Sufian. She complained to the Prophet, peace be upon him, that her husband was miserly and asked whether she could take some money from him without his knowledge. The Prophet, peace be upon him, told her: "Take what is sufficient for you and your child, in line with what is reasonable."

This Hadith, then, speaks about the social case of a stingy husband who does not fulfil his duty of looking after his wife and children and does not provide for their living. The Prophet, peace be upon him, allowed her to redress this omission on her husband's part by taking from him what is sufficient, and he added that it should remain within 'what is reasonable'. So it is not a blank check for every wife.

Of course a wife whose husband provides her with a decent standard of living, according to his means, may not take his money without his knowledge, because there is no overriding necessity, as in the case of the woman who complained of her husband's miserliness. If the husband does not bring the essentials for his wife and children, then he has no right to keep all his money. Islam considers that one's wife and children to be one's partners in his wealth and property. So, if a woman finds herself in a situation where her children's essential requirements, including food and clothing are not provided, she may take from her husband's money what redresses his omission.

[There is a main rule in Islamic law that a particular regulation, which is made for a particular reason, is enforced only when that reason is clearly in evidence.]

Hadiths: None Enters Heaven By Reason Of His Deeds Only

How can the statement of the Prophet, peace be upon him, that none enters heaven by reason of his deeds only be explained?

The Prophet, peace be upon him, has explained this by telling us that even if we spend all our lives in worship and glorification of God, we would not be able to thank Him enough for the blessings we enjoy in life. Therefore, no one would have done what is sufficient to merit entry into heaven on the basis of his actions alone. However, God has extended to us the favor that He accepts from us our good work and rewards us for it on the basis of His generosity, multiplying it at least ten times.

So our admittance into heaven is based on His grace and generosity, not on the value of our actions, although it is our actions that determine our destiny.

Hadiths: Polytheism Creeping Into People's Minds

I have read a Hadith, which states that "Polytheism may be more subtle among my nation than the movement of an ant on a black stone in the dark night." Could you please comment on what is metaphorically expressed here. How to diagnose this? and how to purify oneself from it?

The authentic Hadith warns us against entertaining any thoughts or indulging in any practices, which smack of polytheism, although they may not appear to have any relationship with faith. It also aims to keep us on our guard so that we may watch our actions and examine our thoughts in order to always ensure that our faith remains pure and our actions remain free from elements which detract from our sincerity and dedication.

As you are well aware, Islam places very strong emphasis on the need to maintain sincerity of faith. That can only be achieved if our actions are dedicated to Allah and if our dedication to Him is pure. Every human being may profess himself a believer. However, a true faith can only be expressed through actions. It is for this reason that the Prophet, peace be upon him, defines faith as that "which is entrenched deeply in the heart and to which credence is given through actions." If somebody professes to be a firm believer and that he associates no partner with Allah in any shape or form, he must confirm these statements with actions. If he does not, his claim is false. He may be in actual fact a polytheist or at least he may allow element of polytheism to creep into his mind.

It is perhaps useful to look at certain actions, which involve such elements of polytheism. The first that springs to mind is hypocrisy. I do not mean here the sort of total hypocrisy, which is practiced by a person who knows himself not to believe in Allah and the message of Muhammad, peace be upon him, and yet professes to be a Muslim. Such a person knows that he is not a believer. When he is alone or with people like him or those who are open enemies of Islam, he acknowledges his lack of belief and that he wishes Islam ill. What I mean by hypocrisy here is the sort of hypocritical attitude in people's dealings when a person, for example, shows his superiors at work that he is totally devoted to them and that he is keen to serve the interest of the establishment in which he works, but his claims are in fact false. Moreover, if a person praises another and extols his qualities to a degree of clear exaggeration, without actually being honest about what he is saying, his attitude is hypocritical. When we realize that even very simple and elementary hypocrisy is polytheistic, this becomes very clear to us.

Another aspect of such subtle polytheism is that evidence by actions and feelings such as loving someone or something although that love may lead to or involve some injustice and to hate another although it may lead to or involve more injustice. A true believer must always be on the side of justice and must fight injustice in every shape and form. Allah states in a Qudsi Hadith: "My servants, I have banished injustice away from Me and I have made it forbidden to you." A person of sincere faith will be naturally and instinctively inclined to the side of justice. When that does not happen and he favors injustice in any situation, then he is after self-interest. The same is true when he dislikes or disfavors justice. Any person who allows himself to maintain such attitude places his self-interest above basic Islamic principles. That is clear evidence that he does not have firm beliefs. His faith is suspect. That is a mark of subtle polytheism.

Perhaps a clearer example of what the Prophet, peace be upon him, described as subtle polytheism is to believe that a human being, dead or alive, or something such

as a charm or a shrine or whatever, can cause benefit or harm. A believer in the Oneness of Allah is one who attributes to Him everything that comes one's way of benefit or harm. A true Muslim always prays to Allah to ask Him to fulfill his wishes whatever they are. He knows that the realization of his hopes and the fulfillment of his aspirations can only come with Allah's help. Similarly the avoidance of any trouble and the relief of any evil or hardship that happens to one can only be accomplished by Allah. Therefore, he asks no one else for such help. But many people do not realize that when they believe that a certain person or a particular thing can be of benefit to them or can cause them evil, they are elevating that person or that thing to the degree of partnership with Allah. Islam allows nothing of the sort. Allah states in a Qudsi Hadith: "I am the least desirous of any sort of partnership. Anyone who associates with Me a partner from among My creation, I abandon him to that which he claims to be My partner." This means that Allah rejects any person who associates any partners with Allah. Whomever Allah rejects will never prosper.

That association of partners with Allah does not necessarily take a deliberate form. It is not necessary that the person concerned is aware that he believes that Allah has partners on the same level with Him or even to a level below Him. The fact that he believes that a person or a thing can cause him benefit or harm is a manifestation of polytheism. The Prophet, peace be upon him, warns everyone against entertaining such thoughts. He says: "Whoever humbles himself in front of another in order to achieve any worldly gains loses two thirds of his faith."

All these attitudes and similar ones are often unrecognized by people as forms of polytheism. In order to enhance our awareness and keep us mindful of what we believe and what thoughts we entertain, the Prophet, peace be upon him, uses such a highly vivid picture, describing certain elements of polytheism as more subtle than the movement of ants. It is very important for every Muslim to examine his thoughts and beliefs every now and then so that he may purge any alien thought and maintain purity of faith.

Hadiths: Prophet's Advice — A Recommendation Or A Duty

We know that whatever is Sunnah is not Fardh and that raises a question. How do we treat the advice of the Prophet, peace be upon him. Are we to assume that these are recommendations, which we may adopt if we so please? Your detailed comments will be highly useful.

We have always tried to emphasize in these columns the sort of attitude a believer should have towards instructions given by the Prophet, peace be upon him. We have explained that following the Prophet, peace be upon him, is required of all Muslims. God tells us in the Qur'an:

"Whatever the Prophet bids you, you must do, and whatever he forbids you, you must abandon." [Exile — "Al-Hashr" 59: 7]

This is a basic and clear instruction from which no believer may deviate. It is true that we sometimes default on doing something required by Islam. But that means a failure for which we are punishable unless God forgives us. It is for this reason that a Muslim always prays to be forgiven.

If this prompts some readers to ask about the commandments given to us by the Prophet, peace be upon him, and whether we have to follow them by way of duty, or they are only recommendations that we may adopt as we please, then an explanation is in order. When it is clear from the context that a particular order given by the Prophet, peace be upon him, is meant as a definitive order, then we have to follow it by way of duty. The Prophet, peace be upon him, for example, gives us the following instruction: "Pray in the manner you have seen me pray." He also said at the time

when he started his pilgrimage: “Learn from me your rituals.” God does not tell us in the Qur’an, how to pray, but He gives us clear orders that we must pray. The Prophet, peace be upon him, has shown us how to pray and given us this express order. It is obligatory for every Muslim that he should pray only in the manner the Prophet, peace be upon him, prayed. If he prays in some other form, his prayers will not be accepted as Islamic prayers. Similarly if he goes on pilgrimage without following the example of the Prophet, peace be upon him, his pilgrimage is not valid, although he may offer his worship in all sincerity. These are orders, which must be followed. If a Muslim does not follow them, he disobeys the Prophet, peace be upon him, and, in consequence, disobeys God.

There are, on the other hand, instructions given to us by the Prophet, peace be upon him, which merely indicate a preferable course of action. These should be taken as recommendations. It is the context, which determines whether a particular order points out a duty or a recommendation. But even when the Prophet, peace be upon him, is simply recommending to us a certain thing, we should follow his instructions. He only teaches us what is beneficial to us. God makes sure that we prosper when we follow the example of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and He rewards us for doing what the Prophet, peace be upon him, recommends us. Whether the recommendation by the Prophet, peace be upon him, relates to something of this world or to a matter of worship, we are certain to achieve the best results by following his advice. Those who do not wish to follow the Prophet, peace be upon him, can only blame themselves for the results. The following Hadith explains this in clear terms.

Ayesha, the Prophet’s wife, reports: “The Prophet, peace be upon him, did something and indicated that it is permissible. Some people, however, felt that they should not do it. This was communicated to the Prophet, peace be upon him. He spoke, starting with praising God, before saying: “What is the matter with certain people who feel that they are above doing something which I have done? By God, I know God better than them and I fear Him most.” [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim and An-Nasa’ie]

In this report we are told of certain companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him, who, in their eagerness to maintain a high standard of devotion, felt that they should not do something which the Prophet, peace be upon him, did. In this particular report we are not told what was the thing which the Prophet, peace be upon him, indicated as permissible, but those people refrained from doing. Some commentators indicate that this relates to a particular action of one sort or another. It is perhaps more accurate to say that it particularly refers to three companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and their action.

Those three men went to the Prophet’s wives, asking them about his worship, how often he prayed and fasted voluntarily and how was his life at home with his wives. When they were given these details, they felt that such a standard of worship was not sufficient for them, although it might have been sufficient for the Prophet, peace be upon him. After all, God already forgave him, for any slip or error he might have made. They wanted to adopt a harder course of action. One of them pledged to fast every day of his life; the second indicated that he would be standing up in worship all night every night. The third pledged never to marry.

When the Prophet, peace be upon him, was told of this, he realized the danger it involved to the community of believers and to future generations. It is the sort of danger always associated with going to extreme. The Prophet, peace be upon him, has always indicated that Islam is an easy religion, with instructions to its followers that are easy to follow. Therefore, he wanted to make it absolutely clear that a middle course is the best course and that all Muslims must follow his example. When he stood on the pulpit to speak to his companions, he put the issue succinctly clear. He stated that he knew God better than all people and he feared Him most. To know God

is to fear Him. For no one has true knowledge of God and continues to disobey Him. The better a person knows God the easier it is for him to do what he is bidden and to refrain from what he is forbidden.

Thus the Prophet's actions and example show us our best course of action. When we follow it, we are certain to earn God's pleasure. But those who thought little of the Prophet's example could only think of ways, which did not take into account all factors that influenced people. They wanted to impose on themselves a very strict course. That is why the Prophet, peace be upon him, according to other reports of this Hadith, was very angry when he heard what they said. He told them that they must not impose their own restrictive view. They should follow his example. If he does something when he knows God best and fears Him most, then that which he does is certainly permissible and useful.

The Hadith, which we have quoted above, lays down a fundamental principle. It applies to all situations. Failure to follow the Prophet's advice will deprive the person concerned from a certain benefit. The following Hadith can be given as an example of application of the earlier one. "Two men exchanged words of abuse at the Prophet's place. One of them was very angry to the extent that his face swelled and changed color. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "I know a word which this man needs only to say in order to be relieved of what he is enduring." A man went to him and told him what the Prophet, peace be upon him, said. He also advised him to seek refuge with God against the devil. The man said: "Is there anything wrong with me? Do you find me insane? Go away." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim and An-Nasa'ie].

It is clear that this man was in the flight of anger. The Prophet, peace be upon him, wanted to indicate to his companions that if a man is overwhelmed by anger he only needs to remember God and to seek refuge with Him against the devil and his instigation. However, the angry man was not prepared to listen to advice. That was the reason for his retorting violently when the Prophet's companion communicated to him the Prophet's advice. His failure to follow it, however, meant that his anger got the better of him. He could not think clearly. He did not earn any reward, which a believer would surely earn by following the Prophet's advice. He must have regretted all that when he cooled down, but then regret may be to no avail.

Hadiths: Qudsi Hadiths

You often use the expression in your replies such as "Allah says" or "Allah says in a Qudsi Hadith". Are these sayings a deduction by the Prophet, peace be upon him, from the Qur'anic injunctions? Please explain.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, has attributed certain statements to Allah, although these are not included in the Qur'an. These statements are given the title of a Qudsi Hadith. These always begin with the Prophet, peace be upon him, stating that: "Allah has said," or "Allah says." This is a clear indication that the statement that follows such a phrase is not made by the Prophet himself, but by Allah.

Such a Hadith attributed to Allah takes a position in between the Qur'an and ordinary Hadith which is a statement by the Prophet, expressing in his own words a thought or an idea that has been revealed to him by Allah. In other words, a Hadith is revealed in meaning, stated in the Prophet's own words. A Qudsi Hadith, on the other hand, is revealed in words and meaning. That is, the precise statement is made by Allah to express His own meaning. It is different from the Qur'an in the sense that it may not be recited in prayer and its transmission is in the form of a chain of single reporters. When the authenticity of a Qudsi Hadith has been established, it must be taken as correct and acted upon. The number of Qudsi Hadiths exceed 100. One of the most important statements that the Prophet, peace be upon him, related from his Lord is that Allah has said:

"My servants, I have forbidden oppression for Myself and have made it forbidden for you, so do not oppress one another. My servants, all of you are astray except for those I have guided, so seek guidance from Me and I shall guide you. My servants, all of you are hungry except for those I have fed, so seek food from Me and I shall feed you. My servants, all of you are naked except for those I have clothed, so seek clothing of Me and I shall clothe you. My servants, you sin by night and by day, and I forgive all sins, so seek forgiveness of Me and I shall forgive you. My servants, you will not attain harming Me so as to harm Me, and you will not attain benefiting Me so as to benefit Me. My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you or the jinn of you to be as pious as the most pious heart of any one man of you, that would not increase My kingdom in anything. My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to rise in one place and make a request of Me, and were I to give everyone what he requested, that would not decrease what I have, any more than a needle decreases the sea if you put into it. My servants, it is but your deeds that I reckon up for you and then compensate you for, so let him who finds good praise Allah and let him who finds other than that blame no one but himself." [Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim].

Hadiths: Quoting A Hadith In Paraphrase

Is it permissible to cite a Hadith or a verse of the Qur'an the wording of which a person does not remember exactly, saying that he is quoting its meaning but not its text?

It is very important to remember that the Prophet, peace be upon him, warns against attributing to him something that he did not say. He said: "Whoever deliberately attributes a falsehood to me has his place reserved for him in hell." This was the reason why many of his companions did not quote him when they explained Islamic principles and teachings. However, it is permissible to cite the meaning of a Hadith, provided that we make clear that we are not quoting the Prophet, peace be upon him. We should make clear to our audience that we are only giving the meaning, or an approximation of it. Scholars have taught us that when we want to cite a Hadith, we better take the precaution of stating that 'this is the gist of the Hadith', even when we know it by heart. This is to guard against any error in the transmission of the Hadith.

When citing the Qur'an, we apply the same principle. If one is not sure of the exact wording of a verse he wants to cite, he should state clearly that he is not making a quotation, but rather paraphrasing the text.

Hadiths: Revelations Or Lofty Intuitions

If Hadith is not revelation, can it be termed as "lofty intuition"?

Hadith is much more than what can be described as 'lofty intuition'. Everything that the Prophet, peace be upon him, has taught us of our religion has been revealed to him. The Qur'an is revealed in meaning and in word and every Muslim believes that every single word in the Qur'an is Allah's own word. A sacred or Qudsi Hadith is the one which the Prophet, peace be upon him, attributes to Allah Himself, by stating something to this effect: "Allah, the Most Sublime, says..." There is no doubt that such sacred Hadiths have been revealed to the Prophet, peace be upon him, in meaning. Many scholars say that they are also revealed by Allah in word.

However, the difference between them and the Qur'an is that they have been conveyed to us through a chain of single narrators, rather than chains of numerous narrators at every stage which is the mark of the Qur'an. Unlike the Qur'an, a sacred Hadith may not be recited in prayer, nor is its recitation an aspect of worship.

Ordinary Hadith is the word of the Prophet, although in meaning it is revealed. The Prophet, peace be upon him, has not given us anything concerning our religion of his own accord. Everything that relates to our faith has been revealed by Allah. However, such revelations are put in Hadith in the Prophet's own words. We cannot say that it is the word of Allah. Statements are attributed to their authors who shape and express them the way they like. In short, the meaning of Hadith is revelation, but its wording we attribute to the Prophet, peace be upon him.

Haram Area: Informing On Deception By Non-Muslims

If you know that an expatriate worker has lied about his religion in order to obtain a visa, pretending that he is a Muslim when he is not, do you have to inform the authorities about this case? What worries me in this case is that by so doing, the man is able to get access to the holy sites which are forbidden to non-Muslims. Please advise.

This is a serious offense, yet it might have been committed without any bad intention. Someone might have told him at the beginning that he stood a better chance of getting a job in the Kingdom by pretending to be Muslim. He might have intended no harm. Yet we cannot establish this without thorough investigation. The man should be advised first to make his identity clear.

Perhaps he could inform his employers and they would correct the relevant entry in his stay permit. If he does not take the necessary action after such advice has been impressed on him, then consideration should be given to informing the authorities because anyone deliberately making false pretences could be a source of danger.

Haram Area: Of Madinah

In response to a question about non-Muslims being not allowed to enter the holy places in Saudi Arabia, I read that the city of Madinah also forbids entry to non-Muslims. However, to my knowledge, Madinah has a quite sophisticated international airport. A few years back, even a hijacked airliner, probably Russian, was allowed to land there with non-Muslims on board. Please clarify.

It is as we stated last time: Madinah is not allowed for non-Muslims within a 12 mile-radius. This is in fulfillment to a prohibition order by the Prophet, peace be upon him, who says: "I am forbidding this city as God has made Makkah a forbidden-city." There are clear signs on the roads approaching Madinah from all directions stating that non-Muslims are not allowed in the city. Hence, the prohibition is applied and there is no question about it.

It is true that Madinah has an airport, but it is located outside the precincts of the city. It is not part of it. Thus, it is not different from Jeddah airport, which lies within the Hill area. Moreover, it is only a semi-international airport with international flights coming only from Muslim countries.

It is only the *Saudia* and a few other airlines from Arab and Muslim countries that are allowed to land there. It is not a normal point of entry into the Kingdom, like Jeddah or Dhahran. International flights are received at Madinah airport mostly during the pilgrimage and Umrah seasons. As for the hijacked airliner, this is a case of an emergency that was dealt with in the proper way by the authorities. Certainly no non-Muslim on the plane was allowed in Madinah, unless that person needed urgent medical attention.

Haram Area: Why Non-Muslims Cannot Visit Haram Area

Many friends who are non-Muslims wonder why they are not allowed to visit Makkah and Madinah, while Muslims are allowed to visit their holy cities and shrines. Please comment.

To start with, the restriction on entry to Makkah and Madinah is not made by any political or human authority. Thus it cannot be questioned as though it is something that a government or a leader has put it in place. Nor can the argument hold that an equal treatment be given. Moreover, Muslims have not asked the authorities of any religious place to make that place open to them. They decide to invite visitors or prevent them. Suppose, for argument's sake, that the Vatican authorities decide to ban non-Catholic people from visiting their city. Will anyone have the right to question them? It is their city and they do in it what they like.

Having said that, we may add that the prohibition gives a clear indication that God wants to keep Makkah a city for worship and security. As such it cannot be transformed into a tourist resort. That is totally unacceptable. The same applies to Madinah, which has been restricted to non-Muslims by none other than the Prophet, himself. When God and His Messenger decree something, the only thing open to us is to obey their decree.

Heaven: Life Short Or A Long One & Admission Into Heaven

According to Islam, those who die in childhood are assured of admission to heaven. Those who live to adulthood are accountable for their deeds, and only if they do well in life they can go to heaven. This means that the longer one lives, the more difficult it is for him or her to ensure going to heaven, while children have the great prize without having to do anything. If I were given the choice, of course I would die in childhood. Yet this is causing me a lot of confusion. Please clarify.

To start with, you have to look at life in this world as a test. Those who pass the test go to heaven, and those who fail condemn themselves to God's punishment, unless He, most gracious, merciful and much forgiving as He is, forgives them and waives their punishment. They will also go to heaven in this case. People who have any degree of faith in God, but still come on the Day of Judgment with much more bad deeds than good ones may suffer temporary punishment in hell so as to cleanse them of the burden of sin and then go to heaven. Only a person who does not have the tiniest fraction of faith remains in hell.

Needless to say, the test of this life applies after one has become an adult, able to discern right from wrong and make a choice between alternatives on that basis. Hence, children are not questioned about their deeds because they did not reach that stage when they could make informed choices. It is an aspect of God's mercy that He admits them to heaven. A Hadith tells us that all those who die in childhood are told on the Day of Judgment to go to heaven, but they stand at its gate and make a vociferous protest. God, who knows everything, asks the angels what is the matter with those children. The children plead for their parents, saying that they were deprived of the care and love of their parents early in life and they do not want to be deprived of that again. God, in His mercy, tells them to go to heaven with their parents.

This is just one aspect of God's grace. He is very kind, forgiving and merciful. May I cite the Hadith that says that "God created mercy and divided it into 100 portions. He placed one portion on earth and kept for Himself 99 portions. It is from the one portion that all creatures show mercy to one another, including an animal which lifts its leg to allow its young to pass."

The rest of God's mercy is reserved for the Day of Judgment so as to be exercised on that day. You can see how great it is when you consider that all the kindness in the present world, by all creatures, in all generations, past, present and future, constitutes one portion. When we consider this we realize why it is a fact that we go to heaven, first and foremost, by God's grace not by our deeds.

Added to this, God rewards us generously for our deeds. Let me quote you this Hadith to give you a fair idea. Before I quote it, may I remind you that a martyr is certain to go to heaven as his sins are all forgiven:

Two of the Prophet's companions died, separated by one year, but the first of them died a martyr for the cause of Islam. Another companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, saw them in a dream. They were both in heaven, but the one who died later was ahead of the martyr. He reported his dream to the Prophet, peace be upon him, asking how could the non-martyr be ahead. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: 'Did he not pray 6,000 rak'ahs more and fast the month of Ramadhan?''

This means that in this one year which he lived more than his friend, he ensured for himself a higher position in heaven through attending to his obligatory duties.

What this means is that life can be a great source of goodness, provided one conducts his life in the right way. Given the same choice, I would opt for a long life, provided that I am a believer who is committed to the cause of Islam and obeying God. This ensures the better outcome in heaven.

Heaven: What Is In It For Women?

1. It is mentioned in the Qur'an that there will be women in heaven. May I ask why will they be there? In our country, some scholars suggest that a true believer will be offered as many as seventy such women. Are they correct? If so, what about women? Being a married woman, I cannot think of my husband having seventy women around him in heaven. I want him to be mine only. Is this possible? Do I commit a sin by entertaining such thoughts? Being a non-Arabic speaking woman, I am intrigued by the fact that every time a reward from Allah is mentioned for a particular action, it is suggested that it will be given to a man. What is the reward for women, then? In the translation of the traditions of Al-Bukhari, the writer makes the comment women can never achieve the grade of men with regard to worship. Is the writer correct? Are men superior to women in Allah's judgment?

2. Many a Qur'anic statement describes the life of men in heaven, but there is nothing to describe the life of women there. Men are said to live in heaven with their wives and sons, but how will women live?

When we speak about the life to come, we must bear in mind that whatever we may do, we cannot formulate a "true to life" picture of what things will be like there. How does the resurrection take place? We believe in the resurrection as an essential part of our faith. We have accepted the message of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, as the final and correct message from Allah to mankind, and that the religion of Islam is the faith chosen by Allah for human beings. To believe in the resurrection is a basic requirement of Islam. Hence, we accept it without question.

We are told by the Prophet, peace be upon him, in this connection that women who will be admitted into heaven will be made to look in their best form, full of life and vigor, as they were in their prime of life. How will women regain this form after having lived sixty, seventy or even ninety years? The answer is that we do not know.

We believe in it because we believe that Allah has the power to accomplish anything He wills.

We must also bear in mind the Hadith which describes the luxuries which true believers will enjoy in heaven as follows: "In it [i.e. in heaven] there are things that no eye has ever beheld, and of which no ear has ever heard, and the thought of which no human mind has ever entertained."

This Hadith emphasizes the fact that what those who will be blessed with admission into heaven will have much more than they can enjoy. Yet, there are detailed description of what we are likely to have in heaven. Moreover, the description is made in terms of this life and its luxuries. A Muslim cannot entertain any doubt with regard to the truthfulness of any description given in the life to come. We must not forget that the Qur'an is the word of Allah, and whatever Allah tells us is truth, clear and simple. How do we reconcile the Hadith quoted above with the descriptions of heaven given in the Qur'an? This is very simple. Had Allah described the luxuries and happiness of heaven as they actually are, we would not have understood his description, because our life experience is too modest to comprehend it. Therefore, Allah has given us descriptions, which we can understand through our experience. But the luxuries and happiness of heaven are in actual fact much more than we can visualize.

In other words, their measure is much more than we can imagine. It is true that in the Qur'anic descriptions of heaven, the presence of young, pretty woman is mentioned. But it is not to be contemplated for a second that these will compete with the believers' wives over their husbands. Your feelings about wanting to have your husband all for yourself are quite understandable. You will certainly have him as you please, if both of you are included among those whom Allah will bless with admission into heaven. It is perfectly legitimate for a believer to pray Allah to give him or her in the hereafter the same marriage partner they have in this life. As for the number seventy, referring to women who will be assigned to every man in heaven, this is news to me. I have not heard it before. However, seven and seventy are often used in Arabic as figurative numbers. They denote plenty.

Perhaps I should mention another point with regard to the relationship between believers and these heaven women. In this life, the main purposes of marriages are the satisfaction of our natural desire and having children. Indeed Allah has made sex so enjoyable in order to ensure the survival of man. The continuation of human life is part of Allah's creation. This does not apply to life in the hereafter. People in heaven will not go on giving birth to children and increasing their own numbers. At no time the description of heaven given in the Qur'an mentioned children being born to believers. You may, therefore, rest assured that you will not be fighting other women over your husband.

That the Qur'an uses the masculine reference when it speaks of Allah's reward to believers is a requirement of Arabic language. This is indeed the case in many languages. The Qur'an makes it clear that the same reward is given to men and women for the same actions. Allah states in the Qur'an:

"A person, whether male or female, who does good works while at the same time he is a true believer shall be given a good life of Us, and We will give them their reward according to their best actions." [the Believer — "Al-Mu'min" 40: 40]

Indeed, you should read all references to reward in the hereafter that occur in the masculine as equally applicable to the feminine. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says; "Women are the sisters of men." This denotes total equality between the two

sexes, except where differences are necessitated by their physical differences and their different roles.

May I correct you on the last part of your question? Al-Bukhari has not written this book. He only made a compilation of statements made by the Prophet, making sure of the authenticity of the traditions attributed to the Prophet, peace be upon him. He included in his Saheeh only those Hadiths the authenticity of which he was absolutely certain.

These statements are not made by Al-Bukhari. They were made by the Prophet, peace be upon him, and Al-Bukhari's role was only to confirm their authentic attribution to the Prophet, peace be upon him. May be you are referring to the commentary on the Hadiths listed by Al-Bukhari. If so, this commentary is written by a human being who is liable to err. I do not think that it is correct, from the Islamic point of view, to say that a woman will never attain to the grade of man with regard to worship. This is a fallacy. The fact is that women may excel men in any respect, including work for pleasing Allah.

2. The Prophet, peace be upon him, describes heaven in the following terms: "there is in it what no eye has even seen, things of which no ear has ever heard and what no one has ever imagined." If we try to relate this Hadith to the description of heaven in the Qur'an we conclude that although the Qur'anic description is true and accurate, it is given in terms which are familiar to us. The reality is far happier and much more enjoyable than we can imagine.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "Women are the sisters of men." This Hadith means that women have equal status with men and, with regard to religious duties and rights, they enjoy the same treatment. What this means in effect is that every type of enjoyment which is promised in the Qur'an to believers applies both to men and women in equal measure. Women do not have any lower status, nor are they neglected nor treated in an inferior way. Read if you will Verse 35 of Surah 33, entitled "The Confederates or The Clans," or "Al-Ahzab". It may be rendered in translation as follows:

"For all men and women who have surrendered themselves to Allah, and all believing men and believing women, and all truly devout men and truly devout women, and all men and women who are true to their word, and all men and women who are patient in adversity, and all men and women who humble themselves before Allah, and all men and women who give in charity, and all men and women who fast, and all men and women who are mindful of their chastity, and all men and women who remember Allah unceasingly: for all of them Allah has indeed readied forgiveness of sins and a great reward."[the Clans — "Al-Ahzab" 33: 35]

It is well known that with regard to religious duties, men and women are alike. Hence, their reward must be alike in order to maintain justice between them. Likewise, what they may receive in heaven must be the same.

When the Qur'an speaks of wives for believers in heaven, this need not be understood in terms of marriage in this world. If a married couple are good believers and both of them are admitted to heaven, they will be together in heaven. The woman's happiness will not be jeopardized by her husband having wives from among the women of heaven. That sort of marriage is only for companionship. The women will also have companions and will live in endless bliss.

Heaven: Who Enjoys the Bliss Of Heaven Most?

When I read the Qur'an, I feel that certain verses which speak of the bliss of heaven, mention some enjoyment which seems to be exclusively for men. Could you please explain why?

Allah has sent Muhammad, peace be upon him, with a message to mankind and instructed him to address it to all people, men and women, young and old. The message assigns the same duties to all people, men and women. There are minor differences in observances so that the duties of each sex fit in with the role its members are required to play in human life. Since Allah is fair and since His fairness is absolute, it follows that He rewards people equally for the fulfillment of the same duties. This is clearly stated in the Qur'an on numerous occasions. To give just two examples:

"Their Lord answers their [i.e. the believers'] Salat: I shall not lose sight of the labor of anyone of you, be it man or woman: each of you is an issue of the other. Hence, as for those who forsake the domain of evil, and are driven from their homelands and suffer hurt in My cause, and fight [for it] and are slain - I shall most certainly affect their bad deeds and shall most certainly bring them into gardens beneath which rivers flow as a reward from Allah: for with Allah is the most beautiful of rewards" [The Family of Imran — "Aale-Imran" 3: 195].

"As for anyone, be it man or woman, who does righteous deeds, and is also a believer, him We shall most certainly cause to live a good life; and most certainly, We shall grant to such as these their reward in accordance with the best they ever did." [the Bee — "An-Nahl" 16: 97]

Certain passages in the Qur'an which speak of the reward believers have in heaven use the masculine gender throughout. This is, however, a characteristic of Arabic, but we must understand it is applicable to both men and women. If we believe in Allah's justice, then we must believe that good believing women will be as happy in heaven as good believing men.

The descriptions of heaven in the Qur'an do not outline everything which is there. They are only examples of what believers will enjoy.

Hell: Interim Or Eternal, For Muslims?

In a discussion with a friend, I mentioned that Muslims who commit sins go to hell until their sins have been washed away. And then they are transferred to heaven. He objected to that, saying that once a person is committed to hell, he or she stays there forever and ever. He could not accept the word of any scholar. Could you please confirm the correct view?

I am always reluctant to discuss the point of who goes where in the life to come. Heaven and hell belong to God, and He decides who goes where and for how long.

When we speak about this issue, we must not make any firm statement, because we do not know who earns God's forgiveness, and who incurs His punishment. Even if we see someone committing many types of sin, we do not know how he will be and what he will do toward the end of his life. He may do some good actions, with a pure heart and total dedication. That may earn him God's forgiveness, and perhaps a rich reward.

In the Qur'an, God tells us that everyone, no matter who he is, will be certain to come close to hell, but then people will be either saved or left there.

“By your Lord, We shall most certainly bring them forth together with the evil ones, and then We shall most certainly gather them, on their knees, around hell; and thereupon We shall draft out from every group those who had been most obstinate in their rebellion against the Most Gracious. For, indeed, We know best who most deserves to be burnt in the fire of hell. There is not one among you who shall not pass over it; this is, for your Lord, a decree that must be fulfilled. But we shall save those who are God-fearing, and leave the wrongdoers there, on their knees.” [Marium — 19: 68-72]

There is a clear reference here to people going out of hell after having gone into it. Moreover, the Prophet, peace be upon him, says: “A person with even an iota of faith shall not remain in hell.” This Hadith tells us that no matter how great one’s sins are and how weak one’s faith is, a person will not stay in hell for ever, if he or she believes in God’s oneness. [Some scholars extend this to include the belief in Muhammad, peace be upon him, as the final messenger of God.]

Hell: the Last To Leave Hell

Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

When the Prophet, peace be upon him, was pleased he mostly smiled. He rarely laughed heartily, like most of us do when we hear a funny joke. But the Prophet’s laughter was for something wonderful. He did not engage in idle talk or frivolity. Over the last couple of weeks we mentioned several occasions when the Prophet, peace be upon him, smiled or laughed, which suggest that the Prophet, peace be upon him, always met his companions with a smile. This encouraged a relaxed atmosphere among the Muslim community in Madinah. It is useful in the same context to look at a couple of occasions when the Prophet’s reaction was more than just a smile.

Abu Dharr quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: “I certainly know the first man to be admitted into heaven and the last to leave hell. A man is brought forward on the Day of Judgment and (the angels) are ordered to show him his minor sins. His major ones are withheld from him. He will be told: ‘On this day you did so and so,’ and he admits that he did. He does not deny any, but he is worried about his major sins. Then they are ordered: ‘Replace every sin he did with a good deed.’ He will then say: ‘I have committed further sins but I do not see them here.’” Abu Dharr says: “I saw God’s Messenger laughing heartily so as to see his molar teeth.” (Related by Muslim and Al-Tirmithi).

What the Prophet, peace be upon him, laughed at is the eagerness of the person to have his major sins brought forward when a moment earlier he was extremely worried lest they should be shown. He was first in fear seeing his minor sins counted, and knowing that he had committed major ones as well. However, when he sees that those counted sins are being replaced with good deeds so as to increase his reward, he asks for the rest of his sins to be so taken into the same account. This is characteristic of man: He always wants more of every good thing he gets.

That sins are changed into good deeds is promised in the Qur’an to the believers. God says:

“Those who repent, attain to faith and do righteous deeds, God will transform their bad deeds into good ones. God is indeed Much-Forgiving, Merciful.” (Criterion — “Al-Furqan” 25: 70)

But such people must first of all be believers. Those who do not believe shall have nothing of this, or indeed of any benefit God has in store for believers. It is faith that determines what a person receives. Believers are rewarded for their good deeds, and they are rewarded for repenting of their bad ones. These shall be counted as good

deeds on the Day of Judgment, by virtue of their repentance. But this is all an aspect of God's grace and mercy. However, for this person to actually look for his major sins hoping that they should be converted into good deeds is extraordinary. It certainly sent more than a smile into the Prophet's face. Whether this takes place or not is left untold. However, this person is certain to be admitted into heaven even though the Hadith does not specify that. When God changes someone's bad deeds into good ones and rewards him for them, then He is unlikely to punish him for any of his other deeds.

The Hadith started with the Prophet, peace be upon him, saying that he knew the first person to go to heaven and the last to leave hell. But the rest of the Hadith does not specify the two. It tells us only of a great act of kindness God grants a person He has decided to forgive. It does not say anything about the man who is the last to leave hell. This is mentioned in a different Hadith reported by Abdullah ibn Massoud who quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "I do know the last of hell-dwellers to be allowed out. He is a man who leaves it crawling out. He is then told: 'Move on and enter heaven.' He goes to heaven, but he finds that people have taken all places there. He goes back and says: 'My Lord! People have taken all places.' He is asked: 'Do you remember the time when you lived on earth?' He answers in the affirmative. He is told to have a wish, and he does. It is then said to him: 'You shall have all that you have wished for and ten times as much as the world (you were in).' He says: 'Are You making fun of me when You are the Sovereign?'" The Hadith reporter says: "I saw God's Messenger laughing heartily with his molar teeth visible." (Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Al-Tirmithi and Ibn Majah).

The Hadith is related to our theme as it mentions the Prophet's laughter. This is due to the fact that this man, the last to leave hell, was still thinking in terms of this world. He was fully aware that he deserved no reward from God. When the order was issued to give him all that he wished for and much more, he felt that it was sarcastic. How could he think otherwise when he was fully aware that his sins were so great that all other people were in better positions than him? Indeed, he thought that he had no place in heaven.

The Hadith tells us much about God's kindness. When He eventually forgives the hardest of all sinners, He gives him all that he wishes and much more. What generosity! If this is given to the person who deserved the longest stay in hell, what is given to a good believer? We can try hard to imagine but we cannot.

Moreover, we understand from this Hadith that the suffering in hell has the purpose of purging sinners of the effects of their sins. God benefits nothing by our obedience in this world, or by punishing the unbelievers in the next world. It is we who gain all the benefit. Furthermore, heaven lasts permanently, while the dwellers of hell leave eventually according to this authentic Hadith and similar ones. The Prophet, peace be upon him, is quoted as saying: "Anyone who harbors in his heart even a particle of faith will not remain permanently in hell."

Having said so, we must remember that even a very short stay in hell means a great punishment. To appreciate this we cite the following Hadith which Ibn Kathir describes as authentic: "An unbeliever is brought forward on the Day of Judgment and he is given a quick dip into the fire, then he is asked: 'Did you ever experience anything good or any luxury in your life?' He will answer: 'By Your greatness, my Lord, I never did.' And the person who endured the most miserable life on earth is brought forward and he is given a quick taste of heaven. He is then asked: 'Did you ever experience any misfortune or misery?' He will answer: 'By Your greatness, my Lord, I never did.'"

If a moment's dip in hell is sufficient to make a person forget that he ever tasted any happiness or anything good throughout his life, then it must be a fearsome place.

How much suffering is endured by the man who is the last to be released from hell? Yet it is this man that is given ten times this world as a bonus over and above what he wishes for. Great indeed is God's kindness.

Help: Whom To Help & How?

We are expected to share our prosperity with others. Kindly list the relations and other people, in order of priority, who may be entitled to receive our help. To what extent would this fulfill the need of our first priority before moving on to the next? What is the reasonable percentage of our income we should spend on our relatives and others beside Zakah to be considered generous in Allah's measure?

Thank you for raising this subject which is often neglected. People often think that when they have paid their Zakah, they have discharged all their financial obligations. They are largely unaware that Allah is not satisfied with a community which professes to be Islamic if a section of it remains in need while another section is very affluent. Everything in the financial and economic system of Islamic society is geared toward narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor. When Islam is properly implemented in a society, this gap steadily decreases until it totally disappears. Even when Islam is half heartedly or partly implemented, the poor are sure to receive help, which is not limited to Zakah.

The basic principle of the Islamic system is mutual financial and social security. There are numerous Qur'anic verses and Hadiths which encourage coming forward with financial donations so that the poor get their share of society's wealth. I will quote only one Hadith, which shows the importance of looking after the poor, especially when they are one's neighbors. In this Hadith, the Prophet, peace be upon him, swears three times that a particular person is not a believer. Amazed and shocked, the companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him, wondered who was that person. He said: "The one who goes to bed having eaten his full while he knows that his neighbor, nearby is suffering from hunger."

Perhaps we should reflect a little here. The Prophet, peace be upon him, does not describe such a person as a miser or stingy or tight fisted. He describes him as devoid of faith and he swears three times to the fact. The action required here is simply to give a small share of one's money to alleviate the suffering of poverty within one's neighborhood. That does not merely testify to the great importance of social security from the Islamic point of view. It establishes a direct relationship between financial help within the community and having faith in Allah.

There are several verses in the Qur'an which specify the importance of being kind to certain groups of people. Normally when something is expected to be given to others, the order in which they are mentioned provides an order of priority. Therefore, we list the kindness to parents above kindness to travelers who find themselves stranded and cannot continue their journey without financial or other help. That is because parents are mentioned first among the group to whom we are expected to be kind. Allah says:

"Worship Allah alone and do not associate any partners with Him. Be kind to your parents, your relatives, orphans, the needy, close and distant neighbors, and to your friends, and to travelers in need and to those whom your right hands possess." [Woman — "An-Nis'a" 4:36]

"Among the qualities which make a person righteous the Qur'an includes being generous with money to relatives, orphans, the needy, stranded wayfarers, etc." [the Cow — "Al-Baqarah" 2:177]

As I said, this should be our guideline in the order of priorities. The question arises whether, faced with having many of these groups in real need, one should give all help one can afford to the first in the group or should one divide that among all of them. This is a very sensitive matter to which we cannot apply a very rigid rule. The sensitivity may be on the part of the giver or the recipient. One may feel it is impossible to give all he can afford little though it may be, to one needy neighbor and give nothing to the other, or to give to a needy relative without giving to any [other] relatives. Therefore, every one determines for himself how to divide whatever he can give away among those who he wants to help. His judgment should take into consideration certain factors such as the closeness of the recipients, their circumstances, their strength of faith, etc.

What we are speaking about here is voluntary help, not that which is obligatory, such as Zakah, not what these people, or some of them, may claim as their right. Parents are entitled to be supported by their children if they are in need. This rule applies in all situations, whether the children are barely self-sufficient or indeed poor. A poor person cannot abandon his old parents who have no source of income. He has to share with them whatever he gets.

Hinduism: Ram's Period Of Life

Hindus claim that Ram, whom they consider as one of their main deities, lived in the period 2500-1900 BC. Some people maintain that Ram is a fictitious figure who lived only in people's imagination. Could you please enlighten us about this and also mention which prophets lived at that Bronze Age.

Our policy is not to mention anything about other religions except what we have been told by God in the Qur'an, or by the Prophet, peace be upon him, in a Hadith. We then give the Islamic point of view, which may be at variance with the beliefs of the followers of those religions. But this is only to explain the Islamic point of view, not to discuss the other religion concerned. When we are not told anything about a certain faith, we do not discuss it, simply because we have no means of establishing the truth about the beliefs of the followers of that religion.

As far as Hinduism is concerned, no reference is made to it in our main sources. Hence, we do not discuss it in this paper. We do not know when or where Ram lived, and what was his history. But we know that Ram is not a God, because there is no deity other than God Almighty. We also know that God sent prophets and messengers to all nations. He has told us about some of these and He chose not to tell us about others. We do not go beyond that.

As for the prophets who lived at a particular time, you will find that Islamic accounts of earlier prophets do not give dates, because dates are not important for the purposes for which these accounts are given. We know, for example, that Moses had a tough encounter with Pharaoh, but we cannot identify with any certainty the Pharaoh who opposed Moses. Some people suggest that Moses lived around 4,000 years ago, but this is an approximate date, which could err by a couple of centuries, or more, either way. There is no way for us to know.

Hoarding: Gold & Silver Solely For Enjoyment & Luxurious Life

Could you please comment on the Qur'anic verse which speaks of woeful suffering for those who hoard up gold and silver and do not spend the same in the cause of Allah. I should be grateful if you relate your comments to your previous answer on jewelry and Zakah.

Your reference to the Qur'anic verse is correct. This verse and the following one may be rendered in translation as follows:

"..... As for those who hoard up gold and silver and do not spend the same in the service of Allah's cause, give them the tidings of painful suffering. A day will certainly come when these shall be heated up in the fire of hell and their foreheads, sides and backs shall be branded with them. They will be told: This is what you have stored for yourselves; taste, then, what you have hoarded." [Repentance — "At-Taubah" 9: 34-35]

There is no doubt that Islam does not like the amassing of wealth or using it solely for one's enjoyment or for leading a luxurious life. Indeed, all Islamic legislation in matters of finance are geared toward a fair distribution of wealth. There is no virtue, from the Islamic point of view, in the amassing of great wealth and passing it on from father to son in order to perpetuate a family's strong financial position in society. In the past, it was traditional in certain societies that the eldest son of a family was the single heir of all its wealth. Other children received only what their father assigned to them, if any. It is still the case in most non-Muslim societies that a man is free to bequeath by will whatever portion of his wealth to whoever he chooses.

Islam, on the other hand, has a fine and detailed system of inheritance, which ensures the division of the father's wealth fairly among his heirs. None of the heirs may receive anything above the share apportioned to him or her by Allah, and none of them can be deprived of any amount of that share. The system of inheritance is only one aspect of the Islamic way of distributing wealth fairly in society.

What the Qur'anic verses speak about and warn against is the hoarding up of gold and silver, or money in general. Therefore, it is extremely important to know what is meant by 'hoarding' in order to avoid the fate of woeful suffering which this verse speaks of. Within this context, the question arises whether being rich is permissible in Islam or not. There is nothing in this Qur'anic verse which can be construed as forbidding the ownership of much money, or, more plainly, being rich. Some of the Prophet's companions were rich and we do not find any Hadith, which tells them to get rid of their riches. Indeed, the Prophet, peace be upon him, received donations from such people and thanked them for their generosity. The clearest example is that of Osman who was one of the wealthiest people in Arabia.

At the time when the Prophet, peace be upon him, called on his companions to donate generously for the mobilization of an army to fight the Byzantine Empire, Osman came up with a donation which pleased the Prophet, peace be upon him, immensely. The Prophet, peace be upon him, was speaking on the pulpit when Osman offered one hundred horses with all the equipment necessary for a horseman to have on such a campaign. The Prophet, peace be upon him, accepted that and prayed for Osman. As the Prophet, peace be upon him, went one step down, Osman told him that he was donating another one hundred equipped horses. The Prophet, peace be upon him, again prayed for him and went another step down. At the point, Osman increased his donation to three hundred horses. The Prophet, peace be upon him, stopped and signed with his finger to the right and left and prayed for Osman and said this famous statement: "Nothing that Osman may do in future will harm him." This means that Osman would be forgiven any slip or mistake that he might do subsequent to such a great donation which amounted to the equipment of a full army by the standards of that time. There were other companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him, who were rich indeed, notably, Abdul Rahman Ibn Auf who was one of the ten companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him, given the happiest news of all: certain admission to heaven.

There is nothing wrong from the Islamic point of view in being rich, provided one makes right use of one's riches. Furthermore to be rich is not synonymous with

hoarding money, whether it is of the modern currency type or silver and gold. The two are different.

What does, then, constitute hoarding? According to eminent scholars and commentators on the Qur'an, the payment of Zakah makes all the difference. If one pays the Zakah of his wealth on time, this payment serves as purification of the money and ensures that he is not included among those threatened by this verse. Al-Bukhari relates on the authority of Abdullah Ibn Omar that "this warning was applicable before the legislation of Zakah. When Zakah was made a duty, Allah made it serve as purification of money."

Abdullah Ibn Omar is further reported to have said: "The wealth from which Zakah is paid is not hoarded, even if it is stored under seven layers of earth. What is in a person's hands is hoarded if he does not pay Zakah for it." It is certainly the case that Zakah is spent to serve the cause of Allah. This is true whether Zakah is paid to the poor and the needy, or to any other class of beneficiaries, not merely when it is paid to finance a campaign of jihad.

If one pays more than the required amount of Zakah and makes such payments for purposes, which serve the cause of Allah, then he discharges all his duties and a little extra. We have to remember in this connection the Hadith, which states that "a claim may be pressed against wealth other than that of Zakah." Under this provision, an Islamic government may call on its citizens to contribute to any cause it deems to be of priority. When Muslims comply, they fulfill this other duty which the Prophet, peace be upon him, has mentioned.

As for the women's jewelry, the ruling is quite clear. When a woman has an amount of jewelry, which is considered reasonable for women in her social status, and this jewelry is bought for her personal use, not as a means of investment, then that jewelry is exempt from Zakah. Only when a woman's jewelry exceeds by far what is reasonable — and "reasonable" is estimated in relation to the woman's social status — or when it is brought as a means of investment, Zakah becomes payable for it. For a woman to have gold or silver jewelry or jewelry made of any other precious metal or material is perfectly permissible. It does not constitute hoarding. This is the opinion of the great majority of scholars, past and contemporary.

Hoarding: Storage For Off-Season Sale

When a certain commodity is in season, it is available in large quantities and at cheap prices. Later, when the supply decreases, the price increases. This is normally a gradual process. Some businessmen buy large quantities of crops and commodities when they are in high season and store them in order to sell them when the commodities are in short supply. In this way, they make better profits. Is this acceptable or does it come under hoarding?

We have to differentiate between monopoly and a good sense of business. It is a wise businessman who buys his supply of goods in season when the prices are down. If he stores them for a period of time and manages to keep them in good condition, he is able to make good profit when he releases his stock when the commodity is out of season. In this way, he makes a good use of the relationship between supply and demand. If such a businessman plays fair, there is nothing wrong with his practice. The profits he makes are legitimate.

But I must emphasize the aspect of fairness in this game, because it is a very important aspect. The businessman must be fair to his fellow businessmen and to the consumers.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the aspect of fairness is to explain what is unfair. This is normally known as hoarding or monopoly. Sometimes a businessman or a group of businessmen buys a certain commodity in large quantities. The supply becomes short in relation to the demand. Therefore, the price goes up. Neither the short supply nor the higher price is natural. Both have been artificially created by hoarding. It is only because the commodity has been withdrawn from the market that the prices go up. This is the very purpose of those businessmen who combined efforts and bought the commodity. Their only interest is their own profit. Their practice is undoubtedly forbidden.

It may be suggested that in both cases businessmen have bought large quantities of a certain commodity. What makes the first practice legitimate while the other is forbidden? The answer is that in the second case, the whole process is artificial. In the first one, it is natural. In order to differentiate one from the other an important condition must be met. That is, the commodity itself must remain in good supply in the market throughout the period between buying it at cheap prices in season and releasing it later. When the commodity is not available, the businessmen who bought it in season must release it. Otherwise, they become hoarders and their practice is no longer legitimate. The difference between the two situations is very simple. Every businessman must understand this and should be careful lest he steps over the boundaries of legitimate practices.

Human Rights: Islamic View On

Could you please explain about human rights and how they are viewed in Islam?

Whatever advancement has been made by human civilization with regard to man's role and position in this life, you will find it well established before it was even contemplated by reformers anywhere outside the Muslim world. Only a few centuries ago, Europe unquestioningly accepted the concept of the divine right of kings. It is needless to say that the so-called divine right could only produce absolute rulers who were accountable to no one. Over 1,400 years ago, Islam established that no human being is infallible and no ruler is immune to accountability. When, a few years after the Prophet, peace be upon him, had passed away, the ruler of the Muslim state, Omar ibn Al-Khattab, requested the people during a speech he was giving in Madinah to come forward and correct him, should he deviate from the right path, one of the people stood up and said: "By Allah, should we find you deviating from the right path, we will certainly straighten that deviation with our swords." Omar praised Allah that he has given him people who would not hesitate to correct him should he slip.

The international declaration of human rights is a relatively recent event. Over 1,400 years ago, the Prophet, peace be upon him, declared "Human beings are equal, just like the teeth of a comb." When he traveled to do his pilgrimage, 100,000 people joined him. That was the largest gathering during his life. He gave a memorable speech in which he repeatedly requested his audience to communicate what they learned from him to other people. In that speech, he declared: "You all descend from Adam and Adam was created out of clay. No Arab is superior to a non-Arab and no white person has any privilege over a black person except through good actions based on fearing Allah. The best among you are those who are most God-fearing."

The principle of equality of all human beings has always been central to the Islamic social concept. That equality is clearly reflected in the treatment of slaves as regulated in the Islamic system. Before referring to this, I wish to emphasize that Islam could not have abolished slavery at one go. That was a worldwide system operated by all countries. Therefore, Islam laid down a system, which ensured the

gradual and steady eradication of the system of slavery and its progressive abolition. While it continued, Islam was to ensure the rights of slaves.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "He who kills his slave shall be killed and he who mutilates his slave shall be mutilated." This was the extreme opposite of the prevailing law. No one could question a master about what he did with his slave. If he killed him, he was immune from punishment.

Equality also was established between men and women. It was the normal practice throughout the world that women were considered far inferior to men. Islam addressed its message to both men and women and made it clear that both have the same rights and duties, with minor differences that are necessitated by their different nature and different roles in society.

I have begun with the basic right to equality because it is the one, which generates the longest debate whenever the subject of human rights is discussed. Other rights have also been guaranteed by Islam. The first is the right to live, which every infant is guaranteed from the moment he or she is born. Indeed, this right applies to a fetus once pregnancy is established. Anyone who causes abortion exposes himself to punishment. Other rights like education, work, ownership, freedom of belief, etc. have also been guaranteed by Islam.

What is more is that Islam establishes rights to individuals who do not even know of these rights, cannot claim them and have no way to enforce them. For example, a newborn baby has the right to good care and education until he is old enough to look after himself. If a particular couple neglected a child of their own, the ruler is required to ensure that they fulfill their duty. Otherwise, he could take their son or daughter away from them and place that child with a family who is certain to look after it.

Islam also establishes other rights to which all people are entitled. The most important of these is the right to receive guidance. Allah has revealed His message to mankind and conveyed it to them through Muhammad, peace be upon him. Everyone is entitled to have this message conveyed to him or her in the language he or she understands. This is because Allah has revealed this message so that people can conduct their lives in accordance with divine guidance which ensures their happiness while they live on earth and guarantees happiness in the hereafter. The Muslim community is required to ensure that this message reaches all. However, Islam recognizes that faith can come only through conviction. Hence, it states clearly that no compulsion is admissible in matters of faith. Everyone has the right to choose the faith he or she wants to follow.

As you see, the Islamic concept of man gives this noble creature a very high position. It provides every facility needed for man to work up to his potentials. That ensures the best results of his efforts. Indeed, it is through such willing contribution to the community effort by all individuals in the Muslim community that Islamic civilization made its mark on history and continued to lead humanity for centuries on end. Every time Islam is implemented, the same sort of marvelous results have been manifest. This assures us that the same could happen today if the Muslims were to implement their faith properly.

Human Rights: Torture To Extract Confession

Where does Islam stand on the question of human rights? What does it say to the principle that every person is innocent unless proven guilty? I am asking this because in almost all countries suspected criminals are tortured until they confess to their crimes. However, human endurance varies from one person to another. It may be that an innocent person

would admit to having committed a crime if he is subjected to a certain degree of torture. What do you say about such a situation? If the truth is discovered at a later date, how is he to regain his social standing?

Islam lays a very strong emphasis on human rights. It requires a Muslim ruler to make sure that every individual in his community exercises and enjoys full human rights. The basic freedom that are stressed in the constitutions of modern states are all acknowledged by Islam and no one may interfere to deny any individual his or her rights.

When we speak of the due process of law, Islam has been ahead of all contemporary laws in establishing the rights of defendants and ensuring that no one suffers injustice. To start with, Islam makes it clear that every human being is innocent until he is proven guilty. For certain offenses, Islam requires a much stricter evidence for the proof of guilt. For example, the crime of adultery can only be proven by free confession or the testimony of four witnesses who testify under oath that they have seen the offense being committed. If there are only three people that testify to that offense, their testimony is rejected out of hand and they are punished for false accusation. If the offense is proved only through confession, then that confession may be withdrawn by the person concerned at any time. Withdrawal of the confession will cause immediate stoppage of the punishment.

The main concern of the reader in this question is the confession of a person who is accused of committing a certain crime and how such a confession is obtained. Unfortunately, it is often the case in many countries that confession is obtained in many cases through coercion or even torture. In some countries, including Muslim ones, this happens all the time, particularly with regard to political offenses. Under certain governments, torture of the accused to obtain confession is a normal practice. I personally know a country where many cases were brought to court after the death of a particular ruler and interrogators and jailers admitted to torturing people who were arrested in order to obtain confessions that they knew were false. Sentences against such people guilty of torture were passed by the courts of that country in several cases. Similar practices do happen in other countries.

Islam denounces any such practices, whoever is the perpetrator, regardless of who is the victim. Even if torture is inflicted on a person whom the authorities are sure to have committed a crime, torture is unacceptable to Islam. Indeed, Islam lays down that any confession obtained through torture is of no value and cannot be admitted as evidence.

Besides, from the Islamic point of view, those who resort to torture are guilty of assault against the humanity of man and against God's law. They must be punished, because what they do is clearly against God's law. Whoever gives instructions to another person to exercise torture on prisoners or people arrested for suspicion of committing a particular crime is also guilty. Such a person must be punished. If he escapes punishment in this life, then certainly God will make him accountable for his wrongdoing. God will ensure that justice is made because torture, for whatever reason, is an act of injustice.

Moreover, if a sentence is passed on a person on the basis of a confession he made under torture, that sentence is, in God's law, null and void. He remains innocent until he is proven guilty under the normal process of the law. If he is made to serve part or all of his sentence, then he is entitled to compensation which may be both material and moral. What we have to understand is that torture is absolutely repugnant to Islam. It cannot be sanctioned for any reason whatsoever. God does not accept compulsion even to make people Muslims. How would He accept that people are compelled to confess to crimes, which they have not committed?

Some people argue that unless suspects are put to some pain or some other sort of difficulty, they will not admit to their crimes. This is a ludicrous argument that cannot be given any value in Islamic law. It is infinitely better that a guilty person should escape punishment than that an innocent person is punished for a crime he has not committed. Some people may argue that by saying so we are giving room to the guilty to escape punishment. They will claim that this will tempt more people to commit offenses, hoping that they can get away with them. Such argument is simply unacceptable.

If we want to stop crime, we have to look at the roots of social problems and try to solve them so that we reduce the factors that lead people to commit crimes. Moreover, torturing people in order to obtain confession is in itself a crime. For this reason, Islamic law has a rule that makes it imperative to give a defendant the benefit of the doubt. The Prophet, peace be upon him, has stated a directive to "stop the enforcement of specified punishment when there is a doubt" that the accused has committed the offense. That is exactly the same as the principle that the benefit of the doubt should be given to the accused [or that a crime is to be proved ['beyond any reasonable doubt.']] Punishment can be inflicted only when there is absolutely no doubt as to the identity of the offender. When doubt exists, then punishment may not be enforced.

In all this, Islam has been way ahead of modern law, even in the most free and democratic societies. Muslim scholars have emphasized that the infliction of punishment is not a priority in Islamic law. The top priority is to ensure justice and that no one is punished by mistake. Hence, Islam lays down very stringent requirements for the proof of guilt. The burden of proof is also borne by the prosecution. If authorities will resort to torture in order to prove some people guilty, they will have to face the consequences of a grave offense they committed against divine law.

Hypocrisy: Actions That Indicate Hypocrisy

What sort of actions constitute hypocrisy? What does the Qur'an say about hypocrisy, and how will it be punished?

Hypocrisy is loosely defined as putting up a false appearance. In matters of faith, it describes the sort of actions that are associated with pretending to accept the faith of Islam when a person actually does not. He does so in order to win favor with Muslims and to try to be accepted as one of them. At the time of the Prophet, peace be upon him, there were people in Madinah who claimed to be Muslims when in actual fact they were not. Allah describes these people at the opening of the Surah entitled "The Hypocrites" in the following terms:

"When the hypocrites come to you, they say: we bear witness that you are truly Allah's messenger. Allah certainly knows that you are truly His messenger, but Allah bears witness that the hypocrites are indeed liars." [the Hypocrites — "Al-Munafiqun" 63: 1]

Since hypocrisy is all about pretense, it is very difficult to define who is a hypocrite. However, the Prophet, peace be upon him, has outlined for us some characteristics which are common in all hypocrites. He says: "Three qualities are the mark of hypocrite: he lies when he speaks, he breaks his promises when he has given them and he is unfaithful to his trust." [Related by Muslim]. Another version of this Hadith, also related by Muslim, quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "If the following four characteristics are part of a person's character, he is a pure hypocrite. If one of them applies to him, he has a characteristic of hypocrisy until he abandons it: he lies when he speaks, he violates his pledges, breaks his promises and when he quarrels with someone he is shameless."

It should be added that these are indications of hypocrisy. When such qualities are typical of anyone's behavior to the extent that they are a part of his nature, he is almost certainly a hypocrite. They do not necessarily mean that he is a non-believer who pretends to be a Muslim, since a Muslim may have no doubts about the Oneness of Allah and the fact that Muhammad, peace be upon him, was Allah's messenger, and still commit one or more of these actions.

When, however, they come naturally to a person, his behavior is that of a hypocrite. These Hadiths, then, serve as a very strong warning against such actions, since they are of the type of actions that a hypocrite does all the time. The Prophet, peace be upon him, is telling us in these Hadiths that a person who does this type of action habitually runs the risk of being a confirmed hypocrite.

When the Qur'an warns and threatens the hypocrites with severe punishments in the Hereafter, the warning is directed to those who pretend to be Muslims when they are not. It is they who will suffer the greatest punishment in the Hereafter, because throughout their lives they tried to subvert the Muslim community, pretending to belong to it when they belong to its enemies.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, was ordered by Allah to accept the claims of the hypocrites and leave their punishment to Allah. The point is that no human being can really tell what is the true conviction of another. It is Allah alone who knows what is in our innermost hearts. Hence, it is up to Him to determine the sort of punishment hypocrites deserve. Those who are hypocritical about their faith will suffer the most grievous of punishments.

Hypocrisy: Islam Abhors All Types Of Hypocrisy
Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

One of the worst characteristics that Islam abhors is hypocrisy. The Prophet, peace be upon him, spoke about it several times, and every time he used some graphic description that showed how ugly and unbecoming all types of hypocrisy were. Two Hadiths in this connection are particularly interesting. The Prophet, peace be upon him, who wanted his audience to fully understand his purpose, put it very simply in the first one. He said: "One of the worst people is a double-faced man, who comes to one group with one face and to another group with a totally different face." [Related by Al-Bukhari and Ibn Hibban].

The Prophet, peace be upon him, describes a hypocrite person as double-faced, and then he explains why he has described him as such, showing him as though he actually had two faces. If there are two groups with some differences, or dispute, he would speak to each one in a way that would please them, and say to one group the opposite of what he says to the other. Hence, the Prophet, peace be upon him, says that such a person is one of the worst types of people. This is certainly true, because such a person could not be a man of faith who fears God. As such, he always seeks what he thinks to serve his immediate interests, knowing that this will mean that he lies to both or at least one of them.

A similar Hadith is reported by Ammar ibn Yasir, an early companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, who quotes him as saying: "Whoever is double-faced in this life will have two tongues of fire in the hereafter." A big man then passed by and the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "This is one of them." [Related by Al-Bukhari in Al-Adab Al-Mufrad, Abu Dawood, Al-Darimi and others]. Here the Prophet, peace be upon him, gives a more graphic description of hypocrites. The description concentrates on the hypocrite's tongue, because it is with his words that he tries to cheat people and get the better of them. He always says to his interlocutors what

would please them, so that he is included in their good books. He does not care if what he says is untrue, because all that he cares for is his own interest.

Because a hypocrite relies on lying, thinking that he could lie his way out of any difficulty, God gives him two tongues on the Day of Judgment, but both are made of fire. This is a horrid picture, but very apt for such a person.

One thing every hypocrite lacks is a sense of shame. When he does something against the morality of society, he does not feel ashamed because he thinks that he can still get away with it, saying a few words to please this person and a few others to please someone else. That his words are lies does not trouble him. He has no sense of shame. But this sense is one that all divine messages try to promote. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "Among the words people received from early prophets are: if you feel no shame, then do as you wish." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Abu Dawood, Ibn Majah, Ahmad and others].

This Hadith admits more than one interpretation. The first is that if you feel you will not be ashamed for doing what you intend to do because you can justify it as correct and there is nothing in it to be ashamed of, then you may go ahead and do it without hesitation. It may be that what you are about to do is something right, although some people may prefer that you do not do it. Since you are sure that it is just and fair, then you have nothing to answer for as a result of doing it. You are perfectly entitled to do it. If we prefer this interpretation of this Hadith, then it is important to examine what we intend to do before embarking on it. If we find it to be perfectly acceptable and we are clear in our conscience that it is right for us to do, then that is all we need to ascertain in order to proceed with it.

Secondly, the Hadith may be taken to mean that if a person is incapable of any feeling of shame, and could not care less whether he brought shame on himself, his family or his people, then there is nothing to stop him from doing what is censurable. If we take this interpretation of the Hadith, then we observe that it is phrased in the imperative, but it is meant as a reproach. It could also be said that the Hadith means that having no sense of shame is much worse than what one may actually do.

It is important to know what may be included in having a proper sense of shame. Some people suggest that a shy person is incapable of confronting others with the truth he knows. As a result, he does not fulfill his duty to enjoin what is right and to speak out against what is wrong. His shyness may even lead him to the non-fulfillment of certain rights or duties. Such an attitude is not what is meant in having a sense of shame in the above-mentioned Hadith. This is simply a manifestation of weakness. A proper sense of shame is that which causes a person to feel afraid of being blamed for something unbecoming. It may also lead a person to forgo what rightfully belongs to him because he is too shy to demand it. Hence the virtue that Islam values highly is to feel ashamed as a result of a wrong that one may do. Or to be afraid of blame for committing something unbecoming, and to be too modest to demand something for oneself if people may think that such a demand is made for a personal gain. It is such modesty that the Prophet, peace be upon him, describes as being part of faith.

Abdullah ibn Omar reports that God's messenger, peace be upon him, passed by a man who was blaming his brother for being too modest. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said to him: "Leave him alone. Modesty is a characteristic of faith." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, At-Tirmithi and others]. Apparently the man who was being blamed was too modest to claim what rightfully belongs to him. It may be very difficult to change his attitude. Many a person lends money to another for a specific period of time. When the term of the loan is over, the borrower may take his time before settling his debt. The lender may be in need of the money, but his modesty

prevents him from demanding repayment. His difficulty in requesting repayment is greater than that of the borrower in asking for the loan in the first place.

We notice that the Prophet, peace be upon him, has counseled this man to leave his brother alone making it clear to him that such modesty and having a sense of shame is indicative of strong faith. The Prophet's statement makes it clear that although modesty may prevent a person from demanding his rights, it remains a virtue for which no one should be blamed. It is true that a modest person may not get his rights, but by forgoing them, he is sure to receive a much greater reward from God. It should be added here that the Prophet, peace be upon him, himself was a very modest person. He is described to have had a more refined sense of shame than a virgin has in her private room.

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I'tikaf: A Sunnah Or A Fardh

I always believed that I'tikaf is a Sunnah but I am told that in certain situations it becomes a duty. Could you please comment?

The I'tikaf is a practice that means devoting one's time to worship in a mosque. It can be a Sunnah and it can be a duty. It is a duty only when a person pledges to God to do it in a specific way or for a specific time. Like every such pledge, it must be honored. Otherwise, it is a Sunnah, particularly in the last ten days of Ramadhan. The Prophet, peace be upon him, did this Sunnah more than once, but there is no authentic Hadith to speak of its importance. If it is not pledged, it can be terminated at any time. It does not have to be in Ramadhan.

In fact, it can be at any time a person is staying in a mosque. He may make his intention clear by saying: "I will be in I'tikaf in this mosque for as long as I am here." This means that he has to dedicate his time to worship during his presence in the mosque.

The I'tikaf can be done in any mosque. If one makes the intention to do it in a particular mosque, he can change location, provided he moves to another mosque. Only if he specifies the Haram in Makkah, the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah or the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, he must do it in the one he specifies.

I'tikaf: By Women & the Need To Look After Children

A man was reluctant to allow his wife to do the Sunnah of I'tikaf at home because she has a baby aged 8 months to look after. She was keen to do it, feeling that if she cannot do it at a mosque in her hometown, then she can easily manage in her own place. Please comment.

A woman should have her husband's permission to do the I'tikaf, and he should not refuse such permission without a valid reason. The need to look after a young child, as in this case, is certainly a valid reason. The lady in this case should realize that looking after her baby is a more important duty than doing the Sunnah of I'tikaf.

Having said that, I advise the woman that she can do as much voluntary worship at home as she wants, but this does not come under I'tikaf, because that Sunnah must be done in a mosque. Still it earns a great reward. But she must not neglect her duties, such as attending to her young son.

I'tikaf: By Women & Their Obligations

Some people back home spend a number of nights and days during the last part of Ramadhan in a mosque, spending the whole night in prayer, and they may also do so during the whole day. Nowadays, some women also do the same. Do you think that it is better for the women to stay at home looking after their children?

Spending the last ten days of Ramadhan in a mosque to devote oneself completely to worship, staying up most of the night, and sleeping little in the mosque itself, is a Sunnah. The Prophet, peace be upon him, used to do it, and so did some of his companions. It has been practiced ever since by many Muslims. So we cannot have views, on whether this is appropriate or not. It is a Sunnah, and anyone who does it in order to follow the Prophet's example will, God willing, be richly rewarded by God.

Moreover, this Sunnah, which is called I'tikaf, is mentioned in the Qur'an, as God says:

"Do not lie with them [i.e. your wives], skin to skin, when you are abiding in meditation in mosques." [the Cow — "Al-Baqarah" 2: 187]

This statement also makes it clear that this Sunnah could be done in all mosques, but many scholars make it a condition that the mosque should be one where the Friday prayer is normally offered. However, women may do this Sunnah in any mosque, even if the Friday prayer is not held there, because she is not required to offer Friday prayers. Imam Al-Shaf'ie makes it clear that a woman who wishes to perform this Sunnah may not do so at home. She has to be in a mosque. However, she is recommended to have a cover around the area where she stays in the mosque.

Whether it is preferable for a woman to stay at home, looking after her own children, is subject to the needs of her children and her own circumstances. There can be no rigid rule applicable to all women. If a woman has young children, and has no responsible and mature person to look after them in her absence, then she is better off looking after them, because this is her duty. She may not abandon a duty in order to perform a Sunnah.

Ijtihad: Scholarly Decree On Critical Islamic Issues

While discussing the question on smoking some time back you remarked that "everything is permissible unless there is cause to prohibit it. This is a basic principle which applies to food and drink in the same way as it applies to actions and practices." However, more recently you have said on a couple of occasions that "everything is permissible unless pronounced otherwise." Apparently, these are contradicting views on the same subject. The first view by definition has more force and workability. Discretion, or Ijtihad, could work in case of a difficulty. Please comment.

When we consider the two statements described as contradictory, and try to find the contradictions, we have a difficult task ahead of us. They speak of two somewhat different areas. Allah has not forbidden us anything just for the sake of prohibiting it. There is undoubtedly good reason for prohibiting everything that is forbidden. Allah describes His Messenger as one who "makes lawful to them what is good and forbids them what is evil." The fact that some type of food or drink, or some action or practice which is evil, provides sufficient grounds for having it forbidden. The first statement makes two points with regard to the acceptability of anything or any action: we start initially from the point of its permissibility. We then look at its different aspects and if we find that it is evil or harmful or can produce results, which are neither desirable nor beneficial, we can then pronounce it as forbidden or discouraged or permissible. We do not make our judgment without having conducted a full and proper evaluation.

It is logical that the first statement comes within the discussion of smoking and whether it is forbidden or permissible. You will recall that the answer I have given relies heavily on the effects of smoking on the smoker and the members of his family and his work-mates and those who are in constant contact with him. As the evidence available to us nowadays is overwhelming with regard to the health hazards caused

by smoking, we can easily conclude that smoking is forbidden. We categorize smoking first as evil. As such, there is no hesitation in pronouncing it as forbidden.

The fact that we regard everything as permissible in the first instance is based on what Allah states in the Qur'an that He has made everything on earth subservient to man. He should not do this and at the same time make certain things forbidden unless they are harmful or evil to man himself. In the second statement, the permissibility of all things and all actions in the first instance is again stressed. It adds that prohibition must be backed by a pronouncement, which is made by a competent authority. Since Allah Himself has made everything in the heavens and on the earth subservient to man, then He is the only competent authority to forbid man anything or any action. That is the reason why we find that what Islam forbids is highly detailed in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. But we do not have a long list showing us what is lawful and permissible. This is because the general statement that everything is permissible in the first instance suffices. To restrict that general statement in the case of any particular matter needs an authority.

When we say that prohibition comes only from Allah, we actually, and advisedly, make a very serious statement. This statement is not short of supporting evidence. In the Qur'an we have direct and explicit statement outlining what is forbidden to us. In Surah 6, "Al-Ana'am" or "Cattle", Allah instructs the Prophet, peace be upon him, to make this statement: **"Say, come and I will make clear to you what Allah has forbidden you."** This is followed by a detailed list of serious sins and offenses, which relate to faith and social practices as well as the rights of others. In the same Surah, Allah tells us about the types of food He has forbidden us. In Surah 4, "An-Nis'a", or "Women", he tells us in great detail what is forbidden to us in marriage. Similarly, direct and explicit statements of prohibition are given elsewhere in the Qur'an and in the Prophet's traditions and Hadiths. We have to remember here that in matters of religion, the Prophet, peace be upon him, never spoke out on his own accord. Whatever he stated was revealed to him by Allah, and expressed either in Allah's own words, as it is the case with the Qur'an, or in the Prophet's words as in Hadith. We also note that when the Prophet, peace be upon him, pointed out to us that something is forbidden, he made that statement absolutely clear.

You described my first statement as having more force and workability. You point out that it opens room for scholarly discretion in evaluation of new matters and actions. The fact is that the second statement does not in any way restrict that scholarly discretion. The scholars of Islam are called upon to constantly evaluate whatever is introduced newly in human life in order to give Islamic judgment on its permissibility or otherwise. Their work, however, must be based on what they have of guidelines stated clearly by the Prophet, peace be upon him. In other words, their terms of reference are the Qur'an and the Sunnah. These two provide the necessary yardstick for such a scholarly evaluation.

Take again the example of smoking. Scholars have to look at tobacco and determine whether it is harmful or not, because the Prophet, peace be upon him, has told us that: "Everything that is harmful is forbidden." They have also to consider the principle stated by the Prophet: "You shall not harm, nor reciprocate harm." This means that everything that is harmful either to oneself or to others is forbidden. There are similar statements by the Prophet, peace be upon him, which provide us with principles and guidelines. When we measure something newly invented like smoking against these principles, we have the authority of Allah to back our judgment that smoking is forbidden.

If the determination of scholars is then put into effect by a Muslim ruler, promulgating a law to enforce it, then it acquires all the necessary force for implementation. Indeed, the observance of a law is required in the same way as observance of laws stated in the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

Let us take an example of a different sort. Islam states that it is the duty of Muslims to obey their leaders as long as they do not order them to disobey Allah. In practical terms, this means that if a ruler or a city governor makes a regulation which is within his jurisdiction and which does not involve disobedience to Allah in any way, then all Muslims are required to enforce that regulation. It may be a simple matter like use of a road, made to be used by people, whether by pedestrians or motorists. It is there to facilitate their movement. Therefore, they can drive in either direction, ride a bicycle or walk. When the municipal council or the traffic department restricts a particular street to make it a one-way street, in order to serve the interests of the population and make traffic movement easier, such a regulation acquires, from the Islamic point of view, a stronger force. Thus, implementation is obligatory to everyone because, to start with, the ruler, or any person or department to whom he delegates power, is acting within his jurisdiction. He is furthering the interests of the people in the first place. Secondly, driving in one direction in a particular street does not constitute any disobedience to Allah. Muslims are not only bound by the regulation itself to obey it, but they are bound by their religion to observe that regulation. If someone deliberately drives in the wrong direction in that particular street, perhaps because he feels that it will save him a long roundabout journey or because he feels that at that particular moment, there is nobody coming in the opposite direction, he is not only committing an offense, he is also committing a sin.

Ijtihad: To Make Education Obligatory

It is an undeniable fact that education is the most important thing in life. Perhaps the main reason for the failure of the Muslim world in recent history is the lack of knowledge and education. Why is it that this very important factor is not included among the pillars of Islam? Is there a mechanism to include it at this stage, by means of Ijtihad, since God does not prohibit good additions, which can help the Muslim community to flourish?

The term "pillars of Islam" is derived from the Hadith which states that the structure of the Islamic religion is built on five [pillars]: The declaration that one believes in the Oneness of Allah and the message of the Muhammad, peace be upon him, the regular attendance to prayer, the payment of Zakah, pilgrimage to the Sacred House in Makkah and fasting in Ramadhan. What we understand from this Hadith is that the five are the essentials of the Islamic religion and that the deliberate neglect of anyone of them may take a person out of the fold of Islam altogether. If you consider these, you will find that each one of them is a very definite duty. We know, for example, that prayer involves five compulsory prayers everyday and night. Each one of these has its time range, number of rak'ahs, definite form, etc. Fasting in Ramadhan is also very tangible: We fast the whole month, from dawn to dusk, everyday, abstaining from eating, drinking, and sex. There are other Islamic duties which are very important, but not so definite. They have not been included among the pillars of Islam. Education is very important to any community. There is no doubt about that. But can we consider it as one of the mainstays of the Islamic faith?

Islam is a religion, which appeals to all communities, no matter what degree of advancement they have reached. It can be practiced in a primitive community and in a most sophisticated and advanced one. The relationship between education and Islam is mutually supportive. The higher the standard of education in a Muslim community, the better that community knows and defends its faith. At the same time, the more strongly a community holds to its Islamic faith the greater its interest is in education. Nevertheless, we cannot consider education as a pillar of Islam, because it is so loosely defined. If we do, what standard of education do we impose on every individual? Would it be sufficient to say that every Muslim child must complete preparatory school, or secondary school or should go on to university? What if the

community does not have the resources to provide that type of universal education for its children? Yet Islam has not neglected education. Indeed, there are numerous Hadiths, which encourage education. The Prophet, peace be upon him, is authentically quoted to have said: "To seek knowledge is obligatory on every Muslim." This applies to men and women alike.

Moreover, it is the right of each child that his or her parents should provide for his or her education. If they do not, then they are answerable to Allah for neglecting this important duty. Their son or daughter may question them on the Day of Judgement for that failure.

You ask whether we can include education as a pillar of Islam by means of Ijtihad. Let me explain that Ijtihad means the use of scholarly discretion in determining the Islamic attitude to any particular problem. This applies mainly to matters that develop in every community. Ijtihad is done on the basis of evidence from the Qur'an and the Sunnah. It is applied only in matters that develop in different communities with the progress of human life. Moreover, if a Qur'anic statement or a Hadith defines a particular number of things to which a certain rule applies, then that number cannot be increased. For example, the Prophet, peace be upon him, says that "Three things are of common ownership: Water, pasture and fire." This means that no one can claim complete ownership of a spring of water or a river, etc. People may use that water source and have equal right to it. In recent history some Socialist governments in different parts of the Muslim world sought to have Islamic backing for their Socialist approach, citing this Hadith as a basis and trying to widen its application to other areas. The Prophet, as you notice, speaks of the common ownership of three matters. We cannot make them four.

Similarly, when the Prophet, peace be upon him, states that the structure of Islam is built on five pillars, we cannot make them six. Ijtihad is a very important duty, according to Islam. Scholars throughout Islamic history have not included it among the pillars of Islam, even in periods when the very existence of the Muslim community was threatened. It is not a matter of a good education. Our religion has been revealed by Allah. We cannot add to it something, which is not there.

Ijtihad: To Make Things Lawful Or Forbidden

You have mentioned that the authority to prohibit anything or make it lawful belongs to God Almighty alone. At the same time you say that smoking cigarettes and coloring one's hair is forbidden, when there is no Qur'anic statement or a Hadith to prohibit them. Could you please clarify the apparent contradiction? Also, in a recent discussion with friends, it was suggested that it is possible to pronounce something as lawful or forbidden through Ijtihad. Could you please explain this and how it is done?

The authority to make things lawful or forbidden belongs to God alone. He has specified what he wants us to refrain from in the Qur'an, or through instructions given by the Prophet, peace be upon him, on God's authority. When the Prophet, peace be upon him, expressed his dislike of the smell of garlic and onion, people said that he would soon prohibit them. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said to them: "I am only a messenger of God. I do not prohibit anything. It is only something I disliked and I told you about." These two remain permissible to eat, although when we have eaten them, we should not attend the mosque until the smell is gone.

Nevertheless, what is specified in the Qur'an, and the Hadith as Haram includes only what was known and practiced during the Prophet's time. It was not possible that the Qur'an would mention something that was not known, like tobacco, and give it a

ruling of prohibition when no one on earth knew what tobacco was like. Hence, Islam establishes certain principles that apply at all times. One of these prohibits everything that is harmful. When we consider tobacco smoking, competent doctors tell us that it causes no less than 25 killer diseases. And that it is responsible for 30-40 percent of all cancer cases, and no less than 90 percent of lung cancer cases, we can only give it a verdict of prohibition on the basis of the principle established in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. God tells us in the Qur'an: "Do not kill yourselves; for God is merciful to you." Tobacco smoking is a killer. In many Western countries, such as Canada and Britain, the health warning given in very large letters on each cigarette packet is "Smoking Kills". Hence, anyone who smokes exposes himself to the risk of killing himself, albeit by a slow process. Still, it is covered by the order I have just quoted.

What I have just explained about applying the rule of prohibiting harm to the particular case of tobacco smoking gives an outline of the process of Ijtihad. It is the process of scholarly discretion that enables a competent scholar to analyze a situation and apply the rules and principles to it in order to deduce a verdict for it. This is what competent scholars did throughout Islamic history. There were numerous of these, but the best known of them all are the founders of the four schools of Fiqh: Abu Hanifah, Malik, Al-Shaf'ie and Ahmad ibn Hanbal.

To be able to exercise Ijtihad, a scholar has to meet a number of conditions. Imam Al-Shaf'ie outlined eight such conditions, which include thorough knowledge of Arabic, the Qur'an, the Hadith, etc. Today, competent scholars who may agree or differ with one another on different issues exercise Ijtihad. Each gives his verdict on the basis of the information given to him, and guided by the Qur'an and the Hadith, as well as the rich heritage of Islamic law, or Fiqh.

Incidentally, I never suggested that dyeing of hair be considered as prohibited, except where the intention is to deceive people. Suppose that a man who has grown gray dyes his hair to appear younger, and then proposes to a family to marry their daughter, giving them the impression that he is a few years younger than his actual age. His action is forbidden because of the intent to deceive. It is an act of cheating, and all cheating is forbidden.

Imam Mehdi: the Islamic Concept

1. What is the authentic Islamic concept concerning Imam Al-Mehdi, his absence, reappearance and role in future?

1. We do not have a concept about Imam Al-Mehdi. What we have is some Hadiths, which speak about the appearance of a God-fearing man who will strive hard to put an end to the Impostor who would have wreaked havoc and spread corruption. He would fight that Impostor with those who believe in the right faith. When would this happen? The Hadiths give some indications and signs, but no definite dates.

When the questioner asks about Mehdi's absence and reappearance, he is confusing this notion of the Mehdi with the Shias belief concerning the 12th Imam. They hold that the Mehdi was the 12th Imam and that God had removed him until the time when it is right for him to reappear. He would then ensure total justice on earth. There is nothing of such beliefs in the Sunni schools of Islamic thought.

Imam Mehdi: the Prophecy On His Advent

Could you please explain the prophecy which speaks of the advent of the Mehdi and when will that take place? What are the signs associated with his arrival?

The Prophet, peace be upon him, alerted us to a number of future events, such as the warning against the Dajjal, or the Impostor, and the Second Coming of the Jesus Christ. One of these future events is the advent of the Mehdi, whom we know from his title to be rightly guided. He appears before the Second Coming of Jesus and when Jesus comes, he hands over the leadership of the believers to him. He is an ordinary human being to whom God grants guidance.

When exactly are these events to take place is something God has chosen not to reveal to us. Had He told us that they will happen on such and such a date, we are likely to slacken in our efforts to serve God's cause.

If the date is far away, we may think that our efforts are unlikely to succeed, and we should only wait for the Mehdi, or Jesus Christ's Second Coming. If the date is soon, we will say it is better to wait so that our efforts are put on the right track and are not wasted. We would forget that when the Mehdi comes, he will need people to support him, and these can only be the people that are already engaged in serving God's cause. Therefore, we must always do our best in furthering God's cause, without looking to the future events the Prophet, peace be upon him, has mentioned.

If these occur in our lifetime and we are on the side of the God and His messenger, we will be sure to help in bringing about the triumph of God's message. If we die before they take place, we would have done our duty and will be sure to earn our reward from God.

Inheritance: Agreement Of Heirs To Father's Bequest

Before his death, a man called in his sons and told them that he wished to leave his house to his only daughter, and they agreed to his request. Those of them who were present signed affidavits to this effect, but some were abroad. After the man's death, one of his sons felt that he did not get a fair share. Another one now feels that his father did not do the right thing in accordance with Islamic law. He accepts his father's wish, but he feels it is better to let things be done according to Islamic law. Please comment.

The man's action could be considered from different angles. If we were to treat it as a gift given by a father to one of his children, then it is unfair to his other children who should receive a similar gift each. But most probably the man did not intend this. He wanted to ensure that his daughter would be in a good position after his death. He might have considered that his sons are in more or less good positions. Perhaps one or two of them are not doing as well as the others, but nevertheless, they are capable of looking after their families. So, he wanted his daughter to be similarly good positioned. So, he left her the house as an extension of her share of inheritance.

If we take it in this light, we say it is not up to the father to do so unless all the heirs agree to his action. This is why he called his sons and told them of his desire. They agreed to his action. From the Islamic point of view, their agreement must be re-stated after their father's death. In other words, they are free to go back on what they said to their father. This is due to the fact that in some situations, children cannot disagree with their father, because of the way he brought them up. Or they may feel, as in this case, that the man is on his deathbed, and that he is too ill to argue with. I understand that one of them did not say a word because he felt it would upset his father when he was too ill.

Because of all these considerations, Islam requires that such a request be put back to the heirs after the man's death, so that it would be clear if they genuinely agree to the deceased's request, without any pressure. If they do, then the bequeath goes ahead. If

any of them does not, then he or she is entitled to their full share of inheritance, as though there was no such gift.

This means that those children of the deceased man who want to carry out their father's wish of leaving the house to their sister will continue to do so. The one who does not wish to do that, may claim his share in the house. His share might be valued and his sister may buy it from him so that the house will be hers. There should be no friction between the heirs as each one is free to claim his or her share in full.

I should add that the brothers would be doing a highly honorable deed if they relinquish their shares in the house to their sister. If they do so, they will be doing an act of dutifulness to parents, since they will honor their father's wish. They will also show kindness to their sister, which is richly rewarded by God. However, any of them who is in straitened means may not be able to do so, and he is free to say so and claim his full share.

Inheritance: An Attempt During Lifetime To Deny Heirs Their Rights

Some people try to change the natural course of inheritance by transferring their property to certain relatives, particularly when they have no children. Take the case of a man who is put under pressure to transfer much of his property to his wife, so that his brothers or their children do not inherit from him. Or a widower who inherited much of his wife's property giving it away so that it does not go back to his wife's relations. Please explain what Islam says about this.

A Muslim must always remember that God has established the best system of inheritance known to mankind. It ensures that close relatives receive what is due for them, in all fairness, without doing injustice to anyone. Thus, it is not possible under Islam to disinherit any of one's heirs, or favor any of them over and above the others. The heirs receive their shares apportioned by God. However, there are situations where close relatives do not inherit, such as brothers and sisters when the deceased is survived by his own children or by his parents. In order to allow a reasonable way to look after such close relatives, particularly when they are poor, God has given us the right to bequeath by will a portion of our property that does not exceed one-third of its total.

This should allow for all situations in a fair manner. However, some people look at their situation and find that their heirs include one or two people they do not like, or that those whom they favor will not receive a big share. So they try to circumvent the Islamic law by making gifts. While making gifts is acceptable in principle, when it is done in order to deny some heirs their rights or change the operation of the law of inheritance, they are committing an injustice for which God may hold them to account. They will not be able to plead any extenuating circumstances, because God knows their intentions. While no one can stop any person from making a gift of his property, in part or in full, to his wife or some other relative, if his intention is to deny any heirs their fair shares, they will have to account for this on the Day of Judgment.

In order to make the case clearer, the Prophet's companions judged in a case of one of their number who divorced his wife during his last illness to deny her whatever share was due to her of his inheritance. Their judgment was to give the divorcee her full share, as if she was still married to the man. In other words, they did exactly the opposite of what he intended. They were unanimous in their decision, which makes it a part of the law of inheritance.

In the cases the reader cites, if a man dies having had no children, his wife will inherit one quarter of his property. The remainder goes to other heirs, who could be his parents, brothers and sisters, or the nearest of kin. If he gives her all his property in his lifetime, he may live to regret this decision. She may die before him and in this case, he inherits half of her property and the other half, which was originally his, goes to her relatives. If she has a child by an earlier husband, he takes only one quarter of her property and her son takes three quarters.

As for the other case, the widower who inherited half his wife's property and has no children of his own will have some heirs. But when he dies his property, or that share of it he inherited from his wife, does not go back to her relatives.

Inheritance: As Shares Apportioned By God & Through Will ***Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News***

The Qur'an outlines an elaborate system for the division of inheritance. The details, which are included in three verses in the fourth Surah entitled '*An-Nis'a*, or 'Women,' make it clear how the property of a deceased person should be divided between his or her heirs. The division varies according to the number and the degree of kinship of a person's heirs. The shares detailed in the Qur'an, cannot be exceeded or altered in any way. It is not open to any person to disinherit any of his or her heirs, for any reason. God has apportioned these shares and they must be carried out.

In this respect, Islam is unique. You do not find any jealousies, quarrels or disputes among heirs, unless these are motivated either by ignorance of the system, greed or a mixture of both. Muslims who are aware of the Islamic system of inheritance accept their portions without any question, knowing that they are entitled only to what God has given them. They know that no person may have any say in how his property is divided among his heirs, except through making a will. They also realize that whatever God gives them is fair and equitable. No injustice is done to any one, man or woman.

Many people sometimes confuse having a share of inheritance with inheriting by will. The two are quite different. As the Qur'an states the provisions of inheritance clearly, it mentions no less than four times that these provisions take effect only after the settlement of any debts the deceased person may have left outstanding and the execution of any will he may have made. The costs of burial of the deceased person and settlement of debts take precedence over every thing else. This is only logical, since debts are owed to other people. They are; therefore, payable from the estate left by the deceased, before anyone else makes any claim to any share of it. Inheritance means the division of the deceased's property. His debts are not his property, but the property of others who had lent the deceased their money.

A 'will' normally has two purposes: It is as a charitable act, by which a person makes sure that one portion of his or her property goes to charity. He hopes that by so doing he will increase his reward from God. Some people provide for a continuous act of charity, such as using the money to finance some sort of public utility, such as a health center, a school, an orphanage, or, as used to happen in the past, to provide drinking water on travelers' routes. By so doing, they ensure continuous reward for themselves after they have died. We have learnt from the Prophet, peace be upon him, that after death, a human being cannot earn any reward except in one of three ways. They are: a continuous act of charity, a useful contribution to knowledge and a dutiful child who prays God to bestow His grace on his or her parents. One way of establishing a continuous act of charity is by using the provision of a will.

The other purpose of a will is to provide for relatives who are not heirs but may be in need of help. If a person has been looking after some poor relatives and fears that

they will not have enough to look after themselves after his death, he may make sure that they get a portion of his property after his death through a will. The only condition in this case is that such relatives must not be among his heirs who have shares apportioned to them by God. A will may not be made in favor of an heir. The logic behind this restriction is simple. God has determined the shares of heirs. This division is based on perfect justice. Had a person been free to leave an additional portion to an heir by will, that may allow the disturbance of the system God has laid down, which is fair and equitable. Such a disturbance of fairness can only lead to injustice.

The question may arise: "How much can a person leave by will?" Schools of thought are unanimous that the maximum is one third of one's property. This is based on an authentic Hadith narrated by one of the leading companions of the Prophet, Sa'ad ibn Abu Waqas, who says: "The Prophet, peace be upon him, came once to see me when I was ill in Makkah. [Sa'ad felt very uneasy about dying in the land from which he had emigrated]. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: 'May God have mercy on the son of Afraa.' I said, 'Messenger of God, may I bequeath all my property by will?' The Prophet, peace be upon him, said, 'No.' I said, 'How about half of my property?' He said, 'No.' I asked, 'One third, then?' He said, 'One third is all right, but one third is plenty. To leave your heirs self-sufficient is far better than leaving them in need, begging people for a portion of what they have. Whatever you spend is an act of charity, even when you put a small bite in your wife's mouth. May God give you a long life and make some people benefit by you and others come to grief at your hands.' [Sa'ad had only one daughter at the time]." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood, An-Nasa'ie, At-Tirmithi, Ibn Majah and others].

Inheritance: By An Illegitimate Child

If a child is conceived before marriage, is he entitled to share of his father's inheritance when the father dies? If so, will this be on the same level as the shares of his brothers and sisters born after marriage?

As you realize, all sexual contact outside wedlock is strictly forbidden in Islam. This is part of the very serious view Islam takes of morality. Although the punishments prescribed for adultery and fornication differ in severity, with the severer punishment reserved to married adulterers, the fact that a punishment has been prescribed by Allah for such actions is more than enough to indicate their seriousness.

However, a basic principle in Islamic justice is that no one bears the blame for another's fault. A child born as a result of an illegitimate relationship suffers no adverse discrimination on account of his parents' sin. However, such a child cannot prove that he is the son of his father unless the father acknowledges him. If the father makes such an acknowledgment, he is not asked about the circumstances of the birth of his child. His statement is accepted.

Take for example the case of a young couple who get married after the woman is pregnant. The legitimacy of their first child is a question that no one will raise, since they have taken the right steps to bring the child into their family home. The child will inherit from his parents, along with his brothers and sisters, according to Islamic law, which gives a son twice the share of the daughter.

Inheritance: By Children Of Second Marriage

A man married for the second time a Christian widow, after she had embraced Islam. Can this man's son by his first wife marry the daughter of his father's wife by her previous marriage? Is the daughter eligible to inherit this man's property after his death?

The children by past marriages of both the man and his new wife have no relationship whatsoever with one another. The man and the woman in this relationship were stranger to each other at the time when their children were born. Hence, the same relationship, or indeed the lack of it, obtains between those children regardless of the fact that the father of one child has married the mother of another. In this case the man has a son and the woman a daughter. These two can marry each other if they wish to do so. Consequently, they are not allowed to stay alone together in a room or a house like a brother and sister because they are not brother and sister.

If the new marriage produces children, these become brothers and sisters to all the other children born to either of their parents in their previous marriages. Hence, they cannot marry any of their half brothers or sisters.

The same relationship applies with respect to inheritance. The woman's daughter by her first marriage cannot inherit her mother's husband [i.e. stepfather] when he dies. Nor can the man's son or daughter inherit their stepmother along with her own children should she die. Each inherit his or her own parent. Children of the new marriage, however, share in the inheritance of each of their parents alongwith their brothers and sisters by previous marriages.

There is, however, one possibility of inheritance, which should be clear. If the man, say, dies, his wife inherits one eighth of his property, with the remainder going to his own children. It is divided equally between his children by his first and second marriages, on the basis of each daughter inheriting half of the share of each son. The woman's own daughter by her first marriage does not have any share. If her mother subsequently dies, she inherits her along with the woman's other children by all her marriages. The mother's property may include something, which was originally owned by her deceased husband. Her daughter may receive that as her share. This becomes hers as a part of the inheritance of her own mother, not as part of her stepfather's property. She has no entitlement to what he leaves behind. But she has every right to her share in her mother's inheritance.

There is a factor, which precludes the daughter from inheriting her own mother. You say that the mother was formerly a Christian and she embraced Islam before her marriage. Has the daughter also accepted Islam? If so, then she inherits her mother. If not, she does not inherit anything. This is because Islam does not allow inheritance between the followers of different religions. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "Followers of two different religions may not inherit one another."

Inheritance: By Followers Of Two Different Religions

A man married a Christian woman who bore him a daughter. The couple were later divorced and the woman took the daughter with her to her own country where she is living now. The man died recently, leaving behind both his parents and a number of brothers and sisters. Could you explain how his property should be divided?

There is, to start with, the question of the divorced wife, which the reader specifically asks about. Since the woman has been divorced and her waiting period is over, then she does not inherit anything from him, because of the difference of religion. This applies to any relationship that qualifies for inheritance. In other words, parents and children do not inherit each other when they follow different religions. Suppose that a person adopts the religion of Islam, but neither his father nor his children follow his example and become Muslims. If he dies, none of them inherits him. Nor does he inherit any of them should they die first, simply because of the difference of religion. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "The followers of two different religions do not inherit each other."

It is important in this case to determine whether the man's daughter is a Muslim or not. If she is below the age of puberty, she is considered a Muslim, even though her mother might have brought her up differently. If she has made her own choice and decided to follow some other religion, then the above rule applies to her and she inherits nothing.

If the daughter is a Muslim, then her share is half the property of her father, because she is an only daughter. The man's parent inherit one-sixth each of his property. His brothers and sisters inherit nothing.

That leaves one-sixth, which is then given to the father on the basis of his being the closest male relative to the deceased. On the other hand, if the daughter is not a Muslim, she inherits nothing and the whole property goes to the man's parents. The mother takes one-third and the other two-thirds go to the deceased man's father.

Inheritance: By Will

Islam has a detailed system of inheritance, which specifies shares for each heir. The system caters for all situations and the details of each heir's share is outlined in the Qur'an. The will is the provision, which allows a Muslim to leave a portion of his money either for charity or for relatives who are not among his heirs. Perhaps it should be added that the shares of each of the heirs is determined by Allah. No heir can be left an additional amount by will and none maybe disinherited. The system ensures fair distribution of wealth and militates against the concentration of wealth in a few hands.

Inheritance: Complicated Case Of Inheritance

When my father-in-law died, he left behind two wives, one of them non-Muslim with one son and one daughter. He also had two sons and three daughters by his second Muslim wife. His second wife bought a house and registered it in her name after his death. She subsequently died. My father-in-law had also two properties; the first registered in his two wives' names and the second in their two elder sons' names. The first wife's son demands a 50 percent share of all three properties. A lawyer has told me that the first wife's children do not have any shares in these properties. I will be grateful for your advice on how these properties be shared out.

You seem to imply that all three properties belong to your father-in-law in spite of their registration in various names. You have to establish that either through the agreement of all heirs, or by some other proof. If you cannot, then the house, which is registered in the two eldest sons' names, will remain theirs and each of them will be able to take his share. If they have given pledge to their late father that they would be looking after their brothers and sisters, then they must do that. Obviously, there is no court, which will be able to enforce that without their cooperation. If they claim that the house belongs to them, they have a legal evidence.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, has warned against this in a very serious manner. He says; "I am only a human being and you put your disputes to me. Some of you may have a stronger argument than that of his brother. If I give him something which belongs by right to his brother, I am only giving him a brand of fire which he may take or leave." Here the two eldest sons have that strong argument. If their father had placed them in this position so that they will ensure that their brothers and sisters will have their fair shares and they refuse to do that, they are unfaithful to their trust.

I understand that both wives are now dead. This complicates matter immensely, particularly with regard to the first property, which is registered in their two names. Perhaps the best thing that could happen here is an agreement by all children of

your father-in-law by his two late wives, that the property belonged in reality to him, and therefore, it should be divided among his heirs. If they do not agree and a court will decide on the inheritance of that property, the following will happen. One half of the property, which is in the name of the Muslim wife, will be inherited by her five children on the basis of one share for each daughter and two shares for each son. This assumes that your later mother-in-law did not have any other heirs, such as her parents. The other half of the property which was registered by the non-Muslim wife of your father-in-law could not be inherited by her children, because her children are Muslims, following their father's religion. Therefore, it is to be inherited by her non-Muslim relatives.

The third property is even more problematic. There are two possibilities here:

If the price of that property was equal to or less than the share of your late mother-in-law in her husband's inheritance: A wife, whose husband has children, inherits only one eighth of her husband's property. If he has more than one wife, then the wives' share altogether will be one eighth. But because the other wife was a non-Muslim, she does not inherit anything from her husband. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says that the followers of two different religion do not inherit from one another. As I have already mentioned, her children do not inherit from her because they are Muslims and she was not. Nor does she inherit from her husband or from her children if she survived them. Therefore, your late mother-in-law's share was one eighth of the full property of her husband. If that was sufficient to buy the house, then we consider it as her own property and it goes to her own children. The other children of your late father-in-law do not take any part of this house. This sharing here is a one seventh share of each of the two sons. This assumes that she had no other heirs. Her parents would have inherited from her as well if they had survived her.

The other possibility is that the price of the property was larger than your late mother-in-law's share: In this case, the best thing is to turn that property to your father-in-law's estate, which should be shared by his heirs.

The claim of the first wife's son for a 50 percent share of everything is inadmissible. You will have to explain to him that the sharing of inheritance has been predetermined by Allah. In this case, whatever is finally agreed to be part of your father-in-law's estate should be shared out in the following manner: One-eighth to his second wife. She receives her share because she survived her husband. The remainder goes to all children by both marriages. Altogether, he had three sons and four daughters surviving him. The rest of his property, i.e. after payment of one eighth to his Muslim wife, should be divided to ten shares, giving one share to each of the daughters and two shares to each of the three sons. Again this assumes that neither of your father-in-law's parents had survived him.

If either did, then they receive one-sixth share each before dividing the remainder among his children.

There is further division to be made, - that of the share of your late mother-in-law. She is inherited only by her own children, not by the children of the first wife. If neither of her parents is alive, her property is divided into seven shares, giving one to each daughter and two shares to each son.

Inheritance: Disowning One's Child

Can a father declare his son or daughter as not his and disinherit either one on the basis of indulging in un-Islamic behavior? Suppose a daughter marries a non-Muslim husband, can she be disinherited?

No, it is not permissible for a father or a parent to disinherit his own son or daughter for any reason, as long as that son or daughter is a heir, who means that he or she is a Muslim. Only when the father and the child follow two different religions, inheritance between them is blocked. Therefore, if a father who used to belong to any other religion embraces Islam, while his children do not follow suit, neither can he inherit any of them, nor can they inherit him. This is based on the Prophet's Hadith: "The followers of two different religious do not inherit each other."

If a child is guilty of disobedience to his parents, or if he indulges in forbidden and sinful practices, it is not open to the father to disinherit him or disown him.

It is well known that adoption is forbidden in Islam. Similarly, disowning one's own child is not permissible. A father may feel bitterly aggrieved by the disobedience of his son or his daughter, and he is tempted to deprive them of their shares of inheritance. He must not forget that Allah has apportioned these shares and it is not open to anyone to change Allah's rules.

They should leave that to Allah to determine the best course and the suitable punishment or indeed to reward the parents for what they suffer as a result of their children's undutifulness.

Even if a daughter is "married" to a non-Muslim, her father may not disinherit her or disown her. Such a marriage is not acceptable or valid from the Islamic point of view. She is certainly guilty of a very grave sin. But her father should not sit in judgment of her.

That judgment belongs to Allah alone. Her father may give her sound advice and try to persuade her against that marriage.

When he has done that, he has discharged his duty. If she persists, he may boycott her if he wishes.

But perhaps it is better to keep in touch with her, so that he may try to bring her around to follow the Islamic rules. If she does not listen and declares that she is not a Muslim, then she deprives herself of the right to inherit her Muslim parents, because she is an apostate.

Inheritance: Division Of Inheritance

My friend died recently leaving behind his parents, wife, three sons, one daughter, as well as a number of brothers, sisters and cousins. He has some outstanding debts, but he has two plots of land and two flats one of which he used for his family's living. Please advise on how his property is to be divided, taking into account that one of the land plots is registered in his wife's name, and the other in the name of his first son who needs special care.

When we look at the division of property after a person's death, we speak of it in total, which means that we include the value of all assets, such as real estate, cash, bank accounts, shares, business assets, furniture, etc. All should be valued and the shares due to each heir outlined. The division can then take place. It may be that some heirs want a particular type of property, such as a son wanting to take the family home. This means that he gives up his share in other types of property, and may need to pay in cash any amount by which the value of the home exceeds the share due to him. At the end of the division, each heir should take no more than his or her share as specified by God.

The Islamic inheritance system has a direct line of beneficiaries, which includes the deceased's spouse, parents, grandparents, children and grandchildren. We move upward or downward only in the case of the absence of the more immediate level. This means that grandparents inherit only if the deceased's parents are dead. Grandchildren inherit only if his children are nonexistent. Relatives who are not in this direct line will inherit only if the deceased has no direct heirs, or when these heirs have taken their due shares and something of the estate remains. Thus, if the deceased leaves behind only his father or one son and a number of brothers and sisters, his father or son will take the whole property and the brothers and sisters inherit nothing. This means in this case that neither your friend's siblings nor his cousins inherit anything.

The first thing to do with the estate is to pay out all outstanding debts of the deceased. When this has been done, the man's property should be valued and divided as follows: One-eighth to his wife, one-sixth each to his parents and the remainder to be divided into seven shares - one share to his daughter and two shares each to his three sons.

An important point is the registration of the two plots of land. It is obvious that your friend registered them in his wife and son's names for convenience. He did not give them as gifts to his wife and son. If so, then these should be added to the rest of his property and divided accordingly. The fact that one son needs special care does not entitle him to any special share of inheritance. However, his mother and grandparents may be able to arrange something for him out of their shares, or the whole family could join in this. But it should be done on the basis of free consent.

Inheritance: Division Of Inheritance Delayed For Decades

My wife's father died in 1979, leaving behind his wife, one son and two daughters, but no other heirs. Her mother died about ten years ago, and her brother a few months back. At the time of his death, her brother was a widower, but he had three sons and three daughters. No inheritance has been divided, and there is a house still registered in my wife's father's name. Please advise on the division of this inheritance.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, emphasized that inheritance should be divided among the heirs without delay. Delay causes problems, and these could lead to long-running disputes between brothers and sisters. Many families think it is better to keep things running as they were during the lifetime of a parent, particularly when there is a business that brings income to the family. Yet such thoughts are wrong. It is still possible to keep the business running, with each of the heirs knowing exactly what his or her share is and the amount of income they receive from the business. Without division some heirs lose their rights, and they often begin to nurse a long-lasting ill feeling toward their close relatives. Hence the Prophet's advice: "Divide the inheritance even though it may be only a tooth stick, or a miswak."

Be this as it may, it is important in the case we are looking at to divide the inheritance without further delay, because there are now secondary heirs, i.e. the son's children. If it is not divided, someone's rights might be lost and this will land the whole family in problems. Fortunately, the case is not too complicated now, but it could become so if left unsolved for much longer.

The father's estate should have been divided in the following manner: One-eighth to his widow, and the rest to his children, divided into four shares - two for the son and one each for the two daughters. The mother's estate should be divided among her children in four shares - one to each daughter and two to her son. This assumes that at the time of her death, the mother also had no other heirs, such as either of her parents who might have survived her. Since the mother's inheritance follows the

same lines, this means that when she died, the house, as well as any other money or property left by either parent, belonged to your wife and her sister and brother, with each of the two women taking one quarter and their brother taking one half.

As your wife's brother died, his inheritance should go to his six children. It should divide into nine shares, with each son taking two shares and each daughter taking one share. This applies to all his estate, including half the house he inherited from his parents. This means that the ownership of the house left by your father-in-law is: One quarter to your wife, and one quarter to her sister. The other half belongs to her brother's children divided between them on the above lines: Two shares for each son and one for each daughter.

Inheritance: Father's Property & Its Selective Division By Him

My father has four sons and he wants to divide his property through a sale deed among his three sons, giving no share to his eldest son, for the following reasons: My elder brother has never contributed to the family finances, nor has he ever undertaken any responsibilities with respect to the marriage of our sisters or their family matters. Moreover, the three of us shared physically and financially in the construction of an extension to our father's house. Besides, my eldest brother was always disobedient to my father. At times, he went as far as hurting his father's feelings. My father says that if he allows his property to be divided equally among his four sons, he is doing an injustice to the three of us who shared in the building. I will be grateful for your advice.

May I ask you why are you giving only the possibilities of a division among the four sons or three of them only, excluding your sisters who are, I understand, married? If we are speaking of inheritance, daughters, whether married or not, have shares in their deceased parents' property. Allah states in the Qur'an: ***"Allah commands you [in matters of inheritance] with respect to your children that a male child inherits an amount equal to the shares of two females. ..."*** [Woman — "An-Nis'a" 4: 11]

This is a perfectly clear order, which assigns a share of inheritance to every daughter.

If it is a gift by a father to some of his children that we are talking about, I would like to remind you that the Prophet, peace be upon him, has condemned this as injustice. He refused to witness it.

Having said that, I do understand your father's feelings. There is an element of injustice if he does not compensate you and your two brothers for the shares you have contributed to the extension of the family home. However, in order not to be guilty of injustice, your father should compensate you for what you have contributed. A fair value on the contribution of each one of you should be determined by mutual agreement. He may effect a real deed of sale of the house to the three of you.

What this means is that what each one of you has contributed should be determined. The house can be then divided into four portions, one to your father and one to each one of you, according to his contribution. The sale may be effected and registered. In this case, your father would be giving you back what you have contributed in order to bring about justice among not only his four sons, but also his daughters. When he dies, the family home does not count as part of his estate to be inherited by his heirs, but only his portion in the house is counted as such. The other heirs will [Added: also] have their shares as Allah has given to them. In this way, no disinheritance of the eldest son is made. Nor are your sisters deprived of their

shares either. Alternatively, the three of you may buy the house as a whole and pay your father for his share. But this should be an actual purchase. You should pay the price, which must be a fair one, not a nominal one. In either of these ways, you help your father act within the rules of Islamic law.

Inheritance: Forgoing One's Right

A person who is entitled to receive a share of inheritance finds himself forced to forgo it because other heirs who are in possession of the property resort to delaying tactics in order to prolong procedures. How far can their action be tolerated?

I understand that those other heirs are already in possession of the property and their tactics are really intended to tire the other heir out so that he would forgo his share partly or totally. If the case is such then these people are guilty of an act of injustice. God has forbidden injustice most emphatically in all situations. There is an additional aspect to injustice in matters of inheritance. As you are aware, God has provided the details of inheritance in the Qur'an, assigning well-defined shares to different heirs. He has done so in order to prevent arguments and quarrels between heirs who are normally close relatives. When people ignore all that and resort to different tactics in order to usurp the rights of others who may be their brothers and sisters, or other close relatives, they are committing an offense against other heirs and an offense against God Himself. They would be on their guard because their action could land them in serious trouble.

My advice to the person concerned in this question is that he should not forgo his share, because by doing so, he hands the other people what they want. He should make it clear to them that he does not intend to abandon his right. He should claim it as forcefully as he can, even going to court if necessary. Sometimes, however, going to court is not very wise, because the amount he will get at the end may be less than the costs he would have to bear. He should plan his action well in order to get what belongs to him without incurring any loss.

Sometimes, however, it is very good to forgo one's portion of inheritance. Suppose a brother who is doing well in his life inherits a share in a house, which he will have together with his sister who is married to a poor man. She has a number of children and her family lives in a rented accommodation in a poor area. If the brother forgoes his share in the house in favor of his sister, he helps her to have a house of her own for her family. She will not have to pay rent any more. What her family used to pay in rent may be used for other family expenses. If he forgoes his share in her favor, he stands to earn a generous reward from God.

Inheritance: Gifts To Children & Their Inheritance

In our part of the world, the agricultural land, which is left behind by the deceased, is distributed to his heirs automatically in the revenue records, but division of residential property and other movables is left to the heirs themselves. On the other hand, whether a prospective bridegroom makes a demand or not, it has become customary to pay one's daughter or sister a dowry which is normally more than one can afford easily. The girl is told that she will not claim anything out of the residential property or movables on the death of her father, as she has already been given a dowry beyond her fair share of the estate. Most, if not all, girls consent to this. Even the girls' parents-in-law do not urge her to claim a share of her father's inheritance. How far does this practice fit with Islamic teachings?

There are two important points which need to be clarified with regard to this question: the first concerns the gift made by a father to his daughter at the time when she gets married and the second is her share of her father's inheritance and what happens to it. Two other points are perhaps secondary to this particular question, although they are major ones in their own right. These concern the linkage between dowry and inheritance, and the right of in-laws to a married woman's property. I will attempt to discuss the first two points and refer to the others briefly.

If a father decides to give one of his children a gift, he may do so. Once the son or daughter who has been given such a gift takes possession of it, it becomes his or hers which means that it is no longer the property of the parent making the gift. However, a father, or indeed a parent, is required by Islam to maintain justice between his children. I have often quoted the Hadith of An-Nu'man ibn Basheer whose father came to the Prophet, peace be upon him, with him and said: "I would like you, Messenger of Allah, to witness the fact that I have given a slave as a gift to this child of mine." The Prophet, peace be upon him, asked him whether he has made a similar gift to every one of his children. When the father answered in the negative, the Prophet, peace be upon him, told him to seek some other witness for this transaction. He also said: "I do not witness injustice."

The fact that the Prophet, peace be upon him, called this type of action an injustice makes it forbidden, for all injustice is forbidden in Islam, even when it is a parent's injustice to his own children. Scholars, however, have pointed out that if there is a special case with regard to a particular child, then a gift to that child may be in order. They maintain in this connection the case of a child who is blind or has some other sort of handicap or a chronic illness which makes his situation rather difficult, he or she may be given a gift to ensure a more comfortable life for him or her.

In the case of a parent making gifts to his children, many scholars, including the imams Abu Hanifah, Malik and El-Shaf'ie prefer that all children, male or female, be given exactly the same. This is also reported to be the opinion of Ibn Abbas, the Prophet's cousin and companion who was one of the best learned scholars. However, Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal prefers that such gifts be made in accordance with the children's share of inheritance. That means that a son is given twice as much as a daughter. [When the aim is to avoid cracks amongst heirs in claims for inheritance, the opinions of Abu-Nu'man ibn Basheer and the opinion of Ibn Abbas may be preferred.]

It is customary in many societies that parents give their children gifts when they get married. That applies to both sons and daughters. It is very often the case that a son may not have enough money to cover the expenses of his marriage. His parents often help him with much of what he needs. Similarly, when their daughter is about to be married, parents are ready with their help or their gifts. Such gifts must be looked upon as normal gifts. While parents need not give every one of their children a gift similar to that of the first one to get married, at the time of that marriage, they should be clear in their minds that they will do the same toward their other children when they marry.

As for inheritance, this becomes due when a person dies. Every one has heirs, according to his own situation and those of his immediate relatives who survive him. First degree heirs are the deceased's parents, children and spouse. Others may also be entitled to certain shares, according to particular circumstances. Heirs inherit by right. Allah has apportioned their shares. Perhaps it is useful to remember at this point that, from the Islamic point of view, we do not own our money or property. Whatever we possess belongs to Allah; we are only put in charge of it. That charge reverts to Allah on our death. He distributes it to our heirs the way He likes. He has only allowed us discretion to leave by will an amount of our property not exceeding

one third of its total. We may leave that to the poor or to relatives who are not among our heirs. It is not permissible to leave by will anything to any of our natural heirs.

Suppose that a father has made certain gifts to some of his children, he cannot make a will in favor of the others in order to give them similar gifts. The reason is what I have just explained, that a person no longer owns anything of his property when he dies. He has no say over its distribution. The heirs have a title to their shares, as apportioned to them by Allah. When a man dies, his estate is not divided among his heirs if his widow is pregnant until she has delivered. This is due to the fact that what she delivers is bound to affect the shares of some, if not all of the other heirs. She may give birth to a son, a daughter, twins or triplets. In each case, the division of the estate will differ.

What worries me in the system you have outlined is the link which is made between the gifts given to a girl at her marriage and her share of the inheritance. That link is unacceptable. Let us not forget that if the man's other children will not get similar gifts to what his daughter gets at the time of her marriage, the action itself is described by the Prophet, peace be upon him, as injustice. Inheritance is something that Allah has decreed. How can the two be linked?

You have not explained what happens if a man has three daughters and one or two sons, or more children than that. Suppose that only two of the daughters get married during the lifetime of their father, will the third daughter have a share of the inheritance? You say that the authorities automatically divide the land he leaves behind among his heirs. Do they do that in accordance with the shares of inheritance assigned by Allah? Do they give one eighth of the land to the widow? Are the people in charge of the revenue records competent enough to determine who are the deceased's heirs and what share each of them receives? Will that girl, who has not been married, receive any share of it? You may say that her brothers will see to her marriage and provide a similar gift for her? What if she does not get married at all? It seems to me that the system, as it is, is simply designed to concentrate wealth in the hands of male children. Women are deprived of their rightful shares of inheritance. It is needless to say that Islam cannot accept this at all.

May I also say briefly that the dowry system which means that a bride receives from her father or her brothers gifts, in gold or real property or cash in an amount acceptable to her husband and his family, is different from the dower which Islam makes a condition of marriage. The husband pays this dower to his wife at the time when the marriage contract is made. It becomes her own money and she is fully entitled to dispense with it the way she likes.

You say that in return for her dowry, which often places much hardship on her father and his family, her parents-in-law do not bring any pressure to bear on her to claim a share of inheritance in her deceased father's estate. May I ask what has her parents-in-law got to do with her inheritance? Inheritance is one legitimate way of ownership. When a woman inherits something it becomes her own property. In Islam, a woman is fully entitled to manage, administer, invest or dispense with her property the way she likes, without any interference from her father or husband. She is fully qualified to make any transactions she wants. If she inherits something it does not become the property of her husband or his family. It remains her [property].

Inheritance: Going Back On An Earlier Agreement

May I refer to the case of a family comprising a father, mother and three adult sons, all of whom are married. The eldest son dies leaving behind his widow and two daughters. The widow decided to remain with the family and does not marry again in order to bring up her two daughters. Their grandfather and two uncles look after the two girls and their mother to the

extent that they pay them their dowry when they are married. All parties concerned agreed that neither two girls nor their mother will claim their share of the deceased man's inheritance. I myself was witness to this decision, which was taken at the time the marriages of the two daughters were arranged. However, under pressure from her daughters and her sons-in-law, the widow of the deceased man has filed a suit in court, demanding her late husband's share for her daughters from the property. In our country we do not have Islamic courts. Could you please explain the judgment of Islam on this case? May I say that the dispute has generated ill feelings between the two sons of the old man and the widow of their late brother and their nieces? It may be possible to bring about a reconciliation if we are certain of Islamic judgment in this case. Could you please explain how far are the widow and her two daughters right in their claim to the share of the deceased man? If they can make such a claim, what is their share?

The starting point in answering this question should be the lawsuit filed by the widow of the deceased son. She is claiming something to which she feels entitled, or at least she is led to believe so by her sons-in-law and daughters. You have mentioned that the law in your country is not Islamic law and the court will judge the case according to that law. Therefore, the lady who has filed this lawsuit may gain something as a result. If judgment is passed in her favor, she will be able to enforce that judgment and receive that amount of money, whatever it is. Nobody will be able to oppose her, because she will be backed by the force of law. But even if the amount of money she could gain is enormous, she should first ask herself whether she is doing right or wrong. To some people, this advice may sound wrong. They will say that if the law of the land gives that lady an amount of money, why should she not claim it or enforce judgment by law? Is it not that her relative will be denying her something to which she is entitled? In answer, I will say that matters of inheritance have been legislated by Allah Himself, who has given us a detailed system of inheritance, assigning shares to relatives of deceased people according to their degree of kinship. It is the portions prescribed by Allah, which determine our entitlements. If we claim these, we are within our rights. If we claim something else, we will be doing others injustice. We would be claiming something to which we are not entitled at all. If a secular law supports such a claim, that is only because that law is made by man and it does not conform to what Allah has legislated. It is Allah's law, which takes precedence. That is a matter left to us. We may seek the enforcement of Allah's law or some other law. If we try to win something with the support of man-made law, knowing that Allah has not given us a claim to it, we will be guilty of a grievous offense.

In order to understand the magnitude of such an offense, it is pertinent to quote the Hadith in which the Prophet, peace be upon him, explains his position as a judge in disputes between individuals. He is quoted as saying something on the following lines: "I am only a human being and you put to me your disputes. One of you may have a better or stronger argument than that of his brother. I may, therefore, judge in his favor. Let him then reflect that if I give him something, which belongs by right to his brother, I am only giving him a brand of fire. Let him then take it or leave it." That is certainly a very apt description by the Prophet, peace be upon him, of what we may do with the help of the law, knowing that in reality, and according to Allah's law, it does not belong to us. Who of us wants to close his hand on a brand of fire? What we get of someone else's rightful property is a brand of fire, which we swallow and which remains burning in our hearts. We must, therefore, be extra careful. We must never attempt to get something to which we are not entitled.

The foregoing is a simple principle of Islamic justice. It does not matter what verdict a judge may pass; we know that we are entitled to and must finally stick to it. To claim something, which is not rightfully ours, is to try to usurp the right of others. That will be unjust and it will earn us punishment in the Hereafter. No one in his right mind will buy something in this life knowing that the price will be punishment by Allah in the Hereafter.

You have not explained what the lady is actually claiming. What is it that her sons-in-law and her daughters have persuaded her to claim and to seek the support of the law for her claim? I guess that the deceased may have left some property of his own. That may have been part of the family's wealth. The family might have decided to keep the wealth intact and to look after the deceased man's widow and daughters. If this is the case, then the widow is right to make her claim. It is not right for the grandfather or his two sons to decide that the family wealth should be kept intact. If they wanted it so, they should have allotted the widow and her daughter their rightful shares in the business.

The man's sons may argue that they have paid for the education and marriage of the two daughters. That may be so, but it does not deprive the heirs of their late brother of their rights. They should not forget that it was the duty of the grandfather to look after his granddaughters after their father's death. The kindness the family had shown to the widow is certainly well placed, since she had decided not to marry again, but to look after her daughters. Moreover, the gifts given to the daughters on their marriage are gifts. They do not deprive them of their right.

The matter should be explained to the old man and he should see to it that everybody receives her rightful share. The deceased son's property should have been divided on the following lines: One-sixth to his father, one eighth to his widow and the remainder to be divided equally between the two daughters.

I feel that the way to go about the problem is to explain the rights and entitlements of everyone to the whole family. When this has been fully explained, reconciliation may be worked out and implemented. That is the proper way, which you should try to arrange.

Inheritance: Grandchildren & Joint Estate

The family members of a married son who dies when his father is still alive are not given shares in the father's property. Numerous instances have shown that the children of the deceased son may suffer from extreme deprivation. It may be said that the father should make ample provisions for the deceased son's family. In many cases this is not done. What is the remedy for such a problem? Perhaps I should add that this particular situation is often utilized in propaganda against Islam. Could you please shed some light on this complex issue? May I also ask whether the value of the estate should be considered in the year when the death of the owner occurs, or at the time when his estate is divided which is usually many years later. A further question concerns with property bought by the husband but registered in the names of the married couple. Should it be divided after the death of the husband, or the wife, or both husband and wife?

The first thing we should understand is that God has given us a complete system, which allows for no injustice whatsoever. Where it may appear to us that a particular case has not been dealt with in the Qur'an, and the Sunnah, we have only to make a fresh look at Islamic legislation and are bound to find a satisfactory answer.

Islam dislikes poverty, which it describes as something that “approaches disbelief.” This means that poverty may lead people to deny God and His wisdom. It simply does not happen in Islamic legislation that young children are left un-catered for, simply because their father has died when his own father [the grandfather] is still alive. They are provided for in a variety of ways. Indeed, Islam does not leave any member of its community in a helpless situation. Young children who lose their father are automatically placed in the charge of their grandfather. They would obviously inherit much of their father’s estate. The only other heirs would be their mother and their paternal grandparents, if they have no grandfather, then their paternal uncles are required to take care of them. Orphans who have nobody to bring them up are looked after by the Islamic state or the Muslim community who are deemed not to have fulfilled their duties if they allow any such orphans to grow up in misery and deprivation.

However, the question of direct inheritance is often raised in the circumstances. The point is that if the grandfather dies first, all his children will inherit his property. If any of his children dies shortly afterward, leaving behind young children, they then will inherit their father whose property includes his share of the estate of his own father [the grandfather]. It does not happen all the time, however, that a father dies before all his children. Their parents survive some children. If such an early death occurs and the deceased is not rich while his father is rich, God would not grant the children he left in a terrible situation if they are not allowed to inherit it from their grandfather?

To cater for this situation, Islam operates a principle called “the compulsory will”. It applies specifically in such a situation and it has been advocated and explained by Imam Ibn Hazm, one of the greatest scholars in our history. It has been incorporated in the family laws of a number of Muslim countries including Syria & Egypt. It is a simple principle, which looks at the situation of children who have lost their father, but their grandfather is alive. When the grandfather dies, he is considered to have a will in favor of his grandchildren. As you realize, every person is entitled to bequeath up to one third of his total property for charitable purposes or to relatives who are not heirs. Most schools of thought consider drawing up such a will, for an amount not exceeding one third of the total property, as a highly recommended practice. However, some scholars, including Ibn Hazm, consider it a duty. In this particular case, it is deemed to exist whether the grandfather has drawn it or not. It gives the grandchildren the smaller of two amounts: either one third of the grandfather’s property or the share of the children’s father, which he would have inherited had he survived his father.

This is certainly a fair principle and looks after young members of the Muslim community who find themselves in a helpless situation.

It is needless to say that when the children’s father dies, it is open to the grandfather to provide for them in a variety of ways, such as making gifts to them, which ensure their future. If he does so, then he does not contravene any Islamic principle provided that he treats them equally. In the case when the grandfather omits to do that or dies before he has time to do it, the principle of the compulsory will provides a cover for this eventuality.

When a person dies, his estate should be divided among his heirs immediately, not many years later as you say the practice is. This may be a practice in your part of the world but thanks to God it is not the practice all over the Muslim world. In the majority of Muslim communities and in the majority of cases, the estate of a deceased person is shared out by his heirs shortly after his death as Islam recommends. The Prophet, peace be upon him, has told us to divide the property left by any person as soon as possible, however small the property is. If the property is not divided immediately, then its value at the time of sharing it out should be

considered, unless this represents an injustice to one or more of the heirs. The point is that if parts of the estate have appreciated in value, as it is often the case with real property, then the appreciation should accrue to all the heirs. Similarly, depreciation should be borne out by all of them according to their shares, unless this delay is caused by one of them against the wishes and interests of the other. There is, then, a clear case for that particular heir to bear the loss.

The property of each person should be divided after his own death. Even if one property is registered jointly in the names of husband, and wife, the share which belongs to each one of them should be divided to their heirs immediately after that person's death. Leaving such a share out until the other partner dies may create many other problems and ill feeling, and may bring in other heirs who have shares in a particular part of the property, of either one as a couple. The Islamic view is always for the share out of the property of a deceased person shortly after his death.

Inheritance: Grandchildren's Claim

If in a Muslim family, a man died at a young age, leaving behind minor children and his father has survived him — the question is whether the minor children will have any claim over the property of their grand father (the father of the minor children's father).

The inheritance of the assets of the deceased father are very clear. For instance the deceased left behind two minor children. The division of the property of the children's father is effected as follows: One sixth to his father [i.e. the grand father] and a similar portion [i.e. one sixth] to his mother if she has also survived him. His wife inherits one eighth. The remainder goes to the children. If both are boys, then the total amount is divided between them equally. If they are a boy and a girl, then the boy receives twice as much as the girl who inherits one third while her brother takes two third.

The position is different in the case of grand children's claim to a share of their grand father's inheritance in place of their own father. According to the family law of a number of Muslim countries, they inherit on the basis of a rule known as "the compulsory will". These laws of Muslim countries have adopted the views of Imam Ibn Hazm, which are not only humanitarian but also have a sound basis. He advocates that in this particular case where a man is survived by his father and children of his own, the grand father is deemed to have made a will in favor of those grand-children of his in the amount which his son i.e. their father, would have inherited from him had he been alive, or one third of the grand-father's property whichever is the lesser amount. This applies whether the grandfather has actually made such a will or not.

That is the reason for calling this will a compulsory one. Even if no will is written or signed by the grandfather, it is deemed to be there, and the beneficiaries are only his grandchildren.

Inheritance: If the Deceased Had No Children

One of our colleagues died recently in a car accident, leaving behind his wife, mother, one brother and one sister. He had no children. How will his inheritance be divided among his heirs?

This case brings into operation one of the rules of inheritance that should be explained. When a person is survived by his parents and no children, his mother's share is one-third of his estate, except when he has brothers and sisters.

In this latter case, the mother's share is reduced to one-sixth, whether the deceased's brothers are entitled to any inheritance or not. They do not inherit if the deceased's father is alive, because his father blocks their inheritance. In the present case, this latter aspect does not apply. They inherit because the father is not alive.

After paying the priority dues, which include the deceased's burial expenses, any outstanding debts and any bequests by will he might have made [which may not exceed 1/3rd of the assets], the man's property, including any blood money or compensation paid, should be divided as follows. One-quarter to his widow, since they have no children, one-sixth to his mother, and the remainder is divided into three shares with one share to his sister and two to his brother.

Inheritance: Justice Among Siblings

My father, who has three pieces of land, has told me to start building a house for myself on one of the pieces of land, which is by the roadside. I am worried that this may not be in line with the Islamic law of inheritance. However, I have contributed much to the family expenses and to the marriage of my sisters who are all married now. So is my only brother. Can the dowry we spent on marriage of my sisters be calculated as part of inheritance? Can I go ahead and build a house on this land, as my father is keen that I should?

What has the law of inheritance got to do with this problem? Your father who owns the land is still alive and so are your sisters who received their marriage gifts, or dowry, or whatever. The law of inheritance applies when a person dies and his property is to be divided among his heirs. But in his life, this law does not apply. So the whole question has to be considered from a totally different point of view.

I understand that in your community, women are not given their full share of inheritance because they receive their dowry.

But this is not the proper Islamic way. Inheritance becomes due when a person dies and it applies to all his property which he owned at the time of his death. His heirs are those whom God has defined. So no heir may be denied his or her share on any grounds. Each must be paid in full, in the same way as they all have to meet the obligations of the deceased if he is in debt when he dies.

I have explained on several occasions that the dowry which is paid by the bride's family to the bridegroom is contrary to the Islamic practice which makes a woman entitled to receive a dower, or mahr, from her husband to ensure the validity of the marriage. This is not our main point of discussion now. We should consider, however, this dowry as a gift to the daughter on her marriage. This should be the basis of our discussion of this question.

Islam makes it clear that justice must be maintained between all children. So when a father gives one of his children a gift, he should maintain justice between his children and give everyone of them a similar gift. What is more is that girls and boys are entitled to equal gifts. I have often quoted the highly authentic Hadith, which mentions that An-Nauman ibn Basheer was given a slave by his father as a gift. His father requested the Prophet, peace be upon him, to be a witness to this transaction. The Prophet, peace be upon him, asked him: "Have you given all your children similar gifts?" When An-Nauman's father answered in the negative, the Prophet, peace be upon him, refused to be a witness, telling him: "Seek yourself some other witness, for I do not witness an act of injustice."

Note how the Prophet, peace be upon him, describes the giving of a gift to one child without giving similar gift to all one's children as 'an act of injustice. 'All injustice is

forbidden in Islam. We should also note that the Prophet, peace be upon him, phrased his question to An-Nauman's father without distinction between sons and daughters: "Have you given all your children similar gifts?" He did not say, 'your sons,' which indicates that both sons and daughters are entitled to the same treatment. Indeed this fits with the Islamic principle, which requires a father to look after all his children in the same way. A daughter is entitled to receive the same care and education from her parents as a son.

So what you and your father should do is to ensure justice between yourself, brother and sisters. What your father has done to his children to see them properly settled in life should be valued and you should receive the same value as a gift. If you have contributed to the expenses of your sister's marriages, then this may be considered, so that fairness is maintained. Your father should call a family meeting and explain to everyone how much he had given to each of his children.

Equality should be ensured. If one sister has received much less than the others then she should be given some compensation. "When he has done that, he should come up with a fair arrangement to enable you to build on that plot of land."

Inheritance: Justice Among Siblings & Yet Unequal Shares

You have mentioned that in inheritance a man receives twice as much as a woman, while you have stressed that Islam maintains equality between all children. The two statements seem to be contradictory. Moreover, is a woman justified if she feels herself to be a second class member of her family?

No, there is no contradiction in the matter, because I have been talking about two different situations. I stressed equality of boys and girls in the gifts a parent wishes to give them in his lifetime. In this case all children must be given equal gifts, because they have the same claim on their father or mother's care. If a father were to give more generous gifts to one or more of his children, whether on the basis of sex or personal affection, then he is not maintaining justice between them. The Prophet, peace be upon him, teaches us: "Fear God and maintain justice between your children."

In inheritance, however, the matter is different. To start with, let me remind you that the Islamic system of inheritance is very elaborate. It has been outlined by God Himself in the Qur'an. We may not deviate from it at all, in any circumstances. Now why would God, the most just of judges, wish to give a woman half the share of a man who relates to the deceased on the same footing? There is no favoritism here, because God does not admit such favoritism. It is simply because of the duties and responsibilities He has placed on each of them.

This means that God has taken stock of what He has imposed of duties on men and women and considered the rights He has given to each of them. He then determined their rights of inheritance on the basis of balancing their respective rights against their duties.

A woman needs no work for her living in the Islamic system. Men in her family are responsible to provide her with a decent living. When she gets married, she receives a dowry, which she determines. She has absolute right to decide how to spend it. It is the man who pays her that dowry. If we take only these two privileges into account, we realize that women have been given their fair share.

Inheritance: Laws Of Inheritance & Unfair Gifts

A woman “gifted” her house to her niece only two weeks before her death, thus depriving her heirs, two sisters and a brother, from their shares of inheritance. When objections were raised after the woman’s death, these were answered saying that the objections are borne out of jealousy, and that the deceased aunt simply dispensed with her own property as she was entitled to do, and that legal and religious experts were consulted. I recognize that it is every person’s fundamental right to sell, gift, donate or even to throw away any property that they legally own. However, I am not sure that under Islamic law, the lady was entitled to gift away to her niece. Kindly advise and also whether it was right for the niece to accept such a gift.

Let me first of all correct my reader’s statement. It is not the right of anyone to “throw away” any property they have. If someone behaves irrationally, or in a way deemed to be detrimental to his own or his family’s interests, then a decree may be issued by a court of law preventing that person from disposing with any property he owns. Any disposition with property should be clearly in the interest of the owner or his family.

I should also explain that in Islam, our right to our property is limited to our lifetime. It is not an absolute right, because all money and property belong to God alone. We are placed in charge of it by His will, and in accordance with His law. This is terminated the moment a person dies. He or she has no longer any claim over it. Hence, it is divided in accordance with God’s law of inheritance, not according to wishes of the deceased. However, God has allowed us to dispose with an amount not exceeding one-third of our property by will. This is a gesture of charity He has granted us, so that we are able to do something with that money for our poor relatives who are not our heirs, or to other poor people or to serve some charitable purposes. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: “God has given you one-third of your property as part of His grace, so that you may give it away.”

If the lady in question gave her niece, who is not her heir, one third of her property, that would have been valid because it would be within the provisions of the Islamic law of inheritance. But she gave her the entire house, which was perhaps all that she owned. Moreover, the lady was ill and died without having recovered. The Prophet, peace be upon him, judged a similar case, when a man had freed six slaves he owned shortly before his death. He practically had no other money. His heirs put the case to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and he ruled that only one-third of his property could be dispensed with in this way. The Prophet, peace be upon him, freed two slaves and the other four were given to the man’s heirs to be divided among them in accordance with Islamic law.

This shows that the argument advanced by the beneficiary niece that the woman was merely dispensing with her property is invalid. The woman was ill, and she soon died. Hence, it is an action taken in the illness leading to her death. As such, it is to be reviewed and determined illegal.

From the details provided to me by my reader, the deed of the transfer or gift speaks of the woman and her niece loving each other as mother and daughter. The niece subsequently claiming that this is legal language. All this is irrelevant. If you love someone like you love your son or daughter, that love does not justify a change in the law of inheritance in that person’s favor. Indeed you cannot give any one of your own children any extra portion of your property, other than what he or she may have as their share of inheritance. How come this niece claims all her aunt’s property, depriving the real heirs of their shares?

Surely, the niece does not love her aunt, neither as mother nor as an aunt. If she takes the house, she leaves her aunt in a difficult position on the Day of Judgement. Moreover, she will have to answer to God for a serious situation. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "I am only a human being and you put to me your disputes. Some of you may have a better argument over others. Let everyone reflect: If I give him something, which belongs by right to his brother, I am only giving him a brand of fire. He may take it or leave it."

The niece in this case has the better argument in the shape of the deed of transfer. But the house is a brand of fire in her hand. If she takes it, it will definitely burn her hands. If she leaves it and gives it back to her aunt's heirs, she will get reward from God, which far outweighs what she gave up.

Inheritance: Lineage Of Inheritance

My father died leaving behind his wife, two sons and two daughters. He left a house and a plot of land, which were sold by his heirs. Could you please tell us how his estate is divided between his heirs.

One point I have to make clear before answering your question is that if either one of his parents also survives your father, they also have a share of inheritance.

Although you have given me the prices of the house and the land, I do not like to give figures in order to avoid confusion. There are other items your father must have also left behind, such as liquid money, savings, business, furniture, etc. What you have to consider is that before any heir takes anything, there are things that must be done. These are: the costs of burial of the deceased, repayment of any outstanding debt and executing any will he might have made. A will goes to non-heirs and must not exceed one-third of the estate.

When these have been paid out, what is left is considered to be the estate due to the heirs. In this case, the man's widow takes one-eighth of all the estate. The remainder is divided into six equal shares, with one share for each of the two daughters and two shares for each of the two sons.

Inheritance: Mother's Gesture To Her Daughter & the Proper Way

My father, who died 19 years ago, built a house and registered it in my mother's name. My mother continued to live in this house with my sister and her family, until my sister's husband died last year. All my other brothers and sisters live in other cities or countries. A few months ago, my mother sold the house and bought a smaller and cheaper one, registering it in my sister's name and living with her and her young son. The rest of the money she distributed equally among her children. My father had written a paper, which we considered to be a "will", saying that, whatever assets he managed to have were obtained with the help of my mother and she has the first right to the house for the rest of her life. After that it goes to his children in accordance with Islamic law. One of our brothers believes that our mother has committed a major sin by registering the new house in my sister's name. He says that she should have divided the money in accordance with Islamic law. Is he correct? If so, how to put the matter right?

The first thing to clear is that the paper your father wrote is not a will. It is an assertion of facts. Had it been a will, it would be invalid because his wife, i.e. your mother, and children are his heirs, and a will cannot be made in favor of an heir. In Islam, a person has the right to make bequests by will in a maximum amount of one-

third of his property, but these bequests should be made to non-heirs, such as close relatives in need, or assigned to charity. Hence, what your father wrote was only to confirm your mother's right to the house. It seems he was fully aware of the procedure to be followed. Hence, he insisted on the repayment of his loan before any division of the property. What this means is that the house was your mother's property, and none of her children had any right to it while she was alive. Only on her death could her inheritance be divided. It also looks as though your father was fully aware that this arrangement would not be unfair to his children, as eventually the house would come to them in the same proportions, since children inherit from their parents in the same way.

This leaves us with your mother's action in moving into a smaller house, registering it in your widowed sister's name. Should we treat this as a gift? Let us first look at the way she distributed the rest of the money. She divided this equally among her children. This is correct, with the daughters getting the same as the sons. Gifts by parents should be equal, not on the lines of inheritance. But what about the house? This is a special arrangement your mother has done to ensure that her daughter, your sister, will continue to have a roof over her head after her own death. She knows that her other children are in better situations, and she did something for the one least fortunate. This means that it is a caring gesture. But it is not a total gift because your mother still lives in the same house, and will continue to do so for the rest of her life

It is a gift for the future, which seems a pre-inheritance gift. Hence, it is dubious, although it is perfectly well intentioned. What your mother should have done was to consult her children and obtain their agreement to the arrangement.

She should have told them that since their sister will not be able to earn her own living and her own son is too young to work, they would be responsible for her living expenses. In order to reduce their future burden, she wanted to make this arrangement. Had your mother obtained this consent, her action would be right. In the absence of such agreement, there could be some argument about it. However, you and your brothers and sisters will do well to approve your mother's action. You stand to earn God's reward for helping your widowed sister and her son, and you will earn further reward by pleasing your mother. In addition, you will reduce your future burden of looking after your sister and her son.

Inheritance: Mother's Living Place

My mother, who is very old, is planning to move after finishing her waiting period following my father's death to an apartment he bought at her request. He repeatedly referred to the apartment as being my mother's, but he had to register it in my brother's name for convenience. My brothers are telling our mother that she does not have sufficient reason for moving into that apartment. May I ask whether she could do so, and whether the apartment is hers or part of my father's inheritance?

It appears to me that the apartment belongs to your mother, as your father intended it. Otherwise, he would not have repeatedly referred to it as such. It seems as if he insisted on repeating that in order to make these facts clear to all concerned. If you are aware of the fact and you and your brothers and sisters try to make the apartment part of your father's estate, then you are not only taking something that does not belong to you, which is forbidden, but you would also be undutiful to both your parents. Besides, your mother's property will come back to you all, in the same proportions, when she dies, unless any of you dies before her.

I do not understand your brothers' objection to your mother's intention to move into her apartment. It is her place, which she owns in full. Your family home now belongs

to all your father's heirs, which means that she only has one-eighth share of it. Each heir and those who benefit by his estate also have their shares in it. So, when your mother moves into a place which is completely hers, this is much more comfortable and convenient.

The fact that in the same building lives a member of your family makes things even easier for her. To object to this arrangement requires your brothers and yourself to find a more convenient and suitable place for her. You have indicated that this has not proved possible for a variety of reasons. Well, you really have to take good care of your mother. If all of you cannot provide her with good and comfortable accommodation, where she is happy, you have no right to object to her staying in her own apartment. Indeed, you cannot object to that on any grounds, unless you want to really make her life more comfortable and happier.

Inheritance: Of A Divorcee

Does a divorced wife or her grown-up child inherit anything out of her ex-husband's property in the event of his death? Is a divorced wife allowed to use her ex-husband's name or must she give it up? If a man divorces his wife on charges of infidelity, does he have to pay her all what is due to her as per the Islamic law?

Children's right to inheritance of either one of their parents is not affected in any way by the severance of the marital relationship between their parents through divorce. Thus, when divorce occurs between the parents and either of them dies, the children inherit their deceased parent in the same way as if the marriage was not dissolved. Nor are the rights of inheritance of the children affected by their being in the custody of either parent. This is because the parent/child relationship is permanent and cannot be affected by the relationship between their parents.

The claim of a divorced wife to inherit her ex-husband is affected by several factors. We can say in short that if divorce takes place when the man is in sound health, and if the waiting period of the divorced wife [approximately three months] has lapsed before her ex-husband's death, she does not have a claim to any share in his estate. If, on the other hand, the husband dies during the waiting period after he has pronounced the divorce, the woman in this case has the same right as an undivorced wife, provided that the divorce is revocable. This means that the divorce is a first or second time divorce, in which case the man can revoke the divorce within the waiting period and the couple are reunited in marriage without any need for a fresh marriage contract or a fresh dowry.

It may happen that a man divorces his wife when he falls ill and suspects that he is soon to die. His purpose of this divorce is to get rid of his wife so that she does not share his inheritance with his other heirs. If this is the case, and the man actually dies as a result of that illness, a divorced wife still inherits him, whether her waiting period has lapsed or not at the actual time of his death. This is because Islam does not like injustice of any sort. The man's action in this case is an act of injustice by which he aims to disinherit his wife. Islam does not allow anyone to disinherit any of his heirs. God has made known His ruling of how inheritance should be divided among the deceased person's heirs and no one can devise any method in order to usurp the right of any heir in favor of any other. Anyone who attempts this is guilty of a grave sin.

When a marriage takes place between a man and woman according to the Islamic way, the woman does not adopt her husband's name. She maintains the surname of her father. Hence, the question whether she should relinquish her husband's name when she is divorced does not arise.

The answer to your last question about divorce on grounds of infidelity depends on whether infidelity is proved according to Islamic law or not. Adultery is considered proved in Islam only if confession of guilt is made freely or four male witnesses testify to have seen with their eye adultery being committed.

Short of such a proof, the divorced wife continues to enjoy all her rights. Islam does not allow suspicions to affect people's rights. The wisdom behind this is self-evident. Any person could claim to suspect his wife if he wants to disinherit her for any reason. That could lead toward much injustice. Islam prevents that injustice from taking place by requiring indisputable proof of adultery before treating a person as an adulterer.

Inheritance: Of A Woman's Property

How is a deceased woman's property divided among her heirs, if she has left behind her husband, children, brothers and sisters as well as her parents?

Each one of the deceased woman's parents receives one sixth of her property. Her husband inherits one quarter, since she has children, whether by him or through an earlier marriage. The remainder of her property goes to her children and it is distributed between them on the basis of equal shares [i.e. equal shares are made for convenience of disbursement]. Every daughter inherits one share while every son inherits two shares.

It should be pointed out that such a division can only take place after the payment of any debt which she may not have paid and the execution of any will which she might have left. It should be pointed out that a Muslim may bequeath by will up to one third of his property. No one of his heirs may be left anything by will. The rest must be divided among his or her heirs.

Inheritance: Overdue Share Of Inheritance

My mother died when I was one year old, and my father kept my share of her inheritance. Although he should have paid it to me when I came of age, he did not until he died. Now, his other heirs insist that I could only get my mother's inheritance in the same amount it was when she died, rupee for rupee, although the rupee is now worth one-fiftieth of its value at the time. My inheritance also included shares in companies that are now out of business. What happens to this?

My maternal grandfather, who inherited from my mother, died only last year, but I was told that I inherit nothing from him, not even my mother's share. Is this true? Please comment.

What is important to realize in questions of inheritance is that God has apportioned the share of every heir, in all fairness and justice to all. It is up to people to see to it that what God has legislated, is implemented. When they do not, they do wrong to themselves and others. They incur God's displeasure and they leave themselves liable to His punishment. The reader's father took his son's inheritance and should have invested it for him. He should have paid it out to him when he came of age. But he did not. Now, the reader is entitled to it in full, with any profits made by the father, if he had invested it in any way.

The claims of his father's other heirs that he is entitled to the nominal amount as was at the time of his mother's death is insupportable. In our modern times, currencies cannot be treated in absolute terms, because their value changes. Such changes are at times very drastic. Take the case of Lebanon during the civil war, or Iraq during the

last 13 years. Their currencies retained only their names, but their values were unrecognizable. Before the civil war one US dollar was worth 2.5 Lebanese liras, and at the end of it 1500 liras. If you had lent 1000 liras to a friend before the civil war of 1975 and he paid it back after the war ended in 1990 in the same amount, he would have borrowed from you 400 dollars and returned two-thirds of one dollar. Would he be deemed to have repaid you? Can he claim before God that he has settled his debt? Would he have accepted it if he was the lender and someone repaid him in this way?

Yet such cases are very difficult to sort out. People should never put themselves in such situations. Why should anyone keep his son's inheritance for 33 years? There may be a case to do so if the father was very poor and needed the money to survive with his son, but I take it that this is not so in this case.

The father was well off, as the mother was. Hence, he could have either invested the money in some scheme, or in his own business. If the latter, the son is entitled to the profits made in this period. If it was invested in a scheme, the son is entitled to all the proceeds. Had the father bought his son an apartment or a shop and offered it for rent, the son would have had the rent all those years. The price of the property would have risen by more than the rate of inflation or the change in the value of the currency.

However, if the father did not invest it, but used it for his own need, it remains a debt he owed to his son. The least the son should be paid now is the value of his inheritance as it was at the time. So, if he inherited 1000 rupees and they were worth \$500 at that time, he should be paid now at least \$500, even though this may be worth 30,000 rupees today. In this way, he would get back the principal amount of his loan that his father took. To give him anything less is to defraud him of his right.

As for the shares, I suppose he should claim any dividends or profits his father collected on his behalf during the period the companies were functioning. The principal amount, or the value of the shares, he should count as a dead loss because the companies concerned have gone out of business.

According to the major schools of Islamic thought, a grandchild does not inherit from his grandfather if the latter has children of his own. If a father survives any of his own children, the children of that deceased son or daughter do not inherit from their grandfather, if he leaves behind other sons. The grandfather should bequeath to those grandchildren a portion of his estate. However, a number of Muslim countries, such as Syria and Egypt, apply the principle of the compulsory will in this case, which considers that in such cases where the grandfather does not make such bequests, a compulsory will is deemed to exist. This gives the grandchildren concerned the lesser of the two amounts: either their parents' share had he or she survived, or one-third of the grandfather's property. I heard once that this is applicable in Pakistan. It may be so, but I may be wrong.

Inheritance: Ownership & Inheritance

Many years ago, my father bought a house, using the money from the sale of the jewelry belonging to my mother, and registered it in her name. Does this mean that she is the sole owner of the house and none of my father's heirs have any share in it? My mother wants to sell the house and give everyone of her children their respective shares, keeping her own part? How should she proceed?

If the jewelry your mother put in was the full price of the house, then it belongs to her and it cannot be included in your father's estate to be divided among his heirs. However, if the jewelry accounted for only a part of the house price, and your father

registered the house in her name as a gesture of care and goodwill, then we need to look at his real intention at the time. If he was making her a gift of the rest of the house, then again it belongs to her and no one has any share in it.

If his intention was that the house is shared between them but it was registered in your mother's name for the sake of convenience, then she has only a share of it equivalent to the proportion of the price she paid, taking into account the value of the house at the time, not now. Your first step is to determine the real ownership of the house and your mother's share in it. If your father was co-owner, then his share should be divided between his heirs in accordance with the Islamic law of inheritance.

I understand your father left behind two sons and four daughters as well as his wife, your mother. His estate is divided as follows: one-eighth goes to your mother, and the remainder is divided into 8 shares, with one share each to his daughters and two shares to each of his two sons.

Inheritance: Registering Property To Heirs

I have four married daughters, and I live with my wife in a house, which is registered, together with its land jointly in the name of my wife and myself. We also own another piece of land, one quarter of which is registered in my wife's name. Is it permissible to register the remainder of this property in the names of our four daughters, on condition that they are able to take charge of it only after our deaths?

God has placed us in charge of our money, but He has not made such money our own property. It remains God's property. He says in the Qur'an

"Give them [i.e. slaves] wishing to buy their freedom a portion of God's wealth which he has given you." [The Light — "An-Noor" 24: 33]

Consider how God describes our wealth as His own. This applies to the property of the individual and to that of the State. Hence, it is an Islamic principle that when a person dies, his property reverts back to its owner, i.e. God who has all control over its distribution. Thus the Islamic system of inheritance does not allow any amendments. No one can disinherit an heir nor give him or her anything over or below their assigned shares. The only way a person can determine that any thing is used after his death in a particular fashion is through a will. Thus a person can leave by will a portion of his property not exceeding one-third of that property.

He should give these either to relatives who are not among his heirs or to poor people or to charitable purposes.

During their lifetime, people are given control over their property but they are required to always maintain fairness and to use it for purpose that pleases God and do not incur His displeasure. Thus when a person gives a gift to one of his children he should give all his children similar gifts maintaining equality between them all. This means he should give his daughter as much as he gives his son, because the rights of boys and girls are the same, which has good reason.

Why would one wish to register property in his children's names while at the same time retain its use for the rest of his lifetime? This suggests inheritance rather than giving gift. With regard to inheritance, we have been clearly instructed that we must not precipitate God's ruling, which means we must not distribute our property to our heirs in our lifetime. How does anyone know who will inherit him when he dies. A person may have 6 children; all of them healthy and he may be weak and old. Yet he may survive some of them. Or he may have other property by the time when he dies.

How can he tell? Hence, it is not right to divide one's property in favor of one's heirs, even if he does that in accordance with the Islamic law of inheritance.

But people try to do that normally to get round certain rules of the law of inheritance. In this case for example the four daughters would inherit only two-thirds of their parents' property and the remainder would go to other heirs. The method suggested by the reader aims at giving the four daughters the full property. This is not fair, and hence, it is not permissible. The only course for that is to give the daughters the property now, dividing it among them equally and giving them full control over it. The parents may not wish to do that because it may lead to complications particularly if one of the daughters decides to sell her portion. Hence, my advice to my reader is to trust to God's wisdom and leave matters as they are until the time comes when the property reverts to its owner, God, who determines what is best for every one.

Inheritance: Rules Ensuring A Nearest Male Beneficiary

A married couple who have five daughters, but no son, are confused about how their property should be divided in order to ensure that their children are the only beneficiaries. As the things stand, some portion of their property will automatically go to their nephews. Is there any way to avoid that? These parents do not wish to give anything to their nephews. Could you please explain what they can do?

One should give these parents at least the credit for being frank about their purpose. They are not unique in wishing to ensure that their property will go only to their children, but many people try to give matters a false appearance. Be that as it may, we have here the purpose stated honestly.

It is not unusual for parents to wish to give everything they have, after they had died, to their children. People normally work hard in their lifetime in order to ensure a comfortable living for themselves and for their children. When they die, they wish their children to have an equally comfortable life. Therefore, they dislike the idea that their property should be shared by other relatives who, close as they may be, can never be at the same level with their children. But if people would reflect a little, they will realize that the division God has made in the elaborate system of inheritance, that He has laid down, will eventually work to their children's advantage. Let us take the example of this particular family.

There is no doubt that at least some of those five daughters are still young. If their parents die, when they have not yet grown up or been married and settled down, who will look after them? In an Islamic society, their next of kin are responsible for their upbringing, education and indeed for their living, if they are poor. If the father of those five daughters dies, and he has a brother, who is the paternal uncle of the girls, then that uncle will have to look after them. In an Islamic society you will find numerous examples of uncles taking care of the children of their deceased brothers and sisters. You must have come across a family where a brother marries his deceased brother's widow in order to ensure that his young children are properly treated. The family would not hear of the young mother marrying into a different family, lest the children are not properly or well brought up. Even if that does not happen, still the young children are properly looked after by their father's relatives.

There is a rule in Islam, which applies to the system of inheritance as well as to other aspects of life. That rule states that "gain is commensurate with responsibility." If we expect an uncle to look after his nieces, then it is only fair that this uncle should receive some gain, or at least be entitled to it, in certain circumstances. Thus, the Islamic system of inheritance assigns a certain portion of the estate to the male next of kin, when the deceased has no son, because it is likely that the next of kin will be called upon to provide some care to the daughters of his deceased relative.

Some people may say that those relatives who are indeed next of kin and who would benefit by their inheritance are not the type to fulfill such a responsibility, either because they have too many responsibilities of their own or because they do not care about even their own children. This may be so, but to start with, this is the exception, not the rule. In an Islamic society, the sense of loyalty and responsibility is sharpened, because it is linked to the desire to earn God's pleasure. Therefore, when a good Muslim finds himself responsible for young children whose father has died, he will happily undertake that responsibility, even though he might not have been on good terms with his deceased relative. Moreover, when he realizes that a portion of that relative's estate has fallen to him, he will feel better aware of his responsibility. He is certain to realize that the benefit he has gained is commensurate with the responsibility he must shoulder.

Besides, why do people fret over something that is quite trivial in real terms? Let us look at this case properly. The worst that could happen is that the father dies first. In this case, his wife will inherit one eighth of his property and two thirds of this whole property will be divided equally among his five daughters. The remainder will go to the nearest male relative. This of course assumes that the father does not have either his parents alive at the moment when he dies. If either of his parents is alive, then that parent will inherit one sixth of his property, which leaves only an insignificant amount to any other relative. If the man's father is alive, he will get that portion as well. Still, if neither of his parents is alive, and he is survived by his wife and five daughters, then his property is divided into twenty-four shares; with three going to his widow and sixteen to be shared out equally by his five daughters. The remainder which is five out of twenty four shares, i.e. just over twenty percent, goes to his brothers and sisters, if he has any, or to his nephew; if he has not.

If the mother dies first, then her property is divided into twelve portions; with three going to her husband and eight to be shared equally among his five daughters. That leaves only one share out of twelve to the nearest male relative of the mother. This is again assuming that neither of her parents survives her. In this case, what goes to her relatives is less than ten percent.

As you realize, the amount that is likely to go to such relatives is very small, and perhaps insignificant. However, it ensures that should the daughters of these parents need to be looked after by their relatives, those relatives are there to provide the care needed. If those parents were to deny these relative what God has assigned to them, then that is likely to entail that those relatives will not feel their obligation toward those daughters and will not be ready to give any assistance to them, should the need arise. My advice to these parents is to leave matters as they are, because the benefit, indeed all the benefit, is in implementing God's law as He has laid it down.

Having said that, I feel that I should add that it is open to those parents to divide their property now among their daughters, provided that this division is real which means that they willingly make gifts of their property to their daughters in order to make them the owners of whatever they give them. If they wish to do so, no one can stop them, but they will be required to maintain justice among their five daughters, giving each one the same as the rest.

Inheritance: Settlement Of A Deceased Person's Debts

During his lifetime, my father distributed over 80 percent of his property to his prospective heirs. He also made a will for one-third of what he had left to go to charity, and the other two-thirds to go to his heirs. He also made it clear that heirs must settle his debts. After his death, we duly settled his debts. However, my mother, brothers and sisters told me to take the portion my father left for charity in payment of his debts, since it was I

who settled these. They protested that none of them was in a position to help settle our father's debts. Is it permissible for me to do what they have suggested? How does Islam view their attitude?

When we read the three verses from Qur'an which outline the Islamic system of inheritance and apportion the shares of all types of heirs, we will not fail to notice that the enforcement of deceased person's will and the settlement of his debts takes precedence over the sharing of his property among his heirs. This is mentioned four times in these verses, so as to cover every possible situation. Moreover, all scholars agree that settlement of debts takes precedence over the enforcement of will. Besides, the rules of inheritance allow a person to leave a maximum of one-third of his property to people other than his heirs. This is what is covered by will. In other words, a person's will should not exceed one-third of his or her property. Furthermore, it is not possible for anyone to make a will in favor of anyone of his heirs. The heirs receive only their shares apportioned to them by Allah as outlined in the Qur'an.

This system is both fair and logical. The top priority is given to the settlement of debts, because debt represents an advantage enjoyed by the deceased during his life by the courtesy of another person. The amount of the loan given to the deceased for the debt incurred by him does not belong to the deceased. Nor is any part of his estate. It belongs to the lender. Hence, it must be paid back without delay and prior to the sharing out of the property by the heirs of the deceased.

Again the payment of what the deceased has left by will takes precedence, because the will embodies the owner's wishes. That is to say, every person is given the privilege of deciding how a certain portion of his money should be used after his death. His right to determine that is stronger than the claim of his heirs to their portion. Normally a will is made in favor of relatives other than one's heirs. Those relatives may be poor or elderly, or ones who were looked after the deceased during his lifetime, but they are not included among his heirs. Alternatively, a will is made for general charitable purposes. This means that this provision of will allows everyone a chance to earn reward after his death. However, in order not to give a chance to anyone to abuse this provision by depriving his heirs of their rightful claims, the ceiling of one-third is imposed on the share of property one may bequeath by will.

Sa'ad ibn Abu Waqas fell ill and he was visited by the Prophet, peace be upon him. Sa'ad said to the Prophet, peace be upon him: "Messenger of Allah, I have only one daughter to inherit me. Shall I make a will covering the larger portion of my property?" The Prophet, peace be upon him, said, "No." Sa'ad asked: "How about one half?" The Prophet's answer was again in the negative. Sa'ad then asked: "One-third then?" The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "One-third is all right, but even that, one-third is much." He then gave piece of advice: "To leave your heirs rich is better than leaving them poor, asking people for help."

The fact that Allah has taken care to determine the share of heirs Himself and to outline these shares in perfect detail in the Qur'an is evidence of the seriousness of the whole matter of inheritance. Had the distribution of estate been left to people to determine as they choose, the door would have been left open for unfair treatment of one's heirs and to absurdities of the type we hear about in other cultures, when people leave large sums of money to their dogs and cats.

When we do not implement Allah's law as He has laid down, we create problems for ourselves of which your case is a very clear example. You have divided your father's property before settling his debts and enforcing his will. When everyone has received his or her share they are unwilling to pay back their shares for the debts to be settled. That is unfair. Had you repaid your father's debts first and enforced his will,

the problem would not have arisen. The shares of your fellow heirs would have been less than what they have already received and they would not have been able to do anything about it.

The first mistake was made by your father, when he asked his heirs to pay his debts. He had no reason to do so. If his property is sufficient for repayment, the debts will automatically be settled. If not, you as his son and your brothers and sisters [and your mother] are responsible for their settlement.

Repayment of a deceased person's debts is so important; because lending money in Islamic society is an aspect of social security, since it earns the lender no interest other than Allah's reward. If people are to lose the money they lend because the borrower dies, they will be very reluctant to help their brothers who need to borrow. To emphasize the seriousness of the whole matter, the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not offer the prayer for the deceased, i.e. Janazah, if he had debts to settle. Once the body of a dead person was brought into the mosque for prayer. The Prophet, peace be upon him, inquired about his financial affairs and he was told that he had some debts outstanding. The Prophet, peace be upon him, indicated that he would not lead the Janazah prayer and told his companions to go ahead and offer that prayer. One of them Abu Talha, declared that he would repay the debts on behalf of the deceased. The Prophet, peace be upon him, led that prayer. Later the financial situation of the Muslim state improved the Prophet, peace be upon him, himself, as head of the state, settled the debts of anyone who died leaving no money to repay his loans.

Your fellow heirs cannot disclaim their responsibility for your father's debts since he left sufficient funds to settle them. Nor have they any justification to tell you to use what he has left for charity in order to repay his debts. That money does not belong to them in order to determine how it should be used. They are simply using someone else's property to dodge their own responsibility. What you should do is to explain the situation to them and to tell them that their attitude is unlawful. If they still insist, then your best course of action is to settle those debts yourself. By so doing, you prove yourself to be a highly dutiful son. You discharge your father's obligations and allow him to have the reward of his charitable act. You will receive abundant reward from Allah for doing your duty by your father. You will not fail to enjoy Allah's blessing in this life for being so kind and dutiful. May Allah help you do what is right?

Inheritance: Shares Apportioned & Some Special Needs

In reply to a question on division of inheritance, (Feb. 28, 2005), you contended that it was obvious that the deceased husband registered two plots of land in his wife's and first son's (who needs special care) names only for convenience. How can you tell that the income from these lands is not intended to guarantee the well being of both of them, after the father's death?

Is it not just possible that the deceased registered the two plots of land in their names with full intention to provide them with security?

It is usually the mother, who will spend the rest of her days supervising a disabled child, so she has to be secured in this way. Otherwise she will have to depend on relatives who may often lack interest. I think that might have been her husband's intention.

When we present readers' questions, we often summarize them and by doing so we may overlook some details although we take these into consideration when we

answer. It is the original question that led us to assume that the registration was for the sake of convenience. However, the point you raise needs to be addressed.

If a person realizes that some of his dependants may need special care after his death, he may make provisions for such care, provided however that he does not try to deprive other heirs of their shares, or part of such shares.

A person may give his wife a gift during his lifetime. There is nothing wrong with that, unless the gift is intended to favor her over other heirs. If a child needs special care and the father wants to secure this for the child, he should make this clear in the arrangements he chooses to make. He should tell his other children why he is making this arrangement and obtain their consent. The fact that the child needs special care does not give him or her any additional rights of inheritance. However the family could arrange for that in the proper way. It should be remembered that a father must not favor any of his children with a special gift. He must always be fair with them all, giving each a similar gift. But when the situation is such that one child will always remain dependant, then arrangements can be taken to provide this, explaining to the others what is intended.

Inheritance: Shares Of Inheritance — From Grandfather

Both my father and grandfather died on the same day, with my father being the first to die. I was only three at the time with an elder brother and sister. The law in my country gives grandchildren in such a case a share of the inheritance from the grandfather, but my uncles denied us our share, claiming that it was against God's law. Nor did they support us despite the fact that we were very poor. We could not enforce the law in our favor due to our poverty and young age. Now we are in a position to claim our rights, but my uncle who teaches Islam says that to give us anything from our grandfather's inheritance is against Islam, according to the Hanafi school of Fiqh. Please advise.

What your uncle says about the Hanafi school is correct. Not only so, but also other schools agree with this view. But this does not mean that this is the correct ruling or that any deviation from it is against God's law. Besides, your uncle should know that there is a basic rule in God's law, which states: "Gain is commensurate with liability." The gain in this case is the inheritance from your grandfather, and the liability is looking after your father's young children. If you and your brother and sister were poor after your father's death, then your grandfather takes over the responsibility for you and must look after you. When he died, your uncles were responsible for your living and your education until you were of an age to earn your own living. Why do people always remember their rights but are quick to forget their responsibilities?

Besides, your uncle also knows the great virtue of looking after orphans. Even if you were unrelated to him, he would have done much better to look after you, or to give you a share of your grandfather's estate. So, you certainly have a claim to press even at this late hour. With inheritance, which is a gain, certain responsibilities are tied. For example, if a man dies leaving no money, but having debts outstanding, his heirs are liable to repay his debts. The Prophet, peace be upon him, was asked by one of his companions if she should do the pilgrimage on behalf of her deceased father. He asked her: 'Had your father left a debt outstanding, would you have settled it?' She answered in the affirmative, and the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "A debt owing to God has a greater claim to be settled."

Having explained this, I need to explain that the law in your country, and indeed in other Muslim countries, giving grandchildren a share of their grandfather's inheritance in the case of their father having died earlier, is in no way against God's

law. Indeed, it is in line with it, while leaving young orphans in misery is against God's law. This situation is subject to a principle called 'the compulsory will'. This was formulated as an Islamic principle by Imam Ali ibn Hazm who lived around one thousand years ago. It gives the grandchildren a share of inheritance equal to their deceased father's share or one-third of the grandfather's estate, whichever is the lesser amount. The evidence supporting this principle is taken from the Qur'anic verse which says:

"It is prescribed for you, when death approaches any of you and he is leaving behind some property, to make bequests in favor of his parents and other near of kin in fairness. This is a duty incumbent on the God-fearing." [the Cow — "Al-Baqarah" 2: 180]

Note how the Qur'anic verse stresses the fairness aspect and makes ensuring it a duty incumbent on anyone who is God-fearing. How can a God-fearing person deprive such near of kin as young, orphan grandchildren, claiming that leaving them in poverty is what God's law requires, I simply cannot understand.

Now, if you present this to your uncle, he is likely to argue that he is following the Hanafi school, or that this verse is abrogated, or make some other argument. He may make an argument that the court accepts, and he may be able to get away with whatever he has taken. All this is possible, but then what will he really gain? If he makes such arguments, then you should remind him of the Hadith that says: "I am only a human being and you put to me your disputes. One of you may be able to present a better argument than his brother does, and I may rule in his favor. Let him know that if I give him something that belongs to his brother, then I am only giving him a brand of fire. He may take it or leave it."

Inheritance: Shares Of Inheritance — Specific Query

My friend's father died recently. My friend has two brothers and three sisters, and also his grandfather. How is the deceased's property to be divided?

You have not told me if your friend's mother, i.e. the deceased's wife, has also survived him, or if he has another wife. Anyway, if the deceased's wife is also alive she inherits one-eighth of his property, and if he has more than one wife, they share equally the same share of one-eighth. The deceased's father, i.e. your friend's grandfather inherits one-sixth of the property. The remainder goes to his children to be divided between them on the basis of two shares for a son and one share for a daughter.

It should be remembered, however, that this division applies after the payment of the basic dues, which are, the costs of the deceased's burial, any outstanding debts and any bequests he might have made in a will giving money to charity or to relatives who are not his heirs, which should not exceed 1/3rd of the assets after payment of the basic dues.] When all these dues have been paid, his property is divided on the lines I have indicated.

Inheritance: the Prophet's Inheritance

In a recent article, the writer referred to the plot of land owned by the Prophet, peace be upon him, in Fadak and that it was not divided among his heirs as per the Islamic law of inheritance. Since Islamic law applied to the Prophet, peace be upon him, in his personal capacity, should not this have taken place and the Prophet's heirs should have shared the land?

Generally speaking, what you said about the applicability of Islamic law to the Prophet, peace be upon him, is correct. Throughout his lifetime, the Prophet, peace be upon him, attended to all duties required of all Muslims and refrained from all prohibitions. However, there are certain rules that applied to him only and in which no other Muslim shared. For example, he was not restricted as to the maximum number of wives he might marry. God gave him this concession because he needed to use such marriages for different purposes. Such exceptions are either stated clearly in the Qur'an, or confirmed in authentic Hadiths. Other rules, which applied to him only, included the fact that no Muslim could marry a widow of the Prophet, peace be upon him, after his death. This is clearly stated in Verse 53 of Surah 33.

While these exceptions applied to Muhammad, peace be upon him, certain rules applied to him and to other prophets before him.

One of these rules was that when a prophet died, he was to be buried at the spot where his death occurred. Hence, the Prophet, peace be upon him, was buried in Ayesha's home.

With regard to his inheritance, a rule he had explained was brought into force. When his daughter, Fatimah, requested his inheritance, Abu Bakr told her that he heard the Prophet, peace be upon him, when he said: "We prophets are not to be inherited. Whatever property we may leave is left as Sadaqah [i.e. charity]." Fatimah accepted that and acted on it. May God be pleased with her. There was no disagreement between them.

Inheritance: Two Wives

My father died recently, leaving behind our mother, a stepmother, three sons and one daughter. All children are from the same mother, as our stepmother did not beget any children by my father. My father left money in bank accounts, saving schemes and other property, but they are all deposited in his name jointly with the name of our stepmother. Could you please explain how his property should be divided.

Since your father earned all the money only, then it is all his money. The fact that it is held in joint accounts does not alter the fact. The division of your father's estate is very simple. Assuming that he had no other heirs, which would be the case if both his parents are dead, then his property is divided as follows: one-eighth goes to his wives, shared equally between them. This means that your mother and your stepmother inherit one-sixteenth each of all his property. This applies to all his accounts, cash, house, shop, furniture, etc. What should be explained here is that a wife inherits one-quarter of her husband's property if he leaves no children behind. If a child or more survives him, then her share is one-eighth. If he has more than one wife surviving him, and married to him at the point of his death, then they share this portion equally. Since your father had two wives, each takes one-sixteenth. A man who leaves behind three wives and children, each wife's share is one-third of one-eighth, and if they are four wives, then each takes a-quarter of one-eighth. This is not unfair, because a woman's children are responsible for her and they must look after her. The Islamic rule assigns gain in relation to responsibility.

After giving one-eighth to the two widows, the remainder is divided into seven portions, with your sister taking one portion and the other six are given to the three sons, each taking two portions.

Now it is possible that a woman in your stepmother's position may claim that your father had given her half his wealth as a gift. If she makes such a claim and it is not true, then she would be taking what does not belong to her. This is forbidden. A court of law may not be able to prove her wrong, but this is what the Prophet, peace be

upon him, spoke against when he said that some people may have a strong argument to support their claims. "If I give you something that does not belong to you, then I am giving you a brand of fire, and it is up to you to take it or leave it."

Inheritance: Undutiful Son & His Inheritance

1. A relative of mine has one son by his first wife and two more as well as four daughters by his second wife. Relations between the first son and his stepmother were not very good all the time. As he was managing his father's properties, he moved with his own family into one of his father's houses. There was a long dispute between father and son and the latter complained to the village administrative committee, headed by his own friends. They excommunicated the father making a manifestly one-sided verdict. Insulted and irritated, the father has transferred many of his own properties to his second wife and her children and made a will that his first wife's son should not inherit anything from him. The father has now died. May I ask what Islam says about his own and his son's action? How to divide the properties?

2. A close friend of mine, who has a son and a daughter by his previous marriage (since divorced), has gifted all his land and property to his second wife and his children by her. He has, however, taken due care to adequately provide for his daughter by his first marriage while denying the same to his son, due to his gross disobedience and misbehavior towards him. He says that this is permissible under the provisions relating to an undutiful child. Could you please comment on this action in the light of Islamic law of inheritance?

3. Burdened with a son who indulges in every vice, such as drinking, gambling, rape, etc., a married couple decided to put their house as an endowment to the local mosque. They feared that if their son takes it after their death, he would sell it to spend the money on his bad habits. Are they correct in so doing?

The apparent similarity between these two letters and the problems they outline is highly significant. The problem is not peculiar to any particular community. In fact, this story is heard often, when friction between stepmother and her husband's children develops into a long-drawn dispute. It is more likely for such a problem to become irreconcilable when the father is rich and when he is too busy or too involved to take an objective attitude to protect the rights of every one concerned. While no one disputes the right of the father to have a second wife, if his first wife dies or if his marriage is not successful, or indeed for other reasons, he must be careful not to allow friction to develop between his second wife and his children by his earlier marriage. Such friction does not only spoil the happy family life but it can easily lead to problems which may earn the father himself Allah's displeasure, if he becomes unfair to any party among his closest relatives.

In both these stories, we find the father resorting to the extreme measure of transferring his property to his second wife and her children. In the first case, the father denies his son by his first marriage the right to inherit him. In the second, the father tries to give his actions a legal aspect by saying that he is invoking certain provision in the Islamic law of inheritance. In the first one, he is making a will depriving his son of inheriting from him. Neither action can be sanctioned by Islam.

It is quite possible that the father in such a case becomes very unhappy with his son who may resort to measures which are unacceptable and in conflict with his duty to be kind and respectful toward his father. Such actions by the son may appear to his

father worse than they really are, especially if the son is consistently accused of disrespect and furthering his own interests without giving due regards to his father. However, the father must never forget his responsibilities and must be careful to give every one of his family what is due to them of care, love and fair treatment. I cannot help the feeling that the father in the first case has been heavily leaning toward one side in the dispute in his family. I imagine that the son would not have dared complain about his father to the village committee without having very good grounds for making such a complaint. In a village community, a son, especially an adult, is expected to be dutiful to his father and not to oppose him in any fashion. It seems, however, that the dispute was a fierce one, and probably continued for a very long time. The son has been able to persuade a committee to pronounce a verdict against his father, although the members of the committee must have been keenly aware of the difficulty of their task and that they must never violate the village rules of propriety and morality. My reader describes their verdict as one sided. It may have been so, but was the father's attitude throughout the dispute a fair one, or did he lean to one side more than the other?

In both cases, the father must have never allowed the situation to worsen so badly. He should have stopped the fire before it burnt the peace in his family. Be that as it may, the fire could not be put off with the sort of measure to which both fathers had recourse, namely, denying the son his right of inheritance. I am amazed at the suggestion that this can be sanctioned by Islam under certain provisions. This is certainly not the case.

The Islamic law of inheritance is very detailed and its details have been given to us by Allah Himself. It is not possible, therefore, to add to it or delete from it any provisions. What Allah has ordered must be obeyed, if it sometimes appears to us that a certain clause, which has not been included in this law, may be appropriate. One of the balanced rules of this law of inheritance is that no one can give any of his heirs an extra portion of his estate by will. It is, therefore, not open to any father to give any of his children a little extra on top of his or her apportioned share. On the other hand, no father may disinherit any of his children. Their shares have been determined by Allah and they are entitled to them, disregarding the parents' wishes and desires.

It appears, however, that in both cases, the fathers have resorted to other measures, assigned their properties to those of their heirs, whom they favored, having little to be divided according to the law of inheritance. Such a transfer of property during the lifetime of its owner and when he is in possession of his senses is accepted as legal. However, that legality is merely formal. Allah will undoubtedly hold the father to account for his action. The father will have to justify it and such a justification may be beyond him. How can he answer Allah when he asks him: How can you prevent your son from receiving what I have assigned to him by way of inheritance?

What I am trying to say here is that although a court of law may approve the measures taken by the father as legal, he still has to justify them to Allah who knows true intentions and motives as well as circumstances. If the other heirs of the father want to be kind to him, they will hold a meeting of reconciliation and divide the property left by the father according to the rules of the Islamic way of inheritance.

In the first case, the reader asks how the property should be divided. In all, the father has left behind one wife, three sons and four daughters. His wife inherits one eighth of all the properties and the remainder is divided into ten equal shares. Each of the four daughters receives one share while every one of the three sons receives two shares. In other words, if the second wife of the man and her children want to lighten the burden of the father, they should give the son by his first marriage a share, which amounts to less than one fifth of his father's property. By doing so, they would do the father a great act of kindness and they help bring about a reconciliation

within the family. Who knows, but the sons and daughters of the second marriage may find themselves in need of their elder brother who will be ready to help, if he feels that they have nothing against him. They can demonstrate that by giving him that to which he is entitled by his father's property.

[Added: If you gift some of your property during your lifetime to any of your children for a very cogent reason, you may do so. If, however, you are doing so because you feel that a particular child, e.g., the eldest son or a daughter, should inherit more because according to you the share fixed by rules of inheritance are not to your liking or that they are not fair, then you will be placing your wisdom above that of Allah and you will be answerable to Allah for He is all wise and knows best.

3. What we need to understand is that whatever money or property we have does not belong to us in the first place. It belongs to God and He places us in charge of it. Therefore, when we die, we have no right to it. We cannot control what happens to it after our death. Hence, the Prophet, peace be upon him, tells us that "God has bestowed a favor on you, giving you one-third of your property." This means that we may bequeath by will an amount not exceeding one-third of the total sum of our money and property. This should be given to deserving relatives who are not our heirs, to poor people or to an ongoing good purpose. Apart from that, whatever we have goes to our heirs according to the shares they have been given by the Divine system of inheritance. It is not possible for a person to favor one heir above others, or to disinherit any of his or her heirs.

This means that if you have three sons, you cannot give one of them anything by will. They receive their shares equally. You cannot deprive any of them of his shares. These have been given by God. How can we change them?

The only case when a son or a daughter does not inherit from a parent, or vice versa, is that in which one of the parties follows a religion other than Islam. If the deceased and the heir have different religions, they do not inherit each other. So, in this case, the parents may not do anything intended to deprive their son of his right to inherit. However, they make an endowment or give to other relatives by will something equal to one-third of their property. If the value of the house is within this amount, then it is possible, but if the house represents the larger part of their assets, then it cannot be done.

The parents should not regret this situation. They do not know what will happen to their son. They should continue to pray to God that he may mend his ways and realize that the way of life he is leading will land him in trouble, sooner or later, and will incur God's punishment. If he does, he will be all the better having received his inheritance.

Inheritance: Unfair Division

My father died 20 years ago, leaving behind 3 sons and 3 daughters. He also left 3 houses. Six years later, my second brother agreed terms of settlement with our eldest brother and received a sum of money. He and I transferred our shares to register them in our eldest brother's name. My mother has 2 other houses, which she had inherited from her father. Of late, she has been insisting on registering them in the names of her two youngest children, i.e. my youngest sister and myself. This was done in the case of my sister, but I have refused, insisting that all division should be carried out according to Islamic law. Now my eldest sister has sent a lawyer's notice demanding her share. The matter is further complicated by the fact that my eldest brother has paid much money on the renovation of the houses. Should I accept what my mother wants to do?

You have to differentiate two things here: your father's inheritance, and your mother's houses. As your mother is still alive, she must not favor two of her children by giving them her two houses. This is a gift, and parents' gifts should be based on absolute fairness. If your mother wants to give this gift to you and your sister, she should give each one of her sons and daughters a house. If she cannot, then she should not give such gifts. Let the matter run its course and when she dies, her property is inherited according to the Islamic law of inheritance. The Prophet, peace be upon him, warned very strictly on this issue, calling on all parents to fear God and maintain justice between their children.

As for the inheritance of your father, it is wrong to leave it for such a long time without assigning to all heirs their respective shares. Such delay always results in unnecessary problems. Had such division been done, the 3 houses and the rest of your father's property would have been valued and divided as follows: one-eighth goes to your mother, and the remainder is divided into 9 shares, one share for each of the three daughters and two shares for each of the three sons. This remains the case.

What should be done is a similar valuation, after the deduction of the expenses borne by your eldest brother in improving the property. Since your second brother received his share, your eldest brother should be compensated for what he paid by giving him the share he had bought from his brother. If such division is done now, the need for your sister seeking a lawyer's assistance will be unnecessary. In all this, you have to maintain fairness.

I congratulate my reader on his stand, refusing to take anything, which cannot be approved under Islamic law. He should maintain this position and impress on his mother that she should bring her action in line with Islamic law, which requires absolute fairness among all children.

Inheritance: Various Situations & the Shares

1. A woman died leaving behind her husband, one son as well as two brothers and four sisters. Who are her heirs and what shares do they have? The husband of that woman got married again, without having any children by his second wife. He died some years later. His only son offered his widow a share of one-quarter of his father's estate, but there were some objection. Who will take care of the man's second wife, considering that he has her parents alive and one brother?
2. In the event of the death of the couple's son, who will inherit him, considering that he has a wife, one son and three daughters?
3. Who are the heirs, and in what proportion of a woman who leaves behind her parents, husband, 3 daughters as well as brothers and sisters?
4. I bought two plots of land in a housing scheme, registering one in my name and the other in my father's name. Later he transferred the plot of land to my wife, but people say that on her death, the land will go to her brothers and sisters. Please explain if this is true, considering that we have one son and two daughters.
5. Just before my grandmother's death a few months ago, she said that she wanted her property to be spent on any mosque. She has two daughters and one brother who is very poor; and has two daughters who could not get married because of their poverty. My grandmother had only a small house, which would be of great help to her brother if he is allowed to inherit her. Should the family obey my grandmother's wishes or should her brother be allowed to take over the property?

6. A man has passed away leaving behind a family and considerable property; some of it earned in ways that Islam does not permit. His family have no source of income. Can they take their share of inheritance to survive?

7. A man died leaving behind his wife and five children. The family home was owned jointly by him and his wife. All the five children decided to give the other half of the house to their mother, feeling that any of them can stay with her if needed. Now, many years later, the mother wants to give the house over to one of her granddaughters and her husband, arguing that they will look after her better than her own children. She says that in her lifetime, she can do what she likes with her property. Please comment.

8. A father had given his son a loan to use in his business. Now the son is refusing to repay the loan to his father. Is it permissible for the father to reduce his son's share of inheritance to the extent of the amount of the loan in order to ensure justice between his children? Is such type of will permissible in Islam?

9. In one of your answers about inheritance you said that the brothers of a deceased person would inherit nothing if his father survives him. Would it not be correct to say that this is true if he is survived by one child, whether son or daughter? Kindly explain the division of the property of a deceased person if he is survived by his wife, one daughter, as well as by his brothers and sisters. Both his parents are deceased.

1. Only her husband and her son inherit the first woman. None of her brothers and sisters have any share of her inheritance. Her husband inherits one quarter of all her property, and her son takes the rest, i.e. three-quarters. This is a case, which demonstrates the right to bequeath some of one's property by will. If the woman's brothers and sisters are in difficult circumstances, and she was well off, then she could do something for them by will. Every Muslim is entitled to make bequests to people who have no right of inheritance from him in amounts which do not exceed in total one third of his or her property. If the woman did not make such a will, her brothers and sisters will not have anything of her inheritance.

When her husband died, his heirs were his widow, i.e. the second wife and his son. His wife inherits one eighth of his property, and his son takes the rest. The man's brothers and sisters do not inherit anything except by will, if one was made. When his son offered a share of one quarter to his stepmother, it was a generous offer. She could have taken it and considered half of that amount as high right and the other half as gift from the son. The woman's father is the one responsible for her again after the death of her husband. There is no responsibility on her stepson, considering that she has her father and her brothers to look after her. However, if they are in difficult circumstances and the stepson is well off, he would be doing a great act of dutifulness to his father by looking after his widow, although that is only a stepmother.

2. At the death of that man, his wife takes one eighth of his property. The remainder is divided between his son and three daughters on the basis of one share for each daughter and two shares for the son. In other words, what is left after the wife takes her share of one eighth, is divided into five shares, one share for each daughter and two shares for the one son.

3. The woman's husband has a share of one quarter, while each of her parents inherits one sixth of her property. Her three daughters share a portion equaling two thirds of her property. Nothing is due to her brothers, sisters, uncles or aunts. These

shares add up to more than the whole property. Therefore, we reduce them proportionately so as to maintain the differences.

Suppose the estate is divided out of 12 shares, the woman's husband should take 3 shares, while each of her parents should take 2 shares. Her daughters divide 8 shares equally between them. When we make the appropriate reduction, we give the husband 3 out of 15, and each of the two parent's 2 shares out of 15. The three daughters take 8 shares out of 15 and divide equally between them.

4. It is not true that your wife's brothers and sisters will inherit her, if her children survive her. You have not told me whether either of her parents is alive or not. Assuming that neither is alive at the time of her death, and that she is survived by you and her children, all her property will be divided in this way: One quarter of all her estate will be yours as your apportioned share.

The remainder, or three quarters of her estate, will go to her children, with her son taking twice as much as each of her two daughters. In other words, her son will inherit half of three-quarter of her estate. The other half [of three-quarters] will be shared equally between her two daughters.

5. What your grandmother said is verbal will. A will is valid when it is only verbal, provided that it is appropriately witnessed. However, in Islam a will may not exceed one third of the property of the person concerned. So, a will in the form of "all my property should go to this or that purpose" is not valid.

If this will is to be validated and carried out, it must be approved by all the heirs of your grandmother after her death. If the approval is given during the lifetime of the person who is making such a will, exceeding the amount to which he is entitled, which is one third, then that approval is invalid. It is an approval given by someone whose entitlement to what he is approving is not real yet. Hence, it is of no value.

The heirs of your grandmother are her two daughters and her brother. Her two daughters inherit two thirds of all her property and they share it equally between them. The remainder, which is one third, goes to her brother on the basis that he is the nearest relative to her after her daughters have taken their shares. This division applies to all your grandmother's property, including her house, any cash she might have had, and any other form of property. If your grandmother's daughters decided that in the circumstances they would rather leave the house to her brother, they may do so. They would be giving him a gift. But no pressure should be brought to bear on them to do so.

6. You have not specified the means by which this man has earned his money. If it is through means that the law in the land where he lived allows, but they are not allowed in Islam, such as lottery, running a night club, and similar methods, then the money he leaves behind is his own. When he dies, his family inherits it in the normal way, as the money itself is not contaminated by the way it is earned. On the other hand if the money is obtained by theft or armed robbery and the owners are known, it should be returned to those owners as soon as possible.

In this latter case, if the heirs of the dying man return it to its rightful owners, their action may lessen the burden of their deceased relative. If its owners are unknown and there is no way of knowing them, then his family should do something on behalf of the deceased.

7. Many people think that they can dispense with their money as they wish during their lifetime. Hence they may take some action which favors one or more of their children over the others. Or they may deprive all their children of their rightful shares. This is an act of grave injustice, which is not acceptable in Islam.

May I mention here the incidence, which I have related many times in the past, concerning the man who gave one of his children a slave as a gift and wanted the Prophet, peace be upon him, to be a witness to that. The Prophet, peace be upon him, asked him whether he had given every one of his children a similar gift. When the man answered in the negative, the Prophet, peace be upon him, told him to seek some other witness because he would not witness an act of injustice. He then added a word of advice to all believers, saying: "Fear God and maintain justice between your children." Hadith practically condemns the idea of giving one child without giving all other children similar gifts, and it calls it an act of injustice. That is a clear evidence that we do not have absolute freedom to dispense with our money at will, even when we are in the prime of life, thinking that death is still too far away.

What we have to remember is that Islam has a totally different view to that of other societies which give total freedom to the individuals to disperse with his money in his lifetime and after his death as he or she pleases. Thus we hear sometimes that a rich person has left a large amount of money to his dog or cat, or he has deprived one or more of his children of their rights of inheritance in order to give others all his wealth. In Islam, all money and property belong to God, who has put us in charge of what we have for as long as we live. Therefore, we are answerable to God about the way in which we spend our money. Moreover, our authority over what we have ends at the moment of our death. We have no say on the way our money is divided after we die. However, He has given us the privilege of making bequests to those who are not our heirs, amounting to no more than the third of our property.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, describes this as a charity given by God to us, so that we may dispense with it in a way which benefits some deserving people and earn us reward from God. This means that the will we may have must not exceed one-third of our property, and should go to poor people and our relatives who are not our heirs [or for continuing acts of charity].

In the case we are considering, the mother commits a grave error if she feels that she can do what she likes with her money. That is contrary to Islamic teachings. Moreover, she is wrong to deprive her children of their inheritance, even though she feels that her granddaughter will look after her better. What she can do is to leave something by will to her granddaughter, as the latter is not her heir. The maximum of what she can leave her is one-third of all her property.

8. There are certain principles that must apply in this case. The first is that the father has complete authority over his money and may be able to spend it, or dispose of it as he pleases during his lifetime. However, this right is qualified by certain values and considerations, which must be observed. One of these is that he must maintain justice among his children. This applies to gifts as well as other matters. The second principle is that when a person dies, then he has no longer any jurisdiction over his money or property. The rights of inheritance come into effect, and his property must be divided among his heirs according to the elaborate Islamic system of inheritance.

Another principle, which is highly relevant here, is that no person may increase or reduce the share of any of his heirs, which is apportioned by God Himself. Hence, the Prophet, peace be upon him, lays down the rule that "No will may be made in favor of an heir." Any Muslim may leave by will an amount not exceeding one-third of all his property to any person who is not one of his heirs. This privilege is given in order to provide a way for a person to look after some relatives who do not get a share of his inheritance, or to leave something to charity. Hence, heirs are not allowed to benefit by this provision. This is to prevent any injustice. At the same time, it is not permissible to disinherit any of one's heirs. That is not possible.

In the light of these principles, the father in this case cannot utilize his will to recover the loan his own owes him. At the same time, it is not right for the son to take a loan

from his father and decide not to pay it back. That is paying kindness with injustice. That is unacceptable. The father may remedy the situation and ensure justice among his children in one of two ways.

This first is to give each one of his other children an amount equal to the loan he had given his son. He would then tell his children that he has given them the money as a gift to make sure that they are treated equally. The father may decide to do this if he is rich enough to make such gift without putting himself into any difficulty. The other method is to make a declaration that his son owes him the amount of the loan, and that he has never agreed to give this loan to him as a gift. He then gets this declaration signed and witnessed, preferably in the presence of his children, including the one who had taken the loan. It is then for the man's heirs to claim the loan from the debtor's son when the man dies.

They should be able to get the loan back when they divide the inheritance among them. The father may be able to make this a firmer commitment by getting his son to sign a document specifying the amount of the loan he had given him. That would be an acknowledgement of the loan, which may be paid back at the time of dividing the father's inheritance.

9. The answer to the first point is in the negative. What I have written in my original reply is correct. The deceased has to be survived by at least one son or by his father for his brothers and sisters not to be included among his heirs.

If he has no surviving father and he has no son, then his brothers and sisters inherit what remains after the heirs have taken their shares allocated to each of them by God. When daughters survive their parents and they have no brother, they inherit either one half of the property, if there is only one daughter or two thirds of the property if they are more than one and they share that portion of two-thirds equally between them. In the case the reader cites, the deceased is survived by his wife and one daughter. His wife inherits one-eighth of his property, and his daughter one-half. As he has no surviving parents, the remainder goes to his brothers and sisters, and it is shared out between them on the basis that each sister takes one share and each brother takes two shares.

Inheritance: When Division Is Not Made Promptly

We live in our family home, which was built by my grandfather. At the time of his death, my grandfather had five sons and one daughter. Only the youngest of my uncles remains alive. My father, his sister and other brothers are all dead. Of them all, only my father had any children and we are three brothers. My surviving uncle says that he does not want any share of the property as he is very old and has no children. The problem we are now facing is that my aunt's husband is now claiming her share and wants to donate it to charity. We offered him some money for his share, but he said that he does not want any money. He is 95 and seems to be suffering from dementia. What claim does he have on our family property?

You certainly have a complicated problem, which would have been more serious had your uncles had children of their own. The complication results from the fact that your family did not take the advice of the Prophet, peace be upon him, who stresses the need to divide inheritance as soon as possible after the death of a person. What your family should have done was that after each death, the inheritance of the deceased should be divided in accordance with the Islamic law of inheritance. Instead, your family opted for leaving it undivided and now it is difficult to ascertain the share of anyone who is entitled to a share. It is not only your aunt's widower that

has a claim, which could be substantial, but there may be others. It is your responsibility, together with your brothers, to establish who has a share and give them their shares. I will explain.

Since the family home belonged to your grandfather, you have to ascertain who were his heirs. If his wife was alive, she would inherit one-eighth, and the rest would go to his children. This should have been divided into eleven shares, with one-share goes to your aunt and two shares each to your father and your uncles. When she died, her share and the rest of her property would go to her children in the same way, i.e. 2 shares to each son and 1 share to her daughter. Let us assume that this was the original sharing of the house, which assumes also that your grandparents died when all their children were alive.

When your aunt died, her husband would take one half of all her property including her share in the family home, since they did not have any children. The other half would be shared equally between her surviving brothers. But how much was her share? If she was the first to die after her parents, then her share would be the original one she got from them. But if any of her brothers, apart from your father, died first, she would inherit from them because they had no children. She inherited nothing from your father because he had you and your two brothers. But how much would she inherit from each brother?

Here we come to the possibility of other heirs. If either one of your two late uncles who were married was survived by his wife, then his wife would inherit one-fourth of his property, including his share in the house, since he had no children. When such a widow died, her share would go to her own heirs. These could be her parents, brothers and sisters, or nephews and nieces as the case may be. The other three-quarters of such an uncle's property go to his surviving brothers and sister, to be shared out on the basis of 1 share for a sister and 2 for a brother. As for your uncle who died without being married, his surviving brothers and sister inherit him on the same lines.

What this requires is a proper study and calculation to ascertain each one's share. You say that your surviving uncle says he does not want any share of the property. May be, and should he die, you and your brothers seem to be his only heirs, but you cannot tell. He may survive you all. Hence, the need for calculating what share is by who is urgent. Your aunt's widower is within his right to claim his share, which could be substantial, because it is half of his wife's property. If two or three of her brothers died before her, her share would have increased, and his would now be greater. So, you have no option but to buy his share from him.

Moreover, it is your duty to make sure that if there are other heirs, who would be the heirs of your late uncles' widows, they are made aware of their rights and settlement should be sought. You need to ascertain their exact shares and buy them from them. If they are not aware of their rights, you have to contact them and make them aware of them. In this way, you make sure that what comes to you is only your right and it is halal. Unless you do so, you may be usurping other people's property, and this is forbidden as you are well aware.

Inheritance: When Grandfather Survives the Father

My friend, who has two brothers and three sisters, lost his father recently. However, my friend's grandfather is alive. How is the inheritance to be divided?

You have not told me whether the deceased man's wife has survived him or not. If she is alive, she inherits one-eighth of his property. His father, i.e. your friend's grandfather, inherits one-sixth, and the remainder is divided into 9 shares, with one share to each of the man's three daughters and two shares each to his three sons.

This is based on the instructions given in Verses 12-13 of Surah 4, which gives a surviving parent one-sixth of the property in the case where a deceased person has children, and one-eighth to his surviving wife. If the man's wife is not alive, the whole property is divided in the same manner we have outlined.

Inheritance: Who Gets Death Compensation

A man was killed in a road accident leaving behind his 35-year-old-wife and two daughters aged 15 and 12, one brother and three sisters. Sometime later, the widow received a sum of money that included his final salary, certain benefits, and compensation. When the deceased's brother and sisters heard of this, they demanded that the two girls should be handed over to them together with the money, saying that they are the ones who deserve it, and that they will look after the girls. The deceased also owned a house inherited from his parents. Could you please explain who has a claim to a portion of the money and in what shares.

What is amazing in this story is that the girls' uncle and their aunts did not ask them to join their families earlier. Now they feel that it is their responsibility to look after them. Why is it that an orphan girl with inheritance is welcome at her uncle's, but not the one without such inheritance? It should be always remembered that the basic rule that applies in such situations, and in many others, is that "gain is commensurate with liability."

Having said that, I should explain that custody of young children belongs to their mother, unless she gets married or forfeits her right in some other way. In this case custody is transferred to the children's maternal grandmother. Next in line is their paternal grandmother. Such custody is always given to a woman, choosing the closest available, with preference for the mother's side. For boys, custody continues until the child is able to look after himself in matters of food, clothes and cleanliness. For girls, it continues further, with different views voiced by different scholars and schools of Fiqh. Some extend it until the girl gets married. Others who give a lesser age also give the child the right to choose between his parents, making it clear that the choice can be changed at any time. The two girls in this case are able to make their choice and if they choose their mother, their uncle and aunts will have no claim to them.

The money received by the widow, including compensation, or blood money, and salaries and benefits, should be added to the rest of his estate, such as the family home and the rest of his belonging and divided among his heirs in accordance with the Islamic law of inheritance. Since the deceased man's parents are not alive, his heirs are his wife, two daughters, brother and three sisters. Each has a different share as follows: One-eighth for his widow, two-thirds for the two girls to be divided equally between them. The remainder goes to his brother and sisters, dividing it such that sisters are equal in their class and for a sister half of a brother's share.

Thus, the entire estate, including the sum received by the widow, should be divided into 24 shares, with three shares going to the widow, eight shares to each of the man's two daughters, and two shares to his brother and one share to each of his three sisters.

Inheritance: Will That Should Not Be Implemented

Before his death, my husband wrote a will which makes me the whole beneficiary of the house he owned, whether I wish to occupy or let it, provided that I do not get married. If I am married again, the house should be sold, in which case I get 50 percent of the price and my husband's son and two daughters would share the other half equally. My late husband's children understand and accept his will. I am now considering selling the house, but a relative of mine has created some doubts in my mind about the legitimacy of my husband's will. I would be grateful for your advice. May I ask full guidance on how I should write my own will? I have no children of my own, but I have one sister and two brothers, only one of who is a full brother. May I add that in my country the Islamic family law is not recognized?

One of the most important aspects of Islamic law is the way it deals with inheritance which is an area where it is easy to deny the rights of the weaker elements in the family and in society at large. For example, there are certain communities, some of whom profess to be Muslims, but nevertheless deny women all rights of inheritance. In other areas where the marriage of a daughter is an extremely expensive affair for her father, it is considered that if a father had married off his daughters, then he had done all his duty by them and whatever estate he leaves behind should be shared by his sons. I realize that none of this applies to the Muslim community in your country. However, because you are a small minority, many people tend to accept, knowingly or unknowingly, the prevailing traditions or laws thinking that Islam has no objection to them.

Your husband has made out his will thinking that it serves the best interests of his surviving relatives. It may be so, but he did not refer to the Islamic law of inheritance, which is very detailed. What I would like you to know is that the Islamic law of inheritance has been laid down by Allah Himself who has stated its provisions in detail, apportioning shares of the estate to close relatives in all cases. Scholars have studied this system in depth and its provisions have been made clear for all situations. Hence, there can be no excuse for a Muslim man or woman to deal unjustly with any one of his or her heirs or to deny any of them his or her apportioned share, or indeed to give any of his heirs more than the share Allah has given him or her. What we have to remember is that no one may disinherit any heir, nor indeed can a person give any heir more than his or her apportioned share. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says very clearly: "No will may be made in favor of an heir."

You are one of your husband's heirs, according to the provisions of the Islamic law Allah Himself has enacted. Because your late husband had children, although they are by an earlier marriage, you are entitled to receive one eighth of everything that he had left behind, whether in real estate, cash, shares, furniture, etc. The remainder should be divided between his other relatives. You have not told me whether he left behind any other relatives, such as a parent, a grandparent, or other children. Assuming that he had none, then you are his only heir who has a specified share. When any debt he left outstanding had been paid out and when the provisions of his will to any person who is not an heir have been carried out, you receive one eighth of his estate. The other seven-eighths go to his children whom you have mentioned as

one son and two daughters. The son receives half of all that and the two daughters share the other half equally.

This is the division, which you should make sure to implement in order to comply with Allah's orders. You should speak to your late husband's children and explain the situation and carry out the division. You may end up receiving much less than what your late husband wanted you to receive, but his wishes cannot overrule divine orders. The thing to do with his will is to disregard it altogether so that he may not have to account for it on the Day of Judgement. Perhaps I should emphasize that what should be disregarded in his will is the provisions relating to you and his children. If the will includes other provisions, these should be carried out if they are in line with Islamic law.

If a Muslim does not leave any will, then all his estate should be divided among his heirs in accordance with the Islamic law. The will, from the Islamic point of view, is to cater for those relatives who are not among heirs, or to give away what a person wants to give to charity. Therefore, you need not make a will in favor of your brothers and sister because they will receive their shares automatically if they are among your heirs. You have not told me whether any of your parents is alive. I can tell you that if your father is alive, then your sisters and two brothers will receive nothing. Assuming that you have no surviving parents or grandparents, and knowing that you have no children, then your brothers and sister are your only heirs. Your property should be divided into five portions, with your sister receiving one portion [20%] and two portions [40%] going to each of your brothers. If you need to make a will in their favor in order to ensure that they receive their proper share, then these are the lines on which you should make your will. Otherwise, you are entitled to dispose of one-third of your property as you deem fit, in order to look after some poor relatives who are not heirs, such as an aunt, a poor cousin, etc. By the way, if you decide to marry again, then the situation will change, because your new husband will be one of your heirs, and if you remain childless, then he would be entitled to receive one half of what you leave behind. If you have a child, then your husband's share will be reduced to one quarter. Moreover, if you have a child, then your brothers and sister will cease to be among your heirs.

In-laws: Duties Of A Woman Toward Parents-in-law

Could you please explain what are the duties of a woman toward her parents-in-law? Can she ask her husband not to require her to serve his parents, or, alternatively, that they should live separately so that he may serve them as he wishes. If she makes such a request, does she contravene any Islamic principles? In other words, is she required by Islam to serve her parents-in-law? Suppose that due to her attitude, her husband is pressurized by his parents to divorce her, what should his attitude be?

A woman is expected to show all the respect and kindness toward her husband's parents which may be expected from a dutiful daughter. Her husband must treat his parents kindly at all times and in all situations. He is required to show them respect and kindness and to behave toward them with compassion. If we say that a woman is supposed to act in unison with her husband, then the least she may do is to treat them with the respect a parent rightfully expects. Having said that, I should add that what we are talking about here is a genuine attitude, which is manifested through behavior. The behavior, however, is different from service.

According to Islam, a woman is not required to serve her husband's parents. He himself is required to look after his parents and try as hard as possible to ensure their comfort according to his means. This means that if a woman decides to serve her husband's parents, in deference to them, or out of love for her husband, she

does so voluntarily. Her attitude should be met with gratitude by her husband and his parents. Her kindness should be reciprocated. If she decides not to serve them, she violates no Islamic law or principle. Her husband may not force or pressure her into serving them, whether they share the same house or live separately.

When we understand these limitations, the relationship between parents and daughter-in-law acquires a different look. When someone does you a favor voluntarily, and you do not show your appreciation of that favor, he is bound to feel hurt. The least to be expected is that he does not readily continue to do you favors. When the kindness is returned, or at least appreciated with thanks, he finds all encouragement he needs to continue this fine attitude. If, on the other hand, a person is made to feel that his favor which he does voluntarily, is expected as a duty, when no religious or moral authority has imposed such a duty, then an attitude of rebellion begins to make itself felt. This may be the key to the whole problem about which you have asked.

What I can detect from your letter is that your wife has been made to serve your parents, with whom you live, and she was made to understand that it was her duty. I am not sure what her initial reaction was, but she might have accepted it, perhaps reluctantly, at first. She might have felt later that what was required of her was actually too much, or constituted a burden on her. You have not given me any idea of your family situation, but one can imagine a variety of situations when serving parents-in-law can be a real burden.

Suppose a woman has young children of her own and she has to look after them. Nowadays, young children are too demanding. The burden they present is quite a heavy one. Our modern times are different from those of the extended family, where a woman receives help with bringing up her young children from other women in the family. In addition to that, if she has to serve her parents-in-law, she may find that she is required to work long hours, without having enough rest. There is also the possibility that there is some sort of friction between your wife and your parents. This may come from her feeling that her service is not appreciated. As time passes, this tension leads to strained relations and, probably, an outburst of temper by one side or the other. When things reach such a stage, it becomes very difficult to remedy the situation.

In circumstances like these, a woman is within her right to ask her husband to move out of the family home. She wants to look after her immediate family, and not to have a relationship, which creates friction every now and then. Obviously the advantage she foresees in living alone is great. There will be no pressure on her and she can organize her family to her satisfaction.

It is normal in certain societies, that when the relationship within the family reaches this stage, the husband's parents may ask or suggest to him that he should divorce his wife. What should be his attitude in this case? I am afraid that if he acts on his parent's suggestion, he may be doing his wife and himself a great wrong. He must not forget that he is duty bound to look after his wife and ensure a comfortable life for her according to his means. So, he has the dual responsibility of looking after his wife and his parents. If he cannot fulfill both responsibilities while sharing the same house with his parents, it may be highly advisable that he moves out with his wife. If that prompts his parents to ask him to divorce his wife, he must not do so, as long as his wife fulfills her only duties toward him, their children and his parents. Once again, she is only bound to treat them with respect and kindness. Maybe when they move out, she is better able to fulfill that duty and to make its fulfillment felt by them.

This is a typical Oriental family problem. Islam has provided an easy solution for it, which requires everyone in the family to understand their duties and rights.

It may be felt by some readers that I am taking the side of the wife. I wish to make it clear that I am not. I realize that there are women who take a selfish attitude, which creates problems within the family. Such women want to have their cake and eat it at the same time. A woman of this type should not be treated in the same way as a kind hearted, dutiful woman who knows her rights and duties.

To recap, a woman is within her right to ask her husband to provide her and their family with a separate home. She is also within her right if she decides not to serve her parents-in-law. For them to ask their son to divorce her, because she does not serve them, is wrong. It cannot be approved by Islam, provided that she looks after her Islamic duties. Her husband must not act on his parents' advice to divorce her because that may constitute a grave wrong.

In-laws: Nursing Grievances

A recently married woman finds herself appealing to God against her mother-in-law, because of the latter's ill treatment of her. Sometimes she wonders whether she is committing a sin by doing so. Please advise.

Sometimes relations between a woman and her mother-in-law are so strained that they cannot have a peaceful family life. When they live together under the same roof with strained relations, the situation can be very troublesome indeed, particularly if the woman finds her husband totally inclined to his mother's side, or the mother thinks that her son has been taken away from her. What is important in such a situation is that each one should try her utmost to reduce the chances of friction, and to make her understood by the other. If this does not work, then each woman should try hard not to aggravate the situation. She should pray for a better family life, and try to overlook mistakes by the other lady. It is often the case that we misjudge the other person when we look at her actions from a negative angle.

Having said that, I should add that I cannot give an answer to the question about committing a sin by wishing someone ill. If that person has committed something that has serious repercussions, then it is natural to feel aggrieved. If one feels herself victim of injustice, it is right to appeal to God to lift that injustice. On the other hand, it is always good to forgive other people's mistakes. This will earn rich reward from God.

In-laws: Parents-in-law & Daughters-in-law

1. It is reported that Omar ibn Al-Khattab said once that if parents ask their sons to divorce their wives, they should obey them. In one of your answers, you have come out strongly against this and said that such a divorce is wrong. There seems to be an element of contradiction.

2. If a woman does not like to serve her parents-in-law, does she have any right to misbehave with them or to create tension at home in order to take her husband out of his parents' home. What would you say if this means that he leaves his aged parents helpless, having no other son to look after them? What if that imposes a heavy financial burden on him, having to support his parents and pay rent for a new apartment while he has only a limited income?

Traditions sometimes have a greater effect on the social condition of a particular person or family. Traditions uphold certain values or principles, which have prevailed in a society over a long time, and have a two-way, influence on the religious or economic situation of society as well as on many other elements. In a community where housing is scarce, it becomes traditional for a young man to stay in his parents' home after he marries. That is not necessarily a binding tradition on

everyone. Suppose that a young man who wants to get married has a handsome income and can easily establish a house of his own. He is not duty bound to stay with his parents after his marriage,

From another point of view, it is the duty of a person to look after his aged parents. He cannot simply abandon them when they need him most. In fact, he should be dutiful to them and looking after them with kindness, trying always to satisfy their needs and providing them with a comfortable life, as he is able to provide. He thus ensures his own success in this life and a great reward in the life to come. His wife should encourage him as much as possible to look after his parents. If she herself can contribute to their comfort, this is bound to reflect well on her own family life. Her husband will be most pleased with her and will be more than willing to overlook any other misfortune they have.

Having said that, I should add that proximity might lead to friction. Natures differ and what may appear to be normal to a young wife may not be sanctioned by her parents-in-law. Generally speaking it is better for a young couple to have a home of their own. This is not a rigid rule. People decide for themselves what is in their best interest. The point is that every wife should treat her parents-in-law with the respect they deserve. She should be kind to them and try to comfort them. She is not required to serve them as a duty. But if she does, that is an act of kindness. I would like to stress this point, because in many Oriental families, a young wife is supposed to be doing only her duty when she serves her parents-in-law. I know of instances where a young wife slaves all day long in her parent-in-law's home. Not only serving them and her husband, but also serving other members of the family, such as her brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. If she complains, she is considered rebellious and is treated unkindly.

On the other hand, some young wives do try to take the husbands away from their parents. Thus, they deprive them of a chance to earn God's pleasure through serving their parents. This is certainly a wrong attitude. The proper one is to try to have a course in between and to be dutiful to one's parents while treating one's wife kindly and ensuring that everyone is comfortable and happy.

As far as the question posed by the second reader is concerned, I would say that unless traditions are such that a young wife must stay with her parents-in-law, this is not an Islamic requirement. Traditions, however, should be observed. If we were speaking of a particular problem, then I would like to listen to both sides before I can make a judgement. If we were talking about principles, I would say that a wife is wrong to try to cause a split in her husband's family. On the other hand, it is the son who is required to look after his parents, not his wife. If he decides to live separately, he has to ensure that they are comfortable.

As for the point mentioned in the first letter, the opinion expressed by Omar cannot be taken in isolation, or treated as a final judgement applicable to all cases of similar nature. He was voicing an opinion with regard to a particular problem. Obviously, I would not describe as wrong something that a Hadith allows. Far be it from me to do so. One can imagine, however, many instances when such a suggestion by parents may be appropriate course for a son to follow in order to solve his own family problems. In many other cases, such a suggestion can be totally wrong. One cannot lay down any rigid rules in such a matter.

The point is that a wife also has rights, which must be respected. One of these rights is to be protected by her husband against any injustice perpetrated by other people, including his parents. He himself must not do anything that encroaches on her rights. Supposing that a wife fulfills her duties towards her husband to the best of her ability and treats her parents-in-law with respect and kindness, but she confines herself to do her duties and perhaps a little more, how can they ask their son to

divorce her? If they can make such a suggestion, how can we say that he must obey them? What happens to her rights? Are they only theoretical, or are they practical? Omar's view, which was said within the context of a particular problem, does not supercede those rights of a wife. The contradiction that may appear to exist between his view and the one that I have just explained is not a real contradiction. His opinion was made in a particular context. I am explaining a general principle.

In-laws: Relationship Described As Death

I have been married for over 7 years and have two children. I have been friendly with my wife's sister, and this friendship developed into love, which is mutual, but by God's grace, we kept this love pure and did not slip into committing any sin. I realize that I cannot marry my wife's sister while my marriage lasts. However, my question is whether it is permissible for me to pray God to unite us all three in heaven.

This is a very serious matter. The Prophet, peace be upon him, was once asked about relations with in-laws. And he described it as "death". That means that when the relationship develops into something of the kind described by the reader, it is more dangerous than death. Hence, the Prophet's advice was to steer away from any situation where risks of this nature are involved.

My advice to my reader is to make sure that he would never be alone with his sister-in-law but should make sure that either his wife or a very close relative like her mother, father or other relatives be present with them whenever they are together. In this way, he will physically prevent any chance of temptation. At the same time, he should always remember the good qualities of his wife and picture to himself the horrible development in his relations with her sister. He should always pray God to spare him the agony of an emotion that could only lead to problems.

As for praying God to be united in heaven with His wife and her sister, there is no need for that, because it will only prolong his feeling of love with his sister-in-law. He should try his best to forget her and steer the relationship back to a normal family one. When he is in heaven with his wife and her sister, God willing, they will have only the purest of relationships. May God admit them all there.

In-laws: Relationship With Mother-in-law & Father-in-law

A mother-in-law is considered like a man's own mother in Islamic law. One may treat her the way one treats one's own mother. If a person divorces his wife, does this relationship change?

When a person marries a woman, the mother of his wife becomes forbidden for him to marry. This prohibition is permanent once the marriage contract is made. There is no way the prohibition can be lifted at any time. However, one does not behave with his mother-in-law as he behaves with his own mother, with regard to what she may reveal of her body in front of him, or what he may touch of her.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, has warned that being too familiar with the women folk of the wife's family may lead to regrettable consequences. He says that being too casual or informal with one's "in-laws is like death." Hence, a Muslim must maintain a relationship based on respect, friendliness and mutual care with his wife's family, but he must also observe the Islamic rules of propriety and decency in that relationship. He may, for example, shake hands with his mother-in-law, but he must not kiss her or let her kiss him, like his own mother may kiss him. The relationship is different.

A relationship that is created by marriage is not the same as one based on blood. Hence, when people exceed the limits of propriety and decency, they may land themselves in trouble that affects their close relatives.

Hence one must be careful in his approach to his relationship with his wife's mother and sisters, as well as her other relatives. The same applies to woman's relationship with her husband's male relatives.

In-laws: Unacceptable Intimate Relationship

I have discovered that my wife had an affair with my younger brother whom I had brought up after the death of our father. When my wife admitted that to me, I thought I better try to remedy the situation wisely. I arranged for my brother to get married within a few days. Now both of them seem to have repented their past errors. I am not sure what I should do with my wife. Perhaps I should add that I am very much attached to my wife and my brother. I have two children by my wife, but I am not sure whether I should retain or divorce her.

Families do not realize how close to ruin they come when relationships become so intimate between people whose relations must maintain a high standard of propriety and morality. Most probably the situation developed between your wife and your younger brother after a period of time during which they became more and more familiar with each other. Perhaps that took place in your presence, without any of you thinking that such an intimate relationship could lead to anything wrong. Human experience, however, proves that unwarranted intimacy, especially between young people, could lead to excesses that cannot be sanctioned by Islam. If you try to put your finger on the cause for any such intimate relationship going wrong and leading to an affair between one's wife and a very close relative, you will find that the reason is invariably that they first become too familiar with each other. It is highly important, therefore, to maintain an Islamic standard of propriety and observe Islamic moral values in order to guard against any such situation.

You speak of loving your brother so much. You also say that this is a reciprocal feeling. His love for you, however, did not prevent him from doing wrong to you. Therefore, you have to consider your future situation. The fact that you have arranged his marriage is a step in the right direction. The next step is that he and his wife should live in a home of his own, away from you. That should lessen the chances of him resuming any intimate relationship with your wife.

As far as your wife is concerned, you have to look at the situation very carefully indeed. You appear to wish to save your marriage, but you wish to be guided by Islam. That is fair enough. If you feel that your wife has realized the enormity of her mistake and that she has genuinely regretted what she did, and that she intends never to do the same mistake again, then you may retain her. You have also to guard against any new temptation for a similar error. One way of doing that is by trying to give a better Islamic education. When she learns how Islam views these matters and what is required of a Muslim woman, and when she realizes that she has to seek God's forgiveness for her past errors, she may have the right motivation to maintain an Islamically acceptable behavior. When she acquires such an education, she will be able to bring up your children in a way that serves their future better. She will certainly be a better mother to them.

Having said that, I must emphasize that you need to look at your situation very carefully. If you think that her relationship with your brother was not the sort of a single slip, which will always be regretted, but that it might be repeated at any time the temptation occurs, then it is better for you and for your children to divorce your

wife now. It is true that the children will suffer as a result, but their suffering will be much less than if their mother's behavior is of the sort you have described. I pray to God to guide you to choose what is best for yourself, your children and your family.

Innovations Or Bid'ah: Deviation In Matters Of Religion

1. What we eat, drink and the clothes we use were not known at the Prophet's time. Does this mean that these are bid'ah? May I also mention that when Omar arranged that the taraweeh prayer be offered in congregation, he commented that it was a good bid'ah. On this basis many imams are using the same term to introduce new things in prayer, Thikr, and other practices. Please comment.

2. Could you please explain the concept of bid'ah, and what it means from the Islamic point of view.

3. In my home country, after Friday prayer, most people stand up and start saying greetings to the Prophet, such as Ya Nabi Salam Alaik; Ya Rasool Salam Alaik. Is this acceptable? Can we offer prayers behind the imam who also engages in such rituals? Another thing that is done is that some people request some deceased ones, whom they think were very pious, to intercede with God on their behalf so that their wishes are fulfilled. If a person who does this type of act leads the prayer, should we pray behind him?

1. The term bid'ah is derived from a root bada'a, which means "to invent, produce something new, etc." In its linguistic usage, the word carries proper and commendable connotations. From the same root, the term badee' is derived, which means "1] fine, excellent, and 2] originator." When it is applied to God, it means the latter or "creator." Thus God describes Himself in the Qur'an as Badee' Al-Samawat wal-Ard, which means "the Creator of the heavens and the earth."

The Prophet, peace be upon him, speaks about bid'ah and distinguishes between what is good and what is bad. But he makes clear that this applies to areas where God wants us to follow a certain line. Where no specific guidance is given, we have complete freedom of choice. The examples you have given provide a good basis.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, has not specified guidance on food and clothes, except to point out what is forbidden in either. This means that whatever we choose is perfectly acceptable as long as we remain within the values and morality outlined by Islam. Some people may think that it is a Sunnah to imitate the way the Prophet, peace be upon him, used to dress.

But the Prophet, peace be upon him, used the clothes his people used, without introducing anything new. There was no difference between the unbelievers and the Muslims in the way they dressed, except where something is forbidden in Islam. Thus, no Muslim would wear a robe made of silk, or one, which reveals the area that must be covered.

Normally people eat and dress what is suitable for their environment and climate. This is perfectly acceptable. No bid'ah applies here, because the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not state anything to prevent this. Nor did he recommend certain types of clothes saying that they were the ones to be used by Muslims throughout the world and in all generations.

Where bid'ah clearly applies is in matters of worship. It is here that the word acquires negative connotations. Generally speaking, the word is translated as "innovation", but the English word has positive connotations, while the Arabic word

has no such sense. Hence, it is better to translate it as “deviation.” The Prophet, peace be upon him, has given us a complete package of worship that admits no change or modifications. Hence, nothing can be added to Islamic worship, or it will be a deviation or bid’ah. In this area, there is no such a thing as good bid’ah.

But people often quote Omar’s action and his words. These have to be put in context. The Prophet, peace be upon him, first offered the taraweeh prayer in congregation. He offered it the first night with a number of his companions. On the second night, there was a much larger group of them and they offered it together with the Prophet, peace be upon him, leading the prayer.

The third night, before coming out of his home he looked at the people gathering in the mosque for this prayer and he found the mosque full with hardly any room left for any newcomer. He did not come out for it. When he was asked later why he remained at home, he said: “I feared lest that this prayer should become obligatory for you.”

During his reign, Omar went out at night to find out how people were faring, as was his habit. He noticed that there were many people in the mosque, but there were several congregational prayers in progress at the same time. He did not like what he saw because it gave an impression of disunity in the Muslim community.

He interfered to make all these groups join one congregation, led by Ubayy ibn Ka’ab, a companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, who was famous for his perfect recitation of the Qur’an. The next night, when Omar went to the mosque he found that all people were in one congregation. He commented saying: “This is a good bid’ah.”

From all this we realize that Omar did not introduce anything new. Nor did he initiate something that was not done before. It was the Prophet, peace be upon him, who in practice recommended that night worship in Ramadhan, which is known as taraweeh, be offered in congregation. When he absented himself from it later, this was for a specific reason. Then Omar brought it back to what was done by the Prophet, peace be upon him. Thus, his bid’ah was to go back to the right practice. This was certainly good.

To use his comment to justify something we invent is to quote it out of context. There can simply be no good bid’ah in matters of worship. No one has ever been a more devoted worshipper of God than the Muhammad, peace be upon him. If he did not do a particular act of worship, then it is not part of Islamic worship and can never be so. Anything new is a bid’ah, or deviation, and deviation can never be good.

2. Most people translate bid’ah as innovation, which from the Islamic point of view is wrong, as it seeks to invent some new practice or beliefs that the Prophet, peace be upon him has not sanctioned. But the English word “innovation” carries good connotations, which are at variance with the Islamic concept. Hence, it is better to translate it as “deviation”. This is a more accurate rendering of the Islamic meaning of the word.

When we speak about the principles of faith and proper values, or about Islamic worship, then we have to remember that God has made the religion of Islam perfect. He clearly states this in the Qur’an, as He says:

“This day I have perfected your religion for you.” [Spoils of War — “Al-Ma’idah” 5: 3]

Man cannot make more perfect what God has perfected. Thus, any increase or decrease in acts of worship, or the types of worship we offer, is a deviation. Any status given to any human being, without relying on the Qur’an or the Hadith, is a

deviation. Any belief or ideas or concepts that have not been stated or explained in the Qur'an or the Sunnah is a deviation.

To give some examples: The Prophet, peace be upon him, says that travel may be made to visit only three mosques: the Haram in Makkah, the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah and the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. To add any mosque anywhere in the world and say that visiting it is in itself an act of worship or that it is recommended, or brings this or that reward, is deviation. The Prophet, peace be upon him, stated what Sunnah prayers we may offer, some of which he specified in number of rak'ahs, while some he has left for our choice, as in the case of night worship. To add to the specified ones is deviation. To believe that visiting the grave of some historical figure, devout as he might have been in his life, benefits us with reward from God, or with answering our prayer, or healing our illness, or fulfilling our wishes, is deviation.

All such deviation comes under the Islamic term *bid'ah*, and it should be shunned.

3. This sort of ritual is an innovation. It must not be done. If people do it thinking that this is part of the prayer, or that the prayer becomes better with it, then they are adding to the prayer and their addition is not only wrong. It is forbidden. If they claim that it is correct because someone told them so, then they consider that such a person has the authority to add to Islamic worship, and this is a form of associating partners with God.

On the other hand, if they do it by force of habit, knowing that it is not part of the prayer, and that the prayer is complete without it, their action is merely an innovation, or *bid'ah*, which must be discontinued.

The imam has to be informed so that he could teach the people the proper attitude. If he does not stop insisting that it is 'all appropriate', then it is better not to join him in prayer. Asking dead people to intercede with God for any reason is a form of associating partners with God. This is strictly forbidden. Not only so, but it takes the person who does it out of the fold of Islam altogether.

Innovations Or Bid'ah: Fatihah On the First Thursday Of New Moon

In my home country there are many people who do not follow Islam or fulfill its major duties, such as prayer. Instead, they attend graveyards and visit the tombs of some religious personalities, asking for their help. They do not miss performing "Fatihah" every month, on the first Thursday of the new moon. How will this type of people be treated by Allah on the Day of Judgement?

We cannot say how Allah will deal with anybody on the Day of Judgement. He will administer His absolute justice to all. He knows the special circumstances, the intentions, the motives and the objectives of everyone. He values every action by every individual in the fairest of manners. What we can do, however, is to judge people's actions as they appear to us in the light of divine guidance provided by Allah in the Qur'an and in the light of the Sunnah of the Prophet, peace be upon him. That should give us a very good idea whether a certain kind of action is acceptable or not.

The first thing to say about such people is that they do not attend regularly to their most essential Islamic duties, such as prayers. The Prophet, peace be upon him, describes prayers as the mainstay of the Islamic faith. He explains that by adding: "He who attends to it [i.e. prayer] provides his faith with strongest support, while he who neglects it, allows his faith to collapse." Moreover, a person who neglects his prayer is more likely to neglect his other Islamic duties. It is a fact of life that a

person who does not attend to his prayer is also not likely to have much reward from Allah. There will be little to his credit on the Day of Judgement.

Yet these people try to satisfy their natural desire to be religious by resorting to practices that give them such an appearance. They visit the graves and tombs of those whom they consider saints. Because they give those dead people such a status, they imagine that they have special privileges and powers. It may be true that the dead people whose graves they visit were of high religious standing and it may be true that they have been given certain privileges by Allah, but they are not of the type which enables them to respond to the requests of those who visit their graves. No dead person can be of any benefit to the living. Allah has not given anyone that power. Indeed, a dead person can be of no benefit even to himself. The Prophet, peace be upon him, tells us that "when a human being dies, his actions come to an absolute end, except in one of three ways: A continuing act of charity, a useful contribution to knowledge or a dutiful child who prays for him." In other words, the living can be of benefit to the dead by praying Allah on his behalf, but the dead cannot be of benefit to the living. When those people, whom you have described, go to such graves in order to request the dead to help them, they engage in futile action. Moreover, they are indeed guilty of the worst type of sin, namely, associating partners with Allah. Their practice can only be described as "worshipping graves".

The "Fatihah" is a certain type of ritual when people gather to engage in reading certain verses of the Qur'an and certain phrases of glorification of Allah thousands of times. This is coupled with other rituals such as preparation of food which is placed at a particular point before starting and then eaten after the whole ritual is over. All this has no basis whatsoever. It cannot be supported by any Hadith or Qur'anic verse. As such, it is an innovation, which is totally unacceptable. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "Beware of newly invented matters. For every invented matter is an innovation and every invented matter is going astray and every [person] going astray is in hell fire." [Related by Abu Dawood and At-Tirmithi]. The Prophet, peace be upon him, also says: "He who innovates something in this matter of ours, that is not of it, will have it rejected."

When people engage in such practices, neglecting their duties, they actually try to give their lives a religious aspect. However, they err because they do not see the Prophet's guidance. Indeed, when it is pointed out to them that their practices are wrong, they are not prepared to listen to sound advice.

They feel that their actions are good because they have seen some people, whom they consider guides, do them. They err in not seeking the guidance provided by Muhammad, peace be upon him, who was sent by Allah to convey His message. Their actions are of no value, because they do not give them any religious conscience. Their effect is only to give them a feeling that they have discharged what religion expects of them. Our religion is not a set of rituals. It is a constitution and a way of living. It has a very clear code of practice. Unless it is approached in the manner taught to us by the Prophet, it does not yield its fruit.

If we want to be true Muslims, we have to follow the Prophet's guidance. That means discharging our duties and not adding to the faith of Islam anything that is not part of it. Unfortunately, such practices are widespread in large areas of the Muslim world. They are responsible for the backwardness of Muslims everywhere. Muslims will not regain their strength and proper status until they disown such practices and regain their Islamic sense. That sense will guide them along the path set out for us by Muhammad, Allah's last messenger, peace be upon him.

Innovations Or Bid'ah: Innovators, Followers & Penitence

1. What exactly is Bid'ah? I have come across a Hadith, which states that "Every innovation is an error". If this is true then how do we justify the compilation of the Qur'an by Abu Bakr and Osman, the introduction of a phrase in the call to prayers, or the congregational taraweeh prayer by Omar? In our country, it is customary that people read the Qur'an when a person is dying, especially Surah Ya'Seen, but I met someone who says that this is an innovation. Is this true?

2. Does an innovator or a follower of innovations who dies without having repented incur the punishment of hell forever? Is there any possibility of redemption for him? May I also ask why the Prophet's night journey of Sh'aban, i.e. bar'at, is not celebrated in the Kingdom?

1. A Bid'ah is an innovation. When it is in a matter related to our worldly affairs, it is judged on its usefulness or otherwise. When it is in a matter of religion, then it is judged on its basis. We know for certain that God has made the religion of Islam complete and perfect. It is not possible; then, that we may introduce in it something that has no basis in it. This applies particularly to matters of worship, as they do not change as a result of changing circumstances or different societies.

Hence, the Hadith, which you have mentioned, applies to worship in particular and to faith in general. We have another Hadith, which makes it clear that anything that may be invented in matters of religion is unacceptable. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "He who innovated something in this matter of ours that is not of it will have it rejected." That is because what God has made perfect cannot be made more perfect by adding or deletion.

Where we cannot invent anything, or innovate in what he did or taught, is to add to what the Prophet, peace be upon him, did, or to leave it incomplete. For example, he has taught us to offer Friday prayer in a particular way. We cannot do a similar prayer on Monday. If we do, we will be like one who says that God has given us a certain duty, but we can improve upon it. Far be it from us to suggest anything like that. Certainly any innovation of this sort is an error, and it leads to God's displeasure.

Now if we look at the examples you have mentioned, we do not find in them anything that is intended to add to, or diminish from, what the Prophet, peace be upon him, did or ordered. Abu Bakr compiled the Qur'an in one complete reference copy. This action was intended to preserve the Qur'an as a complete whole, so that people will have a reference to check their copies and their memorization. He only did so when he realized that the Prophet's companions had memorized the whole of the Qur'an began to die in numbers in the various battles the Muslim state had to fight. The same idea was carried further by Osman who compiled six copies so that each major city in the Muslim State would have an easy access to their reference copy.

The taraweeh prayer was recommended by the Prophet, peace be upon him, who offered it on three consecutive days in his mosque, first on his own, then on the following day with a group of people, then with a larger congregation. The fourth day the mosque was full with people waiting for him, but he did not come out. He said that he did not wish to come out for that prayer regularly so that it would not become obligatory. What Mar did was to look in the mosque one day when he found several congregations offering the prayer at the same time.

He appointed Ubai ibn Ka'ab, one of the Prophet's companions whose recitation of the Qur'an was among the best, to lead a single congregation. That it the proper Islamic practice, because Islam does not allow two congregations at the same place at the

same time. Omar invented nothing. He did not start a new prayer. He only organized the way it is offered so that it became in line with Islamic principles.

It is recommended to sit close to the bed of a dying person and try to remind him to say the Kalimah, or the declaration of believing in the Oneness of God. There are some Hadiths, which encourage reciting Surah Ya'Seen by his side, but these Hadiths are not very authentic.

Therefore, if we do this recitation, we are not inventing anything. We are acting on the basis of a Hadith, which, if it is not true, does not encourage anything which is contrary to what Islam teaches. Imam Ahmad, who was among the greatest authorities of Hadiths, says: "If Ya'Seen is recited at the time of death, the ordeal is lightened for the dying person." It is not recommended that a group of people should gather, with each reading a portion of the Qur'an for the dead person, in order to finish it all. Any passage of the Qur'an or Surah may be read at any time by a close relative who may pray God to credit the reward of the recitation to the deceased person. That is more in line with Islamic teachings.

2. Much depends on the intention behind any such action. If such a person sets out to invent something and presents it as a religious practice, he does something seriously wrong. That is because he either feels that the religion of Islam lacks something, which his action provides, or there is a fault with Islam and he is remedying it. In other words, he sets himself to improve on what God has devised and may put himself in such a position with regard to the religion of Islam. Some people may not think in this way when they invent some sort of religious practice.

Let us give a fictitious example and imagine someone encouraging people to say certain phrases of God's glorification at a particular time every night after Isha, while seated in a particular position, placing in front of them certain type of food and drink. He tells them to eat the food and to drink before they go to bed. Now if you take each section of this on its own, you find it permissible. But when you combine it all and claim that it is part of the religious practices of Islam, you are inventing something in the religion of Islam, which is not sanctioned by God and His messenger.

That is an innovation, which is totally unacceptable. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "Whoever invents in this matter [religion] of ours something that does not belong to it, he shall have it rejected."

If this person suggests that he only wants to get people to glorify God more frequently, or if he claims that he has chosen this particular time because he has noticed that people tend to do something against the teachings of Islam around this time, and by introducing this practice he only hopes to give them something more in line with Islam, we tell him that his argument is futile. His practice remains wrong because he is practically saying that through what is revealed by God and taught by the Prophet, peace be upon him, Islam cannot cope properly with a certain need and that this method complements it.

In short, no one may add to what the Prophet, peace be upon him, has taught. No innovation is acceptable. We are talking here about matters of religion. Of course, things may change from time to time and from one community to another. In their dealings with their life affairs, people may have a large area of free choice. There is nothing wrong with that, as long as they keep within the framework of Islam.

The same applies to the middle night of Sh'aban which is called in some parts of the world as the night of bar'at. We do well to study the significance of the Prophet's night journey, but this need not be at any particular time or as part of a celebration or commemoration.

Innovations Or Bid'ah: Koondas In the Month Of Rajab

Some people celebrate an occasion called Koondas in Urdu which involves reciting the Fatihah for Ja'far Sadiq a great many times, and feeding the poor as Sadaqah (i.e. charity) on his behalf, in the month of Rajab. On the night before this celebration, which might take place any day in Rajab, women from the locality are invited to help prepare food and sweets for the occasion. Women who are in their period are assumed to be unclean, and they are, therefore, not allowed to help or even to eat of the food and sweets after the Fatihah is recited. Neither they, nor even pregnant women, are allowed to enter the room where the food is served, because, as the custom would have it, it can be only served in a room, which has been cleaned very thoroughly and sprayed, with perfume and incense. I have been told by a friend who has good knowledge of Islam that such practices are innovations and cannot be sanctioned by our religion. What she could not tell me, however was that if one could not decline an invitation to attend or help in such celebration, because of family commitments and traditions, would it be still wrong for her to attend. I know from experience that it could be very embarrassing for one to refuse such an invitation from very close friends who believe that they are only inviting others for a celebration of worship. May I add that the embarrassment is not only momentary; it could make relations within the family strained, which, I understand, is not something to be encouraged by Islam.

I cannot find anywhere in the Qur'an or in the Hadiths any indication that such celebrations are encouraged, recommended or indeed appropriate. As such, they cannot be part of Islamic worship. This is the only verdict that can be given on the question. Now let us consider it in detail.

When you are asked what makes a person a Muslim your immediate answer will be that he must declare that he believes that there is no deity save Allah and that Muhammad is His messenger. This declaration, as you realize, is made of two parts: the first concerns the Oneness of Allah and the second stresses the importance of the Prophet's role as Allah's messenger. What the second part of the declaration means in practice is that we can receive our teachings, values and practices, with respect to our faith, only from the Prophet, peace be upon him. If we were to receive these from any other source, we do not give credence to our belief in Muhammad as a messenger of Allah. The role of a messenger is to convey a message; he is expected to convey it to people complete, without omissions or additions. Our Prophet, peace be upon him, has stressed, time and again, that he only conveys what he has been asked to convey. Moreover, throughout his life after receiving his message, he never hesitated to convey anything entrusted to him, even when he was certain that conveyance of such a thing would be received with derision, ridicule and cries of "lies." At the end of his long and blessed mission, the Prophet, peace be upon him, addressed the great congregation who went with him on pilgrimage, and enumerated in his farewell address the basic principles and important duties of Islam, asking his followers time after time; "Have I conveyed to you Allah's message?" Every time he asked that question, the Muslims gathered in the Grand Mosque in Makkah answered in the affirmative. He then prayed Allah to bear witness to that fact.

If the message delivered to us by the Prophet, peace be upon him, is complete, then it cannot be made "more complete" by an addition made by any person, be he a scholar or devout, or indeed a direct descendant of the Prophet, peace be upon him. For any person to tell us a certain practice would endear us to Allah, or earn us any reward from Him, although it has not been taught or recommended to us by the Prophet, peace be upon him, is to make a false claim that he can never substantiate.

He indeed, commits a bigger sin than that. By saying this, he says that he knows something which the Prophet, peace be upon him, either did not know or he actually knew but did not convey to us as part of his message. Whichever case he implies, he is guilty of an enormity, which takes him out of the pale of Islam altogether. To say that he knows something of the faith of Islam which the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not know is to give himself a position higher than that of the Prophet, peace be upon him. To say that the Prophet, peace be upon him, kept quiet about it, despite his knowledge of it, is to accuse the Prophet, peace be upon him, of being unfaithful to his trust, negligence of his mission, or a deliberate concealment of part of it. No Muslim who truly loves the Prophet, peace be upon him, would entertain any such thought.

When we read the Qur'an carefully, we realize that Allah has chosen Muhammad to be His messenger, giving him all the qualities which make of him a messenger who is faithful to his trust, able to convey his message with clarity, accuracy and precision. We then go through the Hadiths from beginning to end to find out whether such celebrations as the one you have described has any place in Islam. The result of our search is bound to be in the negative. Indeed, the Prophet, peace be upon him, has not recommended us to hold or organize any celebrations related to his own person. We are not required to celebrate the Prophet's birthday or indeed any other occasion in his life. How, then, could it be possible that we should celebrate any occasion in anybody else's life or career? Had it been mentioned or recommended by the Prophet, peace be upon him, we could have done it willingly. The fact that he has always insisted that no one can be treated in any particular or exceptional way with regard to Islamic worship means that all such celebrations, dedicated in the honor or for the benefit, of any person are no more than false "worship." It indeed incurs Allah's displeasure.

The falsehood of the celebrations you have described appears in more ways than one. For example, reciting the Fatihah thousands of times in parrot-like manner is alien to Islamic worship. When we read the Qur'an, we should dwell on the meaning of its verses. The recitation done on such occasions pays no attention whatsoever to the meaning of the recited parts of the Qur'an. The special care taken with regard to the room where the food is served is also not Islamic. Incense has no special significance, although many people associate it with special "functions" of worship. There is no advantage in burning incense; indeed some people find its smell unhealthy.

What is more infuriating from the Islamic point of view is that some women are barred from help with the preparation of food or entering the place where it is served, simply because they are in their period or they are pregnant. How can such a practice be justified when the Prophet, peace be upon him, expressly states that "A believer can never be impure." This statement was made in the context of what is discharged by people in different situations. The import of this statement is the exact opposite of what is practiced in such celebrations. If a woman in her period is assumed to be impure and that her impurity affects the food she prepares, then we would have been told by the Prophet, peace be upon him, that we must not eat any type of food prepared or served by a woman during her period. The notion itself is absolutely absurd.

Your friend is absolutely correct when she states that such celebrations are innovations. No innovation should be encouraged or accepted or attended by any Muslim. The only situation where attendance in such places is permitted is when the person goes with the intention of making the teachings of Islam in respect of such traditions clear to the people present and try to persuade them not to go ahead with them. If someone whose knowledge and opinions are respected by the people organizing or attending such a celebration goes there and makes it clear to them that they incur Allah's displeasure instead of earning a reward for their efforts, then it is

perfectly proper for him to go and do so. But if a person knows that whatever he says to the people would not affect the situation one way or another, then he should not go. The basis for this judgment is that celebrations of the sort you have described are not only innovations, but they constitute a violation of Islamic teachings. They come under the heading of Munkar, which means something opposed or contrary to Islamic teachings. As such they should be changed or stopped. Allah states in the Qur'an:

“You are the best nation that has ever been raised for mankind; you enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid what is wrong, and you believe in Allah. Had the people of earlier revelation believed it would have been for their own good. Few of them are believers, while most of them are evildoers.” [the Family of Imran — “Aale Imran” 3: 110]

If one is invited to such a celebration and circumstances make it extremely difficult for him or her to decline the invitation, and he or she still finds it impossible to persuade the people not to go ahead with their celebrations, one may go with the intention of visiting his or her relatives and friends. The visitor should try to make his or her visit brief, leave the place early and find some excuse in order not to take part in any aspect of the celebration. This concession is made only for the specific purpose of avoiding causing a strain in one's relations with one's friends and relatives. That, however, does not allow one to take part in a celebration which is a total innovation, or Bid'ah, as is known in Islamic terminology.

Innovations Or Bid'ah: None In Matters Of Faith

Could you please explain what is meant by 'Bid'ah' and define which type of Bid'ah may be described as good? Our scholars back home use this description to refer to some practices, which they acknowledge is not being Sunnah. These have become distinctive of our Muslim community.

The reader gives three examples of these practices, namely, the reading of the story of the Prophet's birth on social occasions, coupled with chanting poetry and followed by Qur'anic recitation; the gathering of relatives and friends to read a portion of the Qur'an each so that together they read it all over a short period of time and make a gift of its reward to a deceased relative' and proclaiming [Kalimah] Shahadah when taking the body of a deceased person for burial.

God says in the Qur'an that he has made our religion complete and perfect. It is the religion He has chosen for us, based on our submission to Him in all our affairs. The term 'Bid'ah' means 'an innovation'. Now if something is introduced into the Islamic religion, which is not part of it, then it is an innovation.

No innovation is admissible in the Islamic faith. That is because God has made it perfect. An innovation seeks either to add something new, or take away something already in existence and substitute it with something different.

To make an innovation in matters relating to day-to-day life is perfectly permissible because a large area of this field has been left to people to determine as they wish, provided they observe the general Islamic principles. If we introduce an innovation that is calculated to benefit people generally, or some of them while not hurting others, then that is a good innovation. The person introducing it receives a reward from God to which is added a reward similar to that of people who take up the same practice.

In matters of worship there may not be a good innovation, because these are not subject to change. The Prophet, peace be upon him, was the most perfect of God's servants in his worship. If he has not taught us something relevant to worship, then

that thing which he has not taught us is not part of Islamic worship. It is an innovation, which is inadmissible.

Take the first of your examples. It is not part of Islamic worship to recite or chant poetry praising the Prophet, peace be upon him, or to read the story of his birth. But if you ask the people who attend such gatherings whether they think that it is part of Islamic worship, you will be surprised at the number of people who feel that it is an act of worship. The same applies to other two practices which the Prophet, peace be upon him, has not taught, practiced or sanctioned. They are simply innovations that Islam does not accept.

Innovations Or Bid'ah: Qul Ceremony

Apparently there is no authentic statement to suggest that the Prophet, peace be upon him, held the Qul ceremony on the third, tenth or fortieth day of the death of a person. Is there any harm in holding such a function, particularly since it encourages people to do something highly recommended, i.e. reading the Qur'an.

On an authentic Hadith, Lady Ayesha quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "He who innovates something in the matter of ours [i.e. our religion] that is not of it will have it rejected." [Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim]. You started your question by saying that there is apparently no authentic statement or report to support this ceremony you name as "Qul". Hence, it must not be practiced, particularly since it is of a religious nature. We rely on the Prophet, peace be upon him, for explaining to us what is part of our faith and what is not. He has conveyed to us Allah's message complete.

Therefore, any addition, even though it may have a religious appearance, must be rejected. The point is that if that addition is part of Islam, then why has the Prophet, peace be upon him, not explained it. Since the Prophet, peace be upon him, has given us our religion complete, then how can we add to what he has given us?

You say that it encourages people to do something good. Yes, but it also has the great disadvantage of inventing something the Prophet, peace be upon him, has not mentioned. If people will not read the Qur'an normally, then their reading of the Qur'an on these occasions does not give them the habit of reading it. It is indeed of little benefit to them or to others. We should always confine ourselves to what the Prophet, peace be upon him, has taught us. We accept no addition and no omission.

Innovations Or Bid'ah: Voluntary Worship & Innovations

We are told that voluntary worship wins us great rewards from Allah. On the other hand, we are repeatedly warned against innovations that lead us to hell. Any voluntary worship is not obligatory and therefore, shall I say an undefined worship. How does one differentiate between innovation and voluntary worship?

We often talk about innovations in highly unfavorable terms. We say that we cannot accept them in our religion and we must not practice them, no matter who encourages us to do so and how keenly they are advocated. Heated arguments often take place between those who insist that innovations have no room in our religion and those who say that there is no harm in doing something additional, which does not contravene the teachings of Islam. The new thing, they argue, has no aim other than to worship Allah and earn His pleasure. This may be so, but it is pertinent to ask: how do you earn Allah's pleasure? Indeed, how can you endear yourself to anyone: a parent, a teacher, a supervisor at work, a ruler, etc. Do you think any of these will be very pleased with you if you pay no attention to what they request of you

or order you? Or will you be more likely to please them if you do exactly as they have told you?

Someone may suggest that it is not improbable to visualize a situation where your keenness to please someone takes you well beyond what he has requested. Your father may ask you to do something in a particular fashion, but you exert yourself to do something extra, only to bring happiness to his heart. He will be ever so pleased with you; so they argue. The fact is that you are just as likely to incur his displeasure. May be he knows something which you do not know, and your extra effort will prove to be counterproductive. If this is true in human dealings, it is more so in our relationship with Allah. In human relations, we are just as likely to know the result of a particular action as the other party who requests something of us or orders us to do it in a particular fashion. When we are dealing with Allah, our knowledge is limited to our world and surroundings. Allah's knowledge is infinite. Therefore, when He tells us, through His Messenger, something, we stick to it and add nothing unless we are told by Allah's messenger that an addition is in order.

We must not forget an essential fact about our religion of Islam. It is a religion, which provides a complete way of life for us to follow in order to achieve our own happiness. The cornerstone of this way of life is that embodied in the declaration by making which we become Muslims: "I bear witness that there is no deity save Allah, and I bear witness that Muhammad is Allah's messenger." The first part of this declaration relates to submission to Allah's will. When we make this declaration, we consciously make a binding pledge that we surrender ourselves to Allah and we abide by His orders. The second part of the declaration defines how we should go about putting this into practice. We declare that Muhammad, peace be upon him, is Allah's messenger. This means that only through him we learn how to submit to Allah and do his bidding. We accept from no one else any teachings or instruction on how to behave in this life, how to submit to Allah and worship Him, or how to go about any business of ours. Therefore, anything that relates to faith and the religion of Islam which is not communicated to us through Muhammad, peace be upon him, is unacceptable, simply because to accept it would tantamount to a negation of the Prophet's role as Allah's messenger. The Prophet, peace be upon him, puts this principle in the clearest of terms. He says: "He who innovates something in this matter of ours that is not of it, will have it rejected." [Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim].

The way the Prophet, peace be upon him, has phrased this most important principle is highly significant. To start with, he does not refer to "Islamic worship" or to "concepts of traditions or practices". He refers to "this matter of ours" which is a very general term that incorporates all these and much more. Hence, the area in which no innovation is admissible is wide indeed. It comprises everything that Islam involves, and Islam we should remember, is a complete way of life. The innovation the Prophet, peace be upon him, denounces must be the one which does not belong to Islam: it is "not of it". Hence, we should determine whether any practice or belief or idea we may entertain belongs to Islam as conveyed to us by Allah's messenger or not. If it belongs to it, then it is perfectly right. If it does not, then we should reject it without hesitation. Since there is only one way to know what belongs to Islam, we must have recourse to it. That way is to identify what has been conveyed to us by the Prophet, peace be upon him, and to follow it.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, says that any innovation is sure to be rejected. The rejection is from Islam itself in the sense that Islam resembles a living organism or a body, which rejects any foreign element that is introduced into it. It is, more importantly; rejected by Allah who does not allow anyone to add to the faith He has revealed to His messenger. By adding anything, one is placing oneself on the same level with Allah. This cannot be accepted from anyone. When we offer any worship, which is not obligatory but voluntary, as has been shown to us by His messenger, we

are only doing what we have been bid to do. Thus we are not indulging in any kind of innovation.

Should we not ask ourselves: What is the purpose of innovation or addition? If it is to please Allah and to be religious, then an innovation does not fall within this category of actions. What we have to remember here is that the Prophet, peace be upon him, was the most sincere of all servants of Allah. His worship was the most perfect any human being can do. Hence if something was not done or practiced by him at any time, it does belong to Islamic worship or Islamic faith.

Someone may suggest here that we may do something which the Prophet, peace be upon him, has not done, but still falls within Islamic worship. What view is taken of such an action? To give an example, is it permissible to offer a certain prayer, of the same type and form as ordinary prayer, but which the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not practice? The answer is simple: If the Prophet, peace be upon him, has said that it can be practiced, then we can go ahead and do it. If it has not [been practiced], then we are inventing something new. This is not open to a Muslim to do. The reason is that if we leave the door open for such actions, it will never be closed and Islamic worship may swell to larger and larger proportions. To illustrate, let us take the case of fasting in Ramadhan. We are required to begin our fast when we have made certain that the new moon of the month of Ramadhan has been born and sighted. If some people cannot determine whether the moon could be sighted, because the sky was a little cloudy, should they fast the following day just in case the moon has been born? The answer is definitely no. The Prophet, peace be upon him, has forbidden us fasting on the day of doubt. We have to start our fasting in the certainty that the month has started. This can only be ascertained if the moon has been actually sighted or the previous month has been completed. Hence, the Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "Fast when you have sighted the moon and end your fast when you have sighted the new moon. Should the sky be too cloudy to sight the new moon, complete the month of Sh'aban to 30 days." We must strictly follow this order. If we were to fast a day in advance "just in case", we may take the count of the month of Ramadhan to 31 days which is impossible. Moreover, it is easy to visualize a situation where, by the passage of time, fasting 31 days becomes the norm and an addition of another day, "just in case", may be preferred.

There is a clear rule, which is of great help in such matters. If the new innovation is part of Islamic worship, but it is simply just a little extra and it has certain rules and regulations and specific times to offer it, then it is an innovation to which the description "erroneous" — which the Prophet, peace be upon him, has used to describe all innovations — applies. There are numerous examples to be taken from the Sufi circle of such innovations. All these must be rejected because the Prophet, peace be upon him, has not endorsed them.

Innovations Or Bid'ah: Wrong Practices With Religious Appearance

In my home country there are many people who do not follow Islam or fulfill its major duties, such as prayer. Instead, they attend graveyards and visit the tombs of some religious personalities, asking for their help. They do not miss performing "Fatihah" every month, on the first Thursday of the new moon. How will this type of people be treated by Allah on the Day of Judgement?

We cannot say how will Allah deal with anybody on the Day of Judgement. He will administer His absolute justice to all. He knows the special circumstances, the intentions, the motives and objectives of everyone. He values every action by every individual in the fairest of manners. What we can do, however, is to judge people's actions as they appear to us in the light of divine guidance provided by Allah in the

Qur'an and in the light of the Sunnah of the Prophet, peace be upon him. They should give us a very good idea whether a certain kind of action is acceptable or not.

The first thing to say about such people is that they do not attend regularly to their most essential Islamic duties, such as prayers. The Prophet, peace be upon him, describes prayer as the mainstay of the Islamic faith. He explains that by adding: "He who attends to it [i.e. prayer] provides his faith with strong support, while he who neglects it, allows his faith to collapse." Moreover, a person who neglects his prayer is more likely to neglect his other Islamic duties. It is a fact of life that a person who does not attend to his prayer is also likely to indulge in different types of forbidden practices. Such a person is not likely to have much reward from Allah. There will be little to his credit on the Day of Judgement.

Yet these people try to satisfy their natural desire to be religious by resorting to practices that give them such an appearance. They visit the graves and tombs of those whom they consider saints. Because they give those dead people such a status, they imagine that they [the dead saints] have special privileges and powers. It may be true that the dead people whose graves they visit were of high religious standing and it may be true that they have been given certain privileges by Allah, but those are not of the type which enables them to respond to the requests of those who visit their graves. No dead person can be of any benefit to the living. Indeed, a dead person can be of no benefit even to himself. The Prophet, peace be upon him, tells us that "when a human being dies, his actions come to an absolute end, except in one of three ways: A continuing act of charity, a useful contribution to knowledge or a dutiful child who prays for him." In other words, the living can be of benefit to the dead by praying Allah on their behalf, but the dead cannot be of benefit to the living. When those people whom you have described go to such graves in order to request the dead to help them, they are engaged in a futile action. Moreover, they are indeed guilty of the worst type of sin, namely, associating partners with Allah. Their practices can only be described as the worshipping of graves.

The "Fatihah" is a certain type of ritual in which people gather to engage in reading certain verses of the Qur'an and certain phrases of glorification of Allah thousands of times. This is coupled with other rituals such as the preparation of food, which is placed at a particular point before starting, and then eaten after the whole ritual is over. All this has no basis whatsoever. It cannot be supported by any Hadith or Qur'anic verse. As such, it is an innovation, which is totally unacceptable. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "Beware of newly invented matters. For every invention is an innovation and every innovation is going astray and every going astray is in hell fire." [Related by Abu Dawood and At-Tirmithi]. The Prophet, peace be upon him, also says: "He who innovates something in this matter of ours, that is not of it, will have it rejected."

When people engage in such practices, neglecting their duties, they actually try to give their lives a religious aspect. However, they err because they do not see the Prophet's guidance. Indeed, when it is pointed out to them that their practices are wrong, they are not prepared to listen to sound advice.

They feel that their actions are good because they have seen some people whom they consider guides to them. They err in not seeking the guidance provided by Muhammad, peace be upon him, who was sent by Allah to convey His knowledge. Their actions are of no value, because they do not give them any religious conscience. Their effect is only to give them a feeling that they have discharged what religion expects of them. Our religion is not a set of rituals. It has a very clear code of practice. Unless it is approached in the manner taught to us by the Prophet, it does not yield its fruit.

If we want to be true Muslims, we have to follow the Prophet's guidance. That means discharging our duties and not adding to the faith of Islam anything that is not part of it. Unfortunately, such practices are widespread in large areas of the Muslim world. They are responsible for the backwardness of Muslims everywhere. Muslims will not regain their strength and proper status until they disown such practices and regain their Islamic sense. That sense will guide them along the path set out for us by Muhammad, Allah's last messenger, peace be upon him.

***Insurance: A Review On Legitimacy Of General & Life Insurance
Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News***

Quite some time back, I wrote an answer encouraging a reader to stop his life insurance policy. Two persons working in the field of insurance for a number of years have provided me with points about insurance policies and why they believe them to be Islamically acceptable. This has prompted me to study the question of insurance at a great depth and I discussed the subject with a number of scholars and referred to much that has been written on it. I have also received a number of letters on general insurance and I am discussing the subject at length hoping that this comprehensive answer will serve as an answer to every reader who has put to me a question on insurance.

I am grateful for the information provided which was of benefit in arriving at the conclusion I am now explaining.

An insurance policy is a contract, which aims at providing compensation for potential loss or damages that are specified in the contract. The insured pays premiums either by installments or in a lump sum, in order to have insurance cover for a specified period of time. Should the loss or damage occur, the insured makes a claim against the other party which is normally the insurance company and he receives the compensation to which he is entitled under the terms of the policy. It is highly significant that an insurance company undertakes its business for profit. The risks against which insurance cover can be given are wide-ranging and vary in nature from theft to loss of goods during transportation to waste of food kept in a freezer due to a power cut or power failure. There is also the well-known life insurance, which deserves to be mentioned separately. A form of insurance which has been made obligatory in most countries is that which concerns driving and motor vehicles where the law of most countries requires drivers to have at least a third party insurance policy before they drive. Since we have discussed car insurance recently [Read page 131], we will not refer to it here.

The Fiqh Counsel of the Muslim World League ruled in favor of what it called the "cooperative insurance" which visualizes a group of people working in the same type of business establishing a joint fund, to which everyone of them contributes. The purpose of the fund is to compensate any one of them who suffers specific losses, due to unforeseen circumstances. There is no element of profit in this type of insurance. If the fund is established for a specific period of time, then when that time lapses, the money still available in the fund is given back to the members in the same percentage as of their contributions.

When we look at what insurance companies do, we find that they work on the same principle, but the fund they establish out of the premiums they charge to their clients is much greater and the risks covered are more wide ranging. No money is returned to clients at the end of the term of agreement. The premium is simply paid in return for the insurance cover. The company makes profits in as much as the premiums it charges exceed the claims it has to pay out.

There is no doubt that the objective of the insurance is sound, legitimate and wins the approval of Islam. It seeks to reduce or redress the effects of a natural or man-made disaster. Hence, it is in effect a regularization of the cooperation, which is required to be shown by the Muslim community when unfortunate circumstances befall its members. For an insurance company to extend such a service and make it available to a large number of people requires a great deal of managerial and administrative work. It has to employ a sufficient work force to look after the various aspects of its work and it has to have offices, stationery, equipment, etc. To do all this, and to make profit as a result is perfectly legitimate.

From the above we conclude that the concept of insurance is sound and its organization through an insurance company is acceptable. Hence, there is nothing wrong in principle in seeking insurance cover against potential risks that a person may run with regard to himself, his property or his business. Having said that, I must point out that many legitimate or permissible things can be used for unacceptable purposes. When this happens, we pronounce something as forbidden, not because it is sinful in nature, but because of its usage for the wrong purpose. It is important, therefore, to look at how insurance works in practice and to try to find out why many scholars remain opposed to it.

One of the objections frequently raised suggests that insurance is a form of gambling. It has been suggested that insurance companies determine premiums on the same principles and rules, which are used by gambling companies in quoting prices. It may be so, but the use of mathematical rules and principles for a forbidden purpose does not make it forbidden to use them for a legitimate purpose. Moreover, gambling is totally different from insurance. Gambling is a moral evil, which has very adverse effects on the gambler and his family. A gambler may lose all his fortune in one unlucky night in a casino. There is only one winner in gambling, which is the owner of the casino or the betting shop. All their clients are losers. Moreover, a gambler always lives in fear of losing all his wealth. His family runs the risk of total loss. In insurance, the reverse is true. The insured has the peace of mind derived from the knowledge that should a catastrophe take place, he will be indemnified. Moreover, the benefits in insurance are mutual. All those who take insurance policies as well as the insurance company benefit by the insurance schemes.

Another objection suggests that insurance is a form of betting. The insured person places his premium and hopes for the best. If nothing happens to him, or to his property, he simply loses his premium, in the same way as a betting person loses his bet. There is a big difference between the two. When a person places a bet he hopes to win because that win will give him a net income. A person taking insurance cover pays his money for security. He prefers that nothing happens to him or to his property, which would require him to make a claim against the insurance company. He prefers safety for himself and for his property. If something happens and he has to make use of his insurance policy, he simply gets a reduction in the losses he has suffered. Take for example a person who has insured his house contents against theft, but burglars break in and get away with much of his valuables. He will probably receive the value of what he has lost, but he would have to lose time in buying replacements. Moreover, some of these valuables may have a sentimental value, which he can never replace.

Some people have suggested that an insurance policy represents a challenge to Allah's will. A good believer, it is argued, accepts whatever calamity befalls him as an act of Allah and submits to Allah's will in all circumstances. While this is certainly true of a good believer, an insurance policy does not attempt to prevent Allah's will. By taking an insurance policy, a person only seeks to reduce the effects of Allah's will, not to prevent it. Sheikh Mustafa Az-Zarqa, professor of Islamic law, likens

insurance to the iron bars placed on top of a building to divert a thunderbolt away from it.

When the architect places these iron bars, the thought of preventing the thunderbolt happening does not occur to him at all. He is only trying to save the building in which he has put so much effort from being destroyed by it. This he achieves through diverting its direction, taking it deep underground.

A more serious objection is that which groups insurance with sales in which risk is a basic element. These are known in Islamic law as "Gharar" sales. Examples of such deals is to sell the fruits of trees at the beginning of the season when their quality [or quantity] cannot be established yet. All such sales are forbidden in Islam, because they involve risk to the buyer and there may be an element of deception on the part of the seller. It is also forbidden to sell an unidentified object as in the case when someone sells a sheep from a flock without specifying or identifying it.

When we consider this particular aspect, we find that Islam has outlawed deeds, which involve an exceptional or a serious element of risk. If we were to say that any deal, which has even the slightest element of risk, is forbidden, then we will block most business deals. When the risk element is of normal or reasonable proportions, a deal may go through. In insurance, what a person buys when he seeks insurance cover is not the amount of compensation he will receive when something happens to him or to his property. What he buys is peace of mind. This is tangible return for the money he pays. Once cover is extended, the insured has this peace of mind, which, to him, is a fair return on his investment. If something happens to him or to his property, he is compensated and his loss is redeemed. If nothing happens, he is happier because he does not have to contend with any misfortune.

Some people have raised another objection saying that insurance companies invest their money in usury, or get interest on funds that are available to them. If so then the action of insurance companies is unacceptable from the Islamic point of view. This, however, does not affect the system of insurance itself. It relates only to that portion of the business of an insurance company, which has an element of usury. We cannot forbid insurance as a whole on the basis of what some or most of insurance companies do. We simply say that if an insurance company invests its money in an Islamically unacceptable way, there is no reason not to use its services.

On the basis of the foregoing, we say without hesitation that insurance is permissible from the Islamic point of view, because it seeks to achieve a legitimate purpose of compensating the insured for any losses he may suffer, through distributing risk to all those who have insurance policies. While losses may occur to a small percentage of people taking insurance covers and paying insurance premiums, the majority will not have to bear any losses. However, everyone who takes an insurance policy receives something in return, namely, peace of mind, which is what he, is after.

Many scholars tend to view life policy with a great deal of suspicion, assuming that the insurance company is guaranteeing that the insured will survive throughout the period of the contract. If he dies, the company has lost the case and it must pay for its loss. In other words, the life policy is viewed in the same light as a bet undertaken by the insurance company. If the insured dies, it has lost its bet and it must pay up. This is indeed a naive understanding, caused most probably by the Arabic name, given to life policy which makes it a life guarantee rather than life insurance. The fact is that the insurance company does not guarantee anyone of its clients to live even for a few moments after the contract has been made and the policy is enforced. No insurance company is foolish enough to guarantee life, when everybody realizes that any human being is liable to die at any moment as a result of a road accident, let alone an unexpected disaster. What a life policy gives is some sort of security to the family of the insured, in case of his death during the period of contract.

In almost all countries, the government operates a social security scheme and a retirement scheme, which are applicable to its employees. Moreover, workers in factories and employees in private sector are required by law in many countries to join the social security scheme, which is often operated by the state. In such schemes, a portion of the salary of the employee is deducted as a contribution to the scheme. It is often the case that the employer, whether a government department or a private company, must make contributions to the scheme on behalf of its employees. In cases of death or the loss of ability to work, the scheme offers a pension to the employee or his family, after his death. The same is true of the pension schemes operated in almost all countries. After the end of a long period of service, an employee retires and receives a monthly payment known as his pension. If he dies, leaving behind his wife and young children, they are paid a pension, which helps them meet life expenses. It is agreed by all contemporary scholars that such schemes are permissible, and indeed encouraged by Islam. Islam does not accept that a person who has spent his most productive years in government service or working for a computer company or in a factory ends up with no income after he reaches the age of 60 or 65, or whatever the retirement age be. Such an employee needs to have a regular income, which is covered by the social security scheme or the pension he receives.

There is a strong similarity between life insurance and such schemes. In life insurance, the insured is guarding his family against becoming destitute in case of his death. He pays premiums so that he receives the peace of mind, which is associated with the knowledge that a handsome amount of money will be paid to his family. If the father of a young family takes out an insurance premium when he is, say, 30 years old, giving him insurance cover for 25 or 30 years, he immediately receives a fair return on his investment represented by the peace of mind which he experiences as a result of the knowledge that his young family will be provided for in case of his early death. If he lives throughout the period of insurance cover, he does not suffer a loss. His children are now grown up and probably working and earning. Some of them may have started their own families. There is nothing wrong with this arrangement. Indeed, there are certain types of social security, which Islam has set in operation. One of these is the contract of allegiance which used to be made between a newcomer to Islam who entered into an agreement with a Muslim that the latter would pay him ransom money should he be guilty of an accidental killing, and would inherit him if he dies heir-less. In this contract, one party is ensuring himself against the risk of committing accidental killing. In return he is making the person who gives him that cover an heir who inherits him.

There is also the Islamic requirement that the family of a person guilty of accidental killing should contribute to the ransom money he has to pay. This is a requirement, which could be enforced by law. Moreover, Islam has given social security to insolvent debtors and to those who find themselves stranded with no money when they travel abroad. From all these forms, we realize that Islam is not against covering oneself against any potential risk. Considering the similarity between the purpose of an insurance policy and pension schemes, it is safe to say that insurance, including life insurance, is permissible.

There is a different method of life insurance, which is linked to a saving scheme. The insurance company agrees to pay its clients or his family a sum of money, which is called "the sum insured". The sum becomes payable to the beneficiary of the life policy if the client dies at anytime during the period of the policy which could last for 20 or 30 years, according to the age of the client at the time when the policy is made. The premiums the insured is required to pay are determined by the sum assured. Over the period of the policy, the insured actually pays to the insurance company the same amount minus the interest, which is premium, made over the same period. If the sum assured is say, one hundred thousand, over a period of 20 years, then the client has to pay to the insurance company something like 4,000 every year

throughout this period. The total amount he actually pays will come to eighty thousand and the interest the company receives on these premiums is passed on to the client, after the deduction of the company's administrative costs. Such a policy could also have an element of payment of profits to the client. These profits represent the client's share of what the insurance company may make on its investment of the client's premiums in different projects. If the client dies within the period of the policy which is 20 years, his family is paid one hundred thousand in addition to any profits made by the company on investing his premiums. If he survives throughout the 20 years, then the policy matures and he is paid one hundred thousand plus his share of the profits, which could be twice, or three times that figure. It is equally possible that the profits are only a small amount.

There is no doubt that such type of life policy is forbidden, not because it is an insurance policy, but because of the element of usury which it incorporates. To render such a policy as permissible from the Islamic point of view, the element of interest should be removed from it. If the insurance company charges the client four thousand a year and insures him for one hundred thousand over a period of 20 years, considering the difference as its contribution which it pays from the profits it makes through its activities, this is perfectly valid. If, in addition to that, it pays its client a percentage of profits on his investment, then all that the client has to do is to make sure that the company invests its money in business activities, which are permissible in Islam. Once he does that, he may go ahead with this type of policy.

To recap on this particular point: the saving type of the policy is forbidden if the payment of interest is involved. If no payment of interest is made, then it has the same ruling as the "term" type of life policy, which is permissible. When the policy qualifies the client to receive a share of the profits, he must make sure that his money is invested in a legitimate way.

Taking insurance for medical treatment, in case one falls victim to cancer or some other serious illness is covered by the same ruling, which makes it permissible. Whether it is advisable or not to take out such an insurance cover is debatable.

Insurance: Car Insurance

I believe that all Islamic legislation are perfect and must be obeyed. Also I believe in predestination. I have no doubt that no individual or group of people can cause me any damage unless Allah so wishes. Within this framework, I have been wondering recently on the desirability or otherwise of renewing my car insurance when it lapses. Perhaps I should say that insurance does not offer any fabulous prizes as a lottery, but compensates me for unforeseen loss when it takes place. No element of interest or usury is involved. I should add for explanation that many manufacturers of machinery offer a sort of guarantee on their products for a limited period of time. In other words, they insure it for the customer. Such a warranty represents a certain amount of cost to the manufacturer, which is passed over to the customer and included in the price of the product. I will be grateful if you comment on this question of car insurance.

The question of insurance is a thorny one, on which scholars have differed greatly. What I am giving you below is a summary of what I have been able to determine on the basis of study and discussions with a number of scholars.

When you insure a car, you make a contract with the insurance company which requires you to pay a premium in which the company guarantees to undertake any repairs of the damage which is caused to your car or someone else's car as a result of an accident and perhaps compensates you or the other people involved for any injury

suffered. Some insurance companies also offer the use of a car during the period when your damaged car is being repaired. In other words, they take care of all the inconvenience, which is caused to you by the accident, which may have been the fault of some other driver. There is certainly no amount of money, which is won by the insured. Insurance is simply meant to cover any loss, which may be sustained as a result of something beyond man's control.

Scholars have tended to view insurance with suspicion and many of them have over the years ruled that it is not compatible with Islam. Much of their argument is based on the fact that there is an element of uncertainty about what the insured buys with his premium. It is well known that when you buy something uncertain, the sale is not allowed from the Islamic point of view. In insurance you pay your premium and drive your car throughout the year and may have no accident whatsoever. You make no claim against the insurance company; thus your premium is gone without any material benefit to you. Hence the question: What have you bought with the money you have paid the insurance company? The absence of any tangible return makes this restrictive view by scholars even more pronounced.

On the other hand, should you have a serious accident, which causes extensive damage to your car and may be to the other vehicle, the insurance company pays the cost of repairing both vehicles and may compensate anyone who has suffered an injury as a result of the accident. What the insurance company pays in such a case is several times greater than the premium you have paid. In other words, you have paid little and received much in return. There is no loss to the company in this transaction because it uses the premiums of other insured persons who may have no accident in order to pay those who make claims as a result of their accidents. The situation is thus which involves taking money from those who sustain no loss in order to pay those who do. Again, this is a point, which has tended to confirm scholars' suspicion of the insurance contract.

When we examine the deal between an insured person and the insurance company, we find that when the insured pays his premium and receives the insurance policy, he actually gets something valuable in return, although he may not need to make any claim throughout the period of cover. What he gets is a peace of mind. He knows that should he ever be involved in an accident and should the accident be his fault and result in extensive damage to someone else's vehicle as well as his own, then he will not have to pay for the repairs which may run into a very large amount indeed. Someone else will take that responsibility, without actually incurring a loss in the process. Such peace of mind is of value and it is certainly tangible, although we may not hold it in our hands. The uncertainty, which is pointed out by scholars about the benefits, you receive for your premium is counter-balanced by the certainty that your liability in the case of an accident is very limited. [That is to say, the day you pay your premium, you have incurred a loss on that day with an assurance that you will not be burdened with any further loss through claims during the period.]

As for taking money from people who make no claim and paying it to those who are involved in accidents, this involves no element of deception. Everyone comes to the insurance company of his own free will, buying something, which he receives immediately, namely, peace of mind. No one pays his premium for anything. Those who make no accidents are happy with the bargain and even happier than those who have accidents because a car that does not have body repairs remains better and fetches a better price when sold than the one, which has had an accident. We can compare the insurance scheme to a cooperative in which the participants undertake to compensate any one of them for any loss he incurs in circumstances beyond his control. Each of them pays a certain amount of money toward funding this scheme and making this money available for such compensation. All scholars agree that when a group of people undertake to do that of their own accord, this is perfectly legitimate. What an insurance company adds to this agreement is the fact that it is a

third party organizing this scheme. It offers it to any number of people who are willing to participate in it, keeping records of participants and claims, collecting premiums and using them for the purposes they have been collected for. The company pays its shareholders and its staff for the work they do. Moreover, it is in business for profit and the profit is shared by the company owners. Again, there is nothing wrong with this arrangement.

To sum up, the car insurance is a proper method of protecting people against suffering a great loss in certain eventualities. It violates no Islamic teachings and as such it is perfectly permissible. There is nothing in the insurance contract that suggests that taking part in such a scheme defies Allah's will or predestination. It does not. It simply seeks to compensate people for the damage they suffer when Allah's will operates.

Some scholars have advised their questioners to limit their car insurance to what the law of the country in which they live requires them to have. This is normally called a third party insurance, which compensates any person other than you who incurs a loss as a result of an accident, which you have caused. It does not give you or your car any cover. Thus if you cause an accident which results in damage to your car and someone else's car, the insurance company will not repair your car but will repair the other driver's car. He is the third party who is covered by this type of insurance. When scholars give such an opinion, they are simply telling people not to go against the law of their country of residence. However, there need be no such limitation. It is perfectly permissible for a Muslim to have a comprehensive insurance policy of his car.

Insurance: Claims From Insurance Companies — Scruples Regarding

Is it permissible to claim the cost of car repairs, which have resulted from a road accident, under an insurance policy? How much should one claim: the cost of the repairs or the premium paid?

I have recently explained that insurance is permissible, because it safeguards the interests of people and reduces the burden of catastrophe that may happen from time to time. Moreover, it presents an agreement to share the burden among so many people who are liable to have the same sort of disaster. It is in effect a pledge of cooperation between a large number of people to reduce the effects of disaster, which may befall a smaller number of them. Therefore, it is perfectly legitimate to claim your costs under insurance policy.

The choice is not open to you of how much you should claim. The insurance company will pay for your repairs, but it will not refund your premiums. What you have already paid in premium has gone to finance other claims. What you get from an insurance company is paid by other people who also subscribe to the same insurance scheme. An insurance company does not work on the basis of saving the premium of every client. That would have been unfair. It works on the basis of giving complete insurance cover from the moment you sign your document and pay your first premium. You may leave the offices of the insurance company, having done that and drive away. Five minutes later, you may have an accident and the insurance company will pay you the costs of your repairs and any other benefits to which you may be entitled under the provisions of your insurance policy. That is perfectly alright and it is what clients of the insurance company expect. If it was simply a refund of their premiums, you would have been paid back the same amount you paid them and that would have given you no insurance cover whatsoever. It would have simply given you a refund. The whole purpose of insurance would have been rendered futile. Anyone would have been better off putting his money away in a safe or somewhere handy. That is definitely not the idea of insurance.

Insurance: Employment As Insurance Agent

Some people object to my work as an insurance agent, claiming that Muslims should place all their trust in God alone. I believe that God only helps those who help themselves. May I ask whether I must quit my job?

My objection is not to your work but to the way you speak about God. Of course God will replace any stolen or destroyed article and compensate for any loss a human being may suffer, if He so wishes. He will certainly not act in the way an insurance company acts, buying a new car for a person or dropping him a check through letterbox, but He will facilitate the means to have a replacement, or even something much better, whenever He pleases to do so. There is no restriction on what God may do. He is able to do whatever He wants whenever He wishes, and the way He pleases.

Nor is it correct to say that God only helps those who help themselves. This is a form of expression that must not be taken literally. God's help is extended to all His servants, all the time. Even those who do not try to help themselves enjoy God's blessings and receive His grace. This is indeed experienced by all of us at all times. Even when we go through the most miserable of difficult streaks in our lives, God's help is always available. Even the most miserable human will find so much to thank God for, if only he would reflect on the blessings he has been given. But that expression refers in a rather un-Islamic way to a principle, which is endorsed by Islam. Man should work and try to improve his situation. If he does his best, trusting to God's help, then that help would be forthcoming. People who remain idle are less likely to receive God's help.

I have explained on various occasions that insurance, including life insurance, is permissible. Therefore, there is no objection to taking up employment as an insurance agent. However, such an agent should observe Islamic values in his work, and not try to sell his policies through the manipulating tactics of the salesmen who are keen to paint a very rosy picture of the article or the service they are selling, without pointing out the shortcomings or defects that may influence their prospective customers' opinions.

Insurance: Life Insurance — Permissibility Of

1. A few years ago I took out two life insurance policies in my name, but I was subsequently told that insurance is not permissible in Islam. A scholar in my home country told me recently that it is permissible. My mother insists that I should cancel them. I will if they are not allowed, but could you please let me know whether it is permissible to take out a life policy or not?

2. Could you please explain whether life insurance is permissible from the Islamic point of view. The attraction to take a life policy seems too strong when one considers the need for economic security in life.

1. An increasing number of scholars are returning rulings of permissibility on insurance. In the past verdicts of non-permissibility were voiced on certain types of insurance, but scholars always said that when insurance is of the cooperative type, it is permissible. But we can say that the working of insurance makes it always of the cooperative type, since the people who take insurance policies agree that their premiums are used to compensate those of them who incur losses. Even life insurance falls into this category, because it represents an agreement to give a specified sum to the family of the insured person in the case of the death of that person within the period of the policy. Thus, it is a method of alleviating the loss incurred or the bereavement of the beneficiaries.

A number of famous scholars have written about insurance, most notably the late Sheikh Mustafa Al-Zarqa, a leading scholar of Fiqh, who says that all insurance is permissible, unless there is a clear element of usury in the business of the insurance company.

2. Insurance has become an essential part of business throughout the world. Because there are too many risks that could affect people's lives and welfare, insurance tries to alleviate the adverse effects of such risks. Insurance has become a highly sophisticated business, with large companies offering cover against a wide range of risks. People take out insurance policies to protect their homes, furniture, vehicles, and jobs, and they also take out health and life insurance. In its modern form, insurance was introduced in Muslim countries when many of them were occupied by Western powers, or when they came under Western influence. In some cases, its introduction was delayed in a country until its international business flourished. Like every thing that came with a "colonial" or Western color. Muslim scholars first viewed Insurance with grave suspicion. A verdict of disapproval was common to most things, which were thought as introduced by non-Muslims.

Yet insurance is not new, and it was not invented by the Western civilization. The idea of collaboration to reduce the effects of disaster that might hit one or more in a community is as old as human society. In many Muslim cities, business people collaborated, establishing funds to look after anyone of them that might suffer a huge trade loss, as could happen when a cargo ship sank during a storm. While these early efforts catered for a specific risk, the idea behind them is the same as that behind insurance.

In the last few decades, a number of eminent scholars discussed insurance at length, arriving at divergent views. The late Prof. Mustafa Al-Zarqa, who ranked high among the top scholars of the twentieth century, published one of the best theses written on the subject in a book in Arabic. His work is very scholarly, as it shows thorough understanding of the insurance system and how it works. He arrives at a verdict of permissibility of all types of insurance, including life insurance. He points out that insurance inevitably involves an element of Gharar, which in Islamic terminology means the sale of an "undefined" or unspecified product. However, he explains that it is rather marginal, and as such it is overlooked, as in other types of transactions involving marginal Gharar.

There are two main types of life insurance: term policy and endowment policy. The term policy involves the payment by the insured of modest premiums over an agreed period, say, 20 years, in return for the benefit of his family receiving an agreed large sum of money in the case of his death during that period.

If the insured remains alive at the end of the policy, it lapses and he gets nothing. What the insured actually buys with his payments is the peace of mind he gets from the knowledge that should he die, his dependants will have a large sum of money to see them through life until, say, his young children come of age and are able to look after themselves.

The endowment policy involves the payment of larger premiums, which are invested by the insurance company. When the policy matures, the insured receives the sum assured as well as any share of profits to which he may be entitled under the terms of investment made on his behalf by the insurance company.

Both types are permissible from the Islamic point of view, as explained by Professor Al-Zarqa, provided that the insured makes sure that the insurance company invests in legitimate business. If the insurance company invests in what Islam forbids, then taking out its policies becomes forbidden as a result.

Insurance: Life Insurance & Pension

Could you please explain whether life insurance and pension plans are acceptable from the Islamic point of view? With regard to the latter, I would like to cite the case of a man who does not have any children by his present wife, but has a daughter by a previous marriage. His pension would automatically go to his wife in case of his death, unless he changes that. He is seriously considering that in order to assign it to his daughter. As for the rest of his property, he wants to make a will giving 30 percent to his daughter with the rest distributed according to the Islamic rules. Please comment.

As for life insurance, scholars have been giving two different verdicts with regard to its permissibility. On examining the evidence given by both groups of scholars in support of their argument, I have had no doubt that the scholars who say that insurance is permissible have much stronger evidence. They rely on a solid basis. Most notably, the late Sheikh Mustafa Al-Zarqa, one of the leading scholars in the twentieth century, wrote a book on insurance, which thoroughly examines all issues involved. He gives a clear verdict of insurance being permissible in Islam. I fully subscribe to this ruling.

Pension plans are generally acceptable. They work on practically the same basis as life insurance, with some differences. Pension plans are operated by most, if not all, Muslim countries. They are also applicable to Al-Azhar and other Islamic universities.

Normally pension plans provide support to a retired employee, his wife, and children below a certain age. The idea is that after that age, which is normally 21, children should be able to support themselves. Pension is a benefit given to those who are at a stage of life when they cannot support themselves. This is why it is paid to a retired employee and his wife, or spouse. It is not part of a person's savings, unless the plan specifies that.

As such, it is not treated as part of one's estate, which is divided according to the law of inheritance. Hence, the person in this case should look closely at his wife and daughter's situation. If he changes the pension benefit, he may be depriving his widow of a right, which he should not do.

As for his inheritance, if the situation continues as it is and he gets no more children, his estate is divided in the following manner: One-eighth to his wife, and one-half to his daughter. This assumes that neither of his parents or grandparents are alive at the time of his death. The remainder goes to other heirs as the case may be. If he has brothers and sisters, they are the ones to take the remainder, which is divided among them on the basis of one share for a sister and two for a brother. If he has no siblings, it goes to his nearest relatives.

The man in this case cannot make a will in favor of his daughter because she is his heir. Under Islamic law, no will may be made in favor of an heir.

Insurance: Life Insurance & the Conditions For Acceptability

I have an insurance policy for fifteen years, which has six years still to mature. The policy stipulates that the insurance company will pay a specific sum of money to my family in case of my death, and covers for accidental damage during this period. If I am still alive on the date of maturity, the insurance company pays back all my premiums with profits, but it does not repay the portion of premiums which covers me for

accidental damage. I am not aware how the insurance company invests its money. Recently I was told that life insurance is not acceptable in Islam. For that reason my question to you as I like to live within Islamic law.

Various articles on insurance have been published and I felt that I conveyed most aspects of this important topic. I explained my view that insurance is acceptable in Islam, including life insurance. I have made it clear that I have arrived at this conclusion after discussing this subject at length with a number of authorities on Islamic Fiqah and reading extensively on this subject. Now I have no doubt in my mind that for an individual to take an insurance policy on his life, or his business, or his house is perfectly acceptable from the Islamic point of view. I know that many scholars will give a different ruling, but I am certain that an increasing number of scholars tend to accept insurance as legitimate once they are aware of all of its implications.

The type of policy you have described is called life policy or endowment policy with profits. In principle, the policy is perfectly acceptable, but you have to make sure how the insurance company invests its money. If you find out that the company invests the premiums it receives from its clients in usurious dealings, such as lending the money out on interest, then you should not take the profits for yourself, but put them to charitable uses.

On the other hand, if the company invests its premium in acceptable business, such as property market, or shares and bonds or legitimate business, then you may take the profits and use them for the betterment of your family. There is no need to cancel the policy.

Intentions: Actions Are But By Intentions — Confusion Over A Hadith

A book prepared by Sheikh Abdul Aziz ibn Baz as a guide for pilgrimage says that only in pilgrimage and Umrah the intention must be stated verbally. In all other actions, a verbal intention is an innovation. On the other hand, an author in my home country declares that actions done without intention, or 'Niyyah, are not valid. He declares that the intention is obligatory. Could you please explain this contradiction and what is meant by the Hadith which states "Actions are but by intentions."

Let us start with the Hadith, which you have quoted and which is highly authentic. It is the intention behind a certain action, which determines its value. That intention refers to the purpose you have in mind for doing any action. Intention does not signify a certain sentence or phrase which you may say before embarking on a certain action. For example, you stand up to pray. If you have in mind before starting your prayer that you are doing it only to fulfill your obligation, which Allah has imposed on you, and to earn reward from Him for your obedience, then you are rewarded for your prayer. On the other hand, someone who prays in order to give an impression to other people that he is religious incurs Allah's displeasure for cheating. The action made by the two people is the same, but the value is widely different. The first person earns a reward while the other incurs a punishment.

That is, generally speaking, the meaning of the Hadith. It applies to all intentions whether they are ordinary, day-to-day affairs, or actions or worship. There is, however, something more to the latter type of actions. When you stand up to pray, you have to be conscious of the action you are embarking on to have the intention present in your mind that you are about to pray, say, the obligatory prayer of Asr in fulfillment of Allah's command. When you have this thought present in your mind, you have made the intention, which puts your action in the proper place. You have

fulfilled your duty to have the right intention and you have ensured the value of your action. That satisfies the condition spoken of by the second author.

That thought is not expressed in words. You do not start your prayer by a verbal statement declaring that you intend to pray four rak'ahs which constitute the obligatory prayer of Asr. It is true that many people make that verbal statement, but this is the innovation of which Sheikh ibn Baz speaks.

This is only reasonable for we speak in our daily life about our actions, saying that I have intended this action for this particular purpose. You may report to your wife or to a friend that you had an argument with a certain person. You may give an account of what took place and follow that with stating: "If he went on in that particular vein, I intended to give him a piece of my mind." Here you used the word "intended." That does not mean that you made a statement saying: I intend to give this person a piece of my mind if he does so and so. It simply means that you had made up your mind to do something. This is what is required in all acts of worship. To make up your mind to do something and fulfill your intention.

With regard to pilgrimage and Umrah, the thought of offering them is normally present in one's mind for sometime before embarking on the action itself. That does not constitute an intention, in the Islamic sense of the word. It is only when you embark on your journey to offer the pilgrimage or the Umrah that you are required to have the intention of offering them. In this particular case, the intention is the thought in your mind and a verbal declaration. That declaration represents a beginning of the Umrah or the pilgrimage in the same way as the phrase, "Allah-O-Akbar", signifies the beginning of prayer. Once you have made that verbal declaration you cannot stop on your way to Makkah and return back home. It is obligatory to complete your pilgrimage or your Umrah. Because the verbal statement is so important, it is made in a special form. You say: "Labbaik Allahumma Hajjah," or "Labbaik Allahumma Umrah." This means "I respond to your call, my Lord, for a pilgrimage or an Umrah." This is the form of verbal declaration of your intention that you are embarking on a trip to offer the pilgrimage or the Umrah [just like you say Allahu Akbar at the beginning of your prayer.] As for the other duties of pilgrimage such as tawaf, Sa'ie, etc. you do not start them with any verbal declaration. Like all other acts of worship, they are done with the intention being present in your mind, not expressed in words.

Intentions: Actions Are But By Intentions

A Hadith states that actions are but by intentions. What happens when a person makes a verbal intention to do something for a particular purpose but deep at heart he has some other idea?

The Hadith in full says: "Actions are but by intentions; and everyone shall have what he has intended. Whoever immigrates for the sake of God and His Messenger, peace be upon him, will be rewarded accordingly; and whoever immigrates in the hope of achieving some worldly purpose or to marry a particular woman, then his immigration is counted for that purpose only."

The meaning of the Hadith is very clear. It is the intention that determines the value of an action, and God's reward takes intention into account. All good actions must be dedicated purely to God in order to earn maximum reward. In the early years of the Islamic state in Madinah, immigration was one of the most important acts a Muslim did, because he would be leaving his homeland, family and clan in order to join the Muslim community. Hence, the Prophet, peace be upon him, cites this action to say that even immigration would count for nothing unless it is done purely for God's sake, in support of His cause.

Someone at that time immigrated to Madinah, but he said at the time that he hoped to marry a certain woman. Although his action is the same as that of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and his companions, in the sense that they all left their own homeland and settled in Madinah, their intentions were different. When that man married the woman he sought, he got all he wanted. God would not reward *'his immigration'*, even though he later became a good fighter for Islam.

Intentions: Matters Are Left To Clear Intention

The fact that a person who is so hungry that he fears for his life is allowed to eat even forbidden types of food only shows that Islam asks for what is easy, and always gives situations of necessity the sort of rulings which ensure that no affliction is caused to its followers. In the end, matters are left to the clear intention and to being conscious of what Allah requires of us. A person, who is driven by an extreme situation to eat of these forbidden types having had no intention of committing a sin, will suffer no punishment.

Islam: A Complete System, Addressing All Areas Of Human Life

I have two Muslim friends with widely different views on the extent of Islamic concerns. One says that Islam is a complete way of life that we have to follow Islamic guidance in all matters including the economic and political affairs. The other says that in such worldly matters, a Muslim may follow any philosophy, which he happens to believe in. In other words, a Muslim may have a Communist or a Capitalist line of thinking. Only in personal matters and beliefs, Islamic rules have to be observed. He further suggests that even if Islam has some say in political, economic and similar matters, these are now outdated. Please comment.

It is a classic argument by those who reject the divine faith to say that religion should only be concerned with personal and spiritual matters. Even at the time of the Prophet, the pagan Arabs were surprised that Islam wanted slaves to be treated kindly and not to be exploited. They said that would have adverse effects on productivity. To them, it was an economic matter which religion should not be concerned with. They were amazed that Islam tackled financial matters, laying down the system of Zakah and considering it a part of worship. To them, the detailed system of inheritance that Islam lays down was yet another example of religion going beyond its spiritual and personal concerns to enter a world which should be the exclusive reserve of human beings. That attitude is echoed today by those who say that the affairs of human life on earth are the concerns of man alone. Human beings can take care of their life through their institutions and the systems they choose to operate. If they have a democratic government, then parliament would issue their legislation, unrestricted by any religious value or consideration. If they have a dictatorial regime, then the dictator will impose his will, whether the people are happy with it or not.

This line of thinking was not peculiar to the Arabs at the time of the Prophet, peace be upon him, just as it is not peculiar to our own time. It has been echoed in all generations by those who opposed the call of Islam. They felt that Islam would take away from them the authority to conduct their affairs the way they want. Islam certainly does not approve that human affairs should be conducted in isolation from divine guidance. It wants human beings to defer to the principles God has revealed and the Prophet, peace be upon him, has expounded, and to establish their systems within that framework. They would have a wide room of choice, but the guiding principles would always be Islamic.

We need only to look at the history and learn about the situations that prevailed in different parts of the world to find out what different human systems have achieved.

We note that every major social change that took place in Europe was achieved at a very high cost in human misery and human lives. This was the case when capitalism took over from feudalism, and it was also the case at the time of the Industrial Revolution. The privileges that workers enjoy in western countries today were not achieved through discussions between equals and meeting in a conference hall or a tearoom. Every European country had to go through much strife before the welfare measures were put in place. You need only speak to any left-of-center politician in Europe to realize that these were the fruits of a very hard struggle fought over a long period of time.

The same was the case when communism and socialism took over in certain countries, such as in the former Soviet Union. Indeed, there was a great deal of trouble in the last few years, when the edifice of communism crumbled down.

All these changes were episodes in man's pursuit of a social system, which ensures justice for all. That remains an elusive goal, which is always opposed by tyranny and dictatorship. That tyranny may take the form of the power of capital in the West or the dictatorship of the party of the individual in other countries, regardless of their level of development. There is simply no man-made system, which has been able to eradicate social injustice. Even the welfare state that the Labor Party of Britain put in place after World War II experienced much abuse of privileges, giving rise to complaints on a wide scale and creating the need for change. When people prefer to live on social security benefits rather than work, then there is something basically wrong with the system. It is an aspect of injustice that a person is able to draw benefits though the system when he knows that he is not entitled to receive them.

All this injustice is the result of people turning their backs on God's guidance. True justice can only be achieved through the system God has revealed, because He has tailored it for the benefit of man, and there is no one to know what suits man better than God, man's creator.

We should ask ourselves: Why has God revealed a complete system, addressing all areas of human life, if it is true that man can manage his affairs well without any need for such guidance. Human history tells us that man has managed very poorly when he turned his back on God's guidance. He continues to achieve endless misery while resisting acknowledgment of the basic truth that he is in need of such guidance.

The aim of divine guidance is to serve human interest; to help man build a happy life in a community characterized by justice. That justice must be achieved at all levels, within the family, the local community, the social hierarchy and the political system. God says in a sacred Hadith: "My servants, I have forbidden Myself injustice and made injustice forbidden to you. Therefore, do not act unjustly to one another." Moreover, history proves that whenever human beings established their system on the basis of divine guidance and applied God's law, their achievements were great indeed. Take the example of the Islamic law of inheritance. Whenever it is applied, a family lives happily and everyone receives his or her share without trouble. When people try to evade the system, there is no end to family divisions and long-lasting quarrels. God has made the law of inheritance a detailed one because there is a need for financial matters to be precise. If your argument is that in certain areas there may be a need for some modification in order to suit different communities, God's law is so flexible as to be able to suit every community at every level of civilization. Islam lays down certain principles, which provide a framework within which human society can operate. Within that framework we can choose to produce a social system to suit us. That is a great characteristic of Islamic law, which enables it to be applicable in all communities. There is, however, a main requirement for Islamic law to be properly applied. The society, which chooses it must be one, which believes in God

and the message of the Muhammad, peace be upon him. Islamic law can only be properly applied in a Muslim community.

Those who claim that Islamic law is outmoded simply do not know what they are talking about. They take a very superficial view, saying that since these Islamic laws were revealed fourteen hundred years ago, then they could not be implemented now. They totally disregard the fact that this law was made by the creator of man, and it is specific only in those areas which are shared by all human beings in all communities and at all times. In every area where human life changes, Islamic law provides only guiding principles, allowing the community to choose its system.

You say that your two friends are Muslims, but my question is would we consider a person who says that Islamic law is outmoded a Muslim? Such a person affronts God with a mouthful, claiming that God does not know what suits a certain level of human development. For anyone to suggest that is to sink into a rejection of the faith. Such a person does not acknowledge some of the main attributes of God such as His absolute knowledge, wisdom and, above all, His sovereignty.

Islam: A Term That Covers Various Religions

May I refer to verse 85 of the third Surah which states that anyone who wishes to follow any religion other than Islam will not have it accepted and that he will be a loser in the hereafter. Nevertheless, it is stated in several Surahs that those who believe and do good deeds will be highly rewarded by Allah whether they are believers, Jews, Christians, Sabians, etc. It appears that the first verse limits salvation to Muslims only while the others ensure salvation for anyone who fulfills certain criteria. Please comment.

The term "Islam" is used in the Qur'an most of the time to indicate the religion preached by Muhammad, peace be upon him, as he conveyed the message Allah entrusted him. In this sense, Islam means the declaration by a person that he believes there is no deity save Allah and that Muhammad, peace be upon him, was His last messenger to mankind. He commits himself to the fulfillment of his duties as outlined by this message and taught by Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. The other sense is the more general one which indicates "submission or self-surrender to Allah." This is indeed the essence of all divine messages preached by all prophets and messengers, ever since Adam and continuing with the line of Prophet-hood until Muhammad, peace be upon him, the last Prophet and messenger. In reference to Prophet Ibrahim, the Qur'an says: "His Lord said to him: Submit: I submit myself to Allah, the Lord of all worlds." The Arabic equivalent to the word submit in this Qur'anic verse is the verb "aslama" from which the term "Islam" is derived. We are told in the Qur'an that it was Prophet Ibrahim who named the believers "Muslims", meaning "those who submit to Allah."

The two senses of the word are closely related since this religion of Islam has the principle of total submission to Allah as its cornerstone. When a person betrays any doubt about submitting totally to Allah, he is considered not to be a Muslim, because he does not fulfill the most basic criterion of Islam.

There is more than one reference in the Qur'an to the type of religion which is acceptable to Allah. In all these references, the term Islam occurs. One clear example is found in verse 19 of Surah 3, entitled: "The House of Imran" where Allah says: ***"Indeed, the only true religion in the sight of Allah is Islam."*** Many scholars are of the opinion that this verse and similar verses refer to Islam in its final form taught by Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, as he conveyed his message. Equally numerous are the scholars who take such verses as referring to Islam in its general

sense, namely, self-surrender or total submission to Allah. To them, the aforementioned verse should be translated into English as: ***"Indeed the only true religion in the sight of Allah is [man's] self-surrender to Him."*** The two views are not contradictory since the final version of the divine religion, i.e. Islam, emphasizes the principal verses in their general sense of the term Islam, we give them a broader scope as to include the followers of earlier prophets who responded to divine messages and submitted themselves to Allah. As it is well known, all prophets preached essentially the same message, calling on their nations to surrender themselves to Allah. The foregoing applies to verse 85 of Surah 3, to which you have referred. If we translate in the stricter sense, we may say that it means: "If anyone seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted from him, etc." I personally tend to prefer this latter rendering. It must be clear to us, however, that since Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, has conveyed to mankind the religion of Islam as the last and complete version of divine faith, this is the only acceptable form of self-surrender to Allah.

The other verses which you have referred to speak of different communities who shall have nothing to fear in the life to come. Let us take one example from verse 62 of Surah 3, which may be translated as follows:

"The believers, as well as those who follow the Jewish faith and Christians and Sabians - - all who believe in Allah and the last day and do righteous deeds - - shall have their reward with their Lord; and no fear need they have and neither shall they grieve." [the Family of Imran — "Aale Imran" 3: 114-115]

These verses should be taken in a historical sense. We know for certain that the message of Islam as preached by Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, abrogates previous messages.

Thus, it is the only form of religious acceptance to Allah. However, those people of old who followed Judaism, Christianity or other faiths preached by earlier prophets and have submitted themselves to Allah alone will certainly have their reward with Allah and they will have nothing to fear on the Day of Judgement. After Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, mankind does not have any choice other than to believe in his message or to deny it. If he denies it, he is among the losers, no matter what creed he follows. However, it is the responsibility of Muslims to convey the message of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, to mankind. Those who do not come to know of it, or who learn about it in a distorted way, cannot be condemned by us. Allah will judge them, as He knows of their situation.

Islam: Are All Human Beings Born Muslims

I attended the lecture in which the lecturer said that according to the Qur'an all human beings are born Muslims. How does the Qur'an prove it to us Muslims and to non-Muslims?

Islam does not say that every child is born a Muslim in the sense that if he or she are left to themselves, without any outside influence, until they attain the age of puberty, they will automatically follow the religion of Islam. They will automatically offer their prayers in the Islamic way and fast in Ramadhan and so on. Islam makes no such claim, as some people mistakenly imagine. What happens is that people listen to scholars saying that every child is born with the Islamic nature instilled in him and they imagine that the child is a Muslim in the full sense of the word. There is an error in this concept, which needs to be corrected.

Let us first of all listen to the Prophet's statement, which deals with this particular issue. He is quoted to have said: "Every newborn is given the Islamic nature, but his

parents cause him to become a Jew or a Christian or a Magian.” This is highly significant, but in order to understand it, we have to be clear about the meaning of the “Islamic nature” to which the Prophet, peace be upon him, refers. I admit that my translation is inadequate. It does not give the full meaning of the expression the Prophet, peace be upon him, uses. The problem is that I do not know how else it can be translated. To be clear about its meaning, we have to take the term ‘Islamic in its broadest sense. Islam means submission to God, and Muslim is a person who willingly surrenders himself to God in every respect. He admits no claim on his money, effort, time and indeed his whole life as taking priority over what God wants of him. In this sense, all prophets since Adam preached the religion of Islam, which means submission to God. Indeed, God tells us in the Qur’an that He has given us a faith, which does not impose on us any undue encumbrance. It is

“The faith of your father, Ibrahim. It is He who has named you Muslims.”
[Pilgrimage — “Al-Hajj” 22: 78]

Speaking of Ibrahim, God says:

“His Lord said to Him, “submit!” He said, “I submit myself to the Lord of all worlds.” [the Cow — “Al-Baqarah” 2: 131]

In order to make it easier for man to follow the right path and abide by divine guidance God has instilled in His nature the desire to know the right faith and to have a correct concept of His Lord. A child who grows up without receiving any religious education and whose parents try to keep him away from religious influences, as some people in the West do, will still find in himself a desire to know the right faith. That is inherent in his nature because God has placed it there when He created man. Moreover, man does not find it at all difficult to submit himself to his Lord, once he has the correct concept of God, the Supreme Being, and the Creator of all worlds. Indeed, when he submits himself to Him, he feels peace and happiness within himself. He also experiences a feeling of peace with the universe around him. He does not rebel, saying that he wants to be independent or he wants to provide his individual character. He realizes that there is nothing to stop him from doing that when he submits to God. Nor does man find any problem in meeting the demands of his faith, which is based on the personal submission to God.

To help man in his search for his Lord and to follow a faith, which achieves harmony between his nature and the world around him, God sent prophets and messengers, preaching the message of submission to God alone, i.e. the message of Islam in its broad sense, and the pure concepts of the Oneness of God, glorified be He. Since the very first of human existence, this message has been given to man and the first prophet to carry it was Adam, the first human being. In this particular point, the Islamic view is totally opposite to the theory of a gradual development of man’s beliefs from the worship of idols and natural forces to a dual concept of god, before the Unitarian concept was developed. Indeed, Islam makes it clear that man was given the Unitarian faith right from the first day, but distortions were introduced in it time after time. The mission of prophets and messengers was always to correct the deviation and bring people back to God, so that they acknowledge His Oneness and submitted to Him alone. Most of these prophets were sent to their own nations and peoples. Some had a message to preach within a certain area; others were confined to a particular city or township. They all fulfilled their task, exerting maximum effort to make people realize that they would lead a much happier life, a life of internal and external peace if they accepted the divine faith. Some, like Moosa, Dawood and Yunus received good response and Dawood was able to establish a kingdom, which he and his son Sulaiman ruled in accordance with the law of the Torah. Others like Hood, Saleh and Nooh had to contend with determined opposition. Nooh in particular continued to preach his message when he lived among them for 950 years, as the Qur’an specifically mentions, but only very few people accepted his faith.

It was God's will that man should continue to have the divine message available to him in clear, undistorted terms. So whenever man is fed up with the misery and the havoc caused by following vain desires, deviant theories and ill-formed concepts, he will be able to return to God by following His message. Therefore, He sent Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, as the final messenger and gave him the Qur'an containing the divine message and guaranteed that the Qur'an would remain intact, free from any distortion, till the end of time. The name He has chosen for His message was Islam, which is derived from the essence of divine faith, preached by all prophets, namely, surrender or submission to God alone.

It is in this sense that the Prophet, peace be upon him, mentions that every child is born with the Islamic nature instilled in him. In other words, every child has the natural inclination to submit to God. Outside influences, however, may distort his view and cause him not to see the truth of the divine faith. One of the most important outside influences, is the upbringing of every child. Family and social factors are largely responsible for the development of a child's approach to life as he grows up. When a person grows up in a society, which has no knowledge of the faith of Islam, it is most unlikely that he will discover Islam and submit to it by himself, unless he is helped by certain circumstances. It is to this that the Prophet, peace be upon him, refers in the second part of the same Hadith when he says: "It is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian." That is because they teach their children this or that religion and, by doing so, they greatly increase the chances of their children growing in these faith. Nevertheless, when a person learns about the faith of the Oneness of God and studies its concepts, and considers its principles and values objectively, he is bound to conclude that the religion of Islam is the most logical, simple and straightforward religion. If he chooses to be consistent and to conduct his life on the basis of the faith, which he knows to be correct one, he will follow Islam. If he decides not to do so, it will be only because he prefers some other methods, interests, relationships or certain practices to regulating his life on the basis of Islamic terminology. He then follows his vain desires.

Islam: Giving Islam A Bad Image

One group in my home country encourages people to read the Qur'an, even though they do not understand any word of what they are reading. When they are told that we need to understand the Qur'an, they demand evidence, saying: "Quote a verse of the Qur'an saying that you should understand its meaning." Please comment.

The very fact that the Qur'an is a book of guidance for mankind means that it must be understood. Scholars have always worked on explaining it and elucidating its meaning.

How else can people do what God wants them to do? Numerous are the verses that require us to think and reflect. How can we do so without understanding? Besides, the Qur'an is God's message addressed to man. Therefore, it is expressed in human language. If we say that we cannot understand it, then we are saying that it is not meant to implement its contents. How can anyone say so?

We earn reward from God for reading the Qur'an even if we do not understand the meaning of what we are reading, because such reading is an act of worship. But definitely a reading coupled with reflection on the meaning is much better and more richly rewarded than parrot reading where the reader does not understand anything.

[Added: ***Narrated Abu Moosa:*** The Prophet, peace be upon him, said, "The example of a believer who recites the Qur'an and acts on it, is like a citron which tastes nice and smells nice. And the example of a believer who does not recite the Qur'an but acts on it, is like a date which tastes good but has no smell. And the example of a

hypocrite who recites the Qur'an, is like a sweet basil, which smells good but tastes bitter. And the example of a hypocrite who does not recite the Qur'an is like a [fruit] which tastes bitter and has a bad smell." Sahih Al-Bukhari 6: 579- O.B.]

Islam: Islamic Literature For Non-Muslims

I, a Christian, would like to know more about Islam. Is it forbidden for me to read the Qur'an? Are there books written in English about Islam? How to get them?

There are plenty of books and booklets written on Islam in English. Perhaps the best place to get these from in Saudi Arabia is Dar El-Ifta, the short name for the "Presidency of Propagation, Islamic Rulings and Research" which is under the direction of Sheikh Abdulaziz ibn Baz. Its headquarters is in Riyadh, you need only to write to them about your requirements and they will send you what books they have in English for free distribution. You need only address your letter to the department of Islamic propagation at the Presidency in Riyadh. If you address it to Sheikh ibn Baz himself, it will be equally good.

Alternatively, you can write to any of the following addresses in Britain and the U.S.A. to have a list of the books, which they can supply you on a purchase order.

1. The Islamic Book Shop, Muslim Welfare House, 223 Seven Sisters Road, London N4, England.
2. The Islamic Foundation, 223 London Road, Leicester, England.
3. The American Trust Publications, 109000 W Washington Street, Indianapolis, IN 46231, U.S.A.

The Qur'an has been revealed to Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, in order to warn mankind against disbelief. As such, it is Allah's message to all mankind. The Prophet, peace be upon him, did not hesitate to recite it to any unbeliever of the pagan Arabs, or indeed to non-Arabs. When he wrote to the heads of neighboring states, he included in his letter verses of the Qur'an. He was aware that they were non-Muslims and they were bound to hold his letters and read them. Moreover, I believe that you will be reading a translation of the Qur'an.

There is no question that you are welcome to read anyone of the translations. Perhaps you will find that the easiest to read is the one published by Penguins which is translated by N. J. Dawood. However, the translator gives himself at times too much license in conveying the meanings of the text. Moreover, being a non-Muslim, Dawood is liable sometimes to make the occasional error in grasping the meaning of the Arabic text.

Another translation, which has the benefit of a good English style, is the one done by Muhammad Asad. However, one has to be on one's guard again, because quite often Asad imposes an extremely rationalized interpretation on verses which tackle matters that are not familiar to us in this world. On the other hand, Pickthall's translation follows the original text very strictly. As such, it suffers from being too literal. Yousuf Ali's translation is somewhat apologetic. However, the new edition prepared by Dar El-Ifta amends most of the errors in this translation.

Islam: Permissibility & Prohibition

In Islam, question of permissibility and prohibition is closely related to the more important feeling of being conscious of Allah and fearing Him. It is the pivot round which every intention and every action in the life of a believer turns. Thus, it transforms human life into a relationship with Allah and a recognition of His greatness and a consciousness of His presence and power in all situations, whether we are alone or with others: ***"And have fear of Allah; indeed, Allah is swift in reckoning."***

Islam: Political Islamic Issues

1. Is it true that nationalism is forbidden in Islam?
2. Some people suggest that Muslims today are in such a miserable state because they have abandoned the caliphate system, and that they should go back to it. Please comment.

1. We cannot say anything in answer, unless a proper definition of nationalism is given first. If it is merely a sense of belonging to a certain community, then this is perfectly permissible. The companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him, never abandoned their affiliation to their tribes or communities. They certainly did not put such affiliation ahead of their loyalty to Islam and the Muslim community, but they did not abandon them.

Therefore, if one considers that his main allegiance is to a community or geopolitical entity, and that it takes precedence over his allegiance to Islam, then he is in the wrong, and must rectify this. But if his main allegiance is to Islam and the Muslim community then his belonging to a country or a race is merely a statement of fact. There is nothing wrong with this.

2. This idea that the re-establishment of the caliphate should be the primary cause of all Muslims, and that without it nothing is proper or right, is advanced by the organization known as Hizb Al-Tahrir. It is a shallow idea that does not rely on any clear evidence from the Sunnah. The Prophet, peace be upon him, never advocated any form of government, or the establishment of a political entity. It is true that he established a state once he had the foundations for it, but he did not establish a caliphate system. Nor did he advise on a particular form of government. This is the reason why the choice of the first five caliphs in Islam took five different procedures. All of them meet the general principle that Islamic government is consultative.

When you go into the ideas of Hizb Al-Tahrir, you find many faults with them. You also find them very argumentative, unwilling to look at any view or argument that differs with them. This is not the proper Islamic attitude. Their way does not lead to much good, although most of their members are honest, devout and sincere. Yet their approach is erroneous.

Islam: Relevance Of Islam In Our Time

Would you please explain the relevance of Islam in our time? Or may I phrase my question differently and ask whether Muslims would have been worse off had they not been practicing Muslims? May I also ask why Allah had deemed it fit to declare that Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is the last messenger.

To ask whether Islam is relevant to human life in our modern time is to ask whether man needs divine guidance or not. If we relate this question to a specific period in time, when we suppose that divine guidance might have been suitable or needed at a

particular stage but, with human development and advancement, man may come to a stage when he is no longer in need of such guidance. To prove this, we need to examine various human situations and see how human society fares if it follows divine guidance and what may happen to it if it considers such guidance irrelevant. Fortunately, examples abound.

Ever since the Industrial Revolution, Europe and American societies have moved away from religion and decided that religion had no place in shaping human life. In the West, the capitalist system emphasized the freedom of the individual and considered faith and worship personal matters, which might remain isolated from the political and economic fields. The sphere of influence of religion was further reduced, so as to banish it altogether from the social order. What results do we see there?

In the West, where democracy has ensured a genuine chance for people to replace their government, we see a frequently changing cycle, with the electorate deciding to change directions every few years. Thus, a right-wing government is replaced by a left-wing one, which is replaced a few years later by another right-wing government. An economic problem of rising inflation is succeeded by a more acute problem of rising unemployment. Money supply is tightened or relaxed as fits the outlook of the government in power, which is bound to rely on support from either the business community or trade unions. It may be argued that there is enough flexibility in the system to tolerate such changes and allow the people to choose the direction in which they wish to go. While this is true and the flexibility is commendable in principle, the frequency of change and the rapid cycle of rising unemployment following close on the heels of sharp inflation causes a great deal of suffering. It is often the case that the government of the day wants to appease its own constituency, be it big business or powerful trade unions. Therefore, the measures it takes and the legislation it enacts seldom take the interest of the whole community into consideration. Rarely a piece of legislation is calculated to serve the community as a whole. The people face a dilemma, which they try to solve by voting an unpopular government out of power and replacing it with a government, which soon loses popularity. In Britain, for example, it is always expected that any by-election, which takes place in the second or third year of the life of a parliament, would go against the government in power. This phenomenon is known as "protest vote" against the government. As the time for general elections approaches, the government in power starts to take popular measures in order to try to win the next elections.

There is no doubt that the most important achievement of Western civilization is the importance it attaches to the freedom of the individual. Over the years, this has brought up the best in people. Freedom is certainly necessary for man to allow his talents and skills to have full play and to yield their best fruit. One cannot but admire the principle of freedom, which is valued so highly in the West. However, Western societies have erred in giving little to discipline, which should run side by side with personal freedom. Thus, moral values have been allowed to lose their grip on people's conduct and the concept of unrestrained social behavior was given full sway. One of the results of such philosophy was the permissiveness, which was given in the sixties of this century the title of the "sexual revolution". A by-product of this permissiveness was the spread of wanton, permissive and perverted sexual behavior, which has increased the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases; the most recent of which is AIDS.

In the Eastern bloc, communism has ruled for over 70 years in the Soviet Union and for nearly half a century in other East European countries. In these countries, people lived under ruthless dictatorships with little or no hope of ever enjoying the type of personal freedom every human being yearns for. When we compare the capitalist system of the West with the communism of the East, from the point of view of the material well-being of society, we find that communism has allowed members of the

party and top officials in the government to get a large share of the nation's wealth and imposed a life of poverty and deprivation on the rest of the population. One of the most flagrant examples was that of the Romanian dictator, Ceausescu, who led a life emperor would be shy to contemplate while his nation suffered from starvation. The bankruptcy of communism has been made so obvious for all people to see, once the process of reform was allowed to operate. On the other hand, capitalism allows people to enjoy the fruits of their efforts but its financial system which is based on usury, is geared to allow the rich to be better off and gives the poor little chance of improving their lot. Because of the widening gap between the rich and the poor in capitalist society, it was necessary for capitalist countries to introduce a system of social security, which offers housing subsidies and health insurance to people of low income. It must be said, however, that none of these benefits could be gained without hard struggle.

It is such examples that explain to us the relevance of divine guidance in our age and indeed, in every period of human society. Allah has provided us with guidance, which does not shackle us so as to prevent our advancement, but keeps us on the route to progress while ensuring a respectable standard of living for every one. Moreover, it is balanced between our material and spiritual needs. It allows a disciplined and responsible sort of personal freedom which allows man's talents to flourish but gives them the right guidance which ensures that they work for the betterment of man as the creature Allah has chosen to be in charge of building life on earth. Without divine guidance, man is likely to go astray, erring in the side of spiritualism or materialism. When one of these two elements is overemphasized at the expense of the other, the result is human sufferings.

You ask whether Muslims would have been worse off had they not been practicing Islam. The answer is two-fold. First, generally speaking, Muslims implement Islam only partially today. Indeed, only a small part of Islam is implemented in the lives of Muslims. Nevertheless, they would have been much worse off without such partial implementation. Secondly, if Muslims were to lead a truly Islamic life, they would indeed be much better off, not only spiritually but also materially. Allah's promise to humanity will always come true. If human beings were to implement divine guidance, Allah would grant them abundance of every good thing in life. This promise is repeated several times in the Qur'an. We need not have anything in addition to that in order to believe that the implementation of Islam will result in prosperity and happiness. Allah's promise always comes true.

All prophets preached essentially the same message to their nations. Allah has willed, however, to bring His message in its fullness and to address it to all mankind. He has sent Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, as His messenger to convey this message to mankind. He has guaranteed that the message will be preserved intact, free from distortion, for the rest of time. It was necessary, therefore, to make it clear to all people that the Prophet, peace be upon him, was the last messenger so that no one can claim to be a new prophet or to have any new message. Moreover, our knowledge that Muhammad, peace be upon him, was Allah's last messenger reassures us that when we follow his guidance, we are certain of our grounds. We will certainly achieve happiness and earn Allah's pleasure.

Islamic Community: As the Best Nation Ever Raised For Mankind

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Beneficent. “

You are the best nation that has ever been raised for mankind; you enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid what is wrong, and you believe in Allah. Had the people of earlier revelation believed, it would have been for their own good. Few of them are believers, while most of them are evildoers.”

[the House of Imran, "Aale Imran": 3: 110] Commentary by Sayyid Qutb —
Translated & Edited by Adil Salahi.

Believing in Allah provides all that since it gives a correct concept of the universe and the relationship between the Creator and His creation, and a correct concept of man, the purpose of his existence and his true position in the universe. It is from this general concept that moral values and principles should be derived. The desire to earn the pleasure of Allah and to avoid His displeasure motivates people to work for the implementation of these principles, which are, in turn, safeguarded by fearing Allah and by the authority of His law.

Believing in Allah is necessary in order that those who invite to all that is good, enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong can proceed along their appointed course and bear all its difficulties and hardships. They have to face the tyranny of evil at its fiercest, the pressures of worldly desires at their strongest, and they have to face complacency, weakness and narrow ambitions. As they do that, they have to be equipped with faith. It is their only weapon. Their support comes from Allah. Any other equipment is exhaustible, any other weapon can be overpowered and any other support is liable to collapse.

Earlier in the Surah an order is given to the Muslim community to have some of its numbers who are charged with the task of inviting to all that is good, enjoining the doing of what is right and forbidding what is wrong. Here, Allah describes the Muslim community as having this quality, so that it may realize that it does not come into existence unless it has this essential quality by which it is distinguished from the rest of mankind. It either invites to all that is good, enjoin what is right and forbids what is wrong, in addition to believing in Allah, and thereby gives credence to its existence as a Muslim nation, or it does not do any of that which means that it has not come into existence, and it loses its Islamic mark.

The Qur'an stresses this in numerous places. The Sunnah also includes a number of directives and commands by the Prophet, peace be upon him, some of which may be quoted here:

Abu Saeed Al-Khudri reports that he heard the Prophet, peace be upon him, saying: "Let any of you who sees something wrong put it right with his own hand. If he is unable to do so, let him change it by the word of mouth. If he cannot do even that, let him do it within himself. This is the weakest form of faith." [Related by Muslim].

Abu Dawood and At-Tirmithi relate on the authority of Ibn Massoud that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "When the children of Israel began to commit sins frequently, their scholars tried to dissuade them, but they persisted. Their scholars, nevertheless, continued to attend their social gatherings, and eat and drink with them. Allah left them [their scholars] to stray and sealed their hearts. He also cursed them in the words of Dawood, Sulaiman and Jesus, Son of Mary." The Prophet, peace be upon him, was saying this as he reclined, but at this point he sat up and said: "By Him who holds my soul in His hand, you must make them turn back to what is right."

At-Tirmithi relates on the authority of Huthaifah that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "By Him, who holds my soul in His hand, you will enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid what is wrong, or else, Allah will visit you with a punishment of His own. You will, then, pray to Him and He will not answer you."

Allah's messenger says: "When a sin is committed on earth, a person who witnesses it and denounces it is the same as one who has not seen it and the one who has been absent and approves of it is considered like one who has taken part in it." [Related by Abu Dawood].

Abu Saeed Al-Khudri quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "One of the highest forms of jihad is to confront a despotic ruler with the word of truth." [Related by Abu Dawood and At-Tirmithi].

Jabir quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "The best of all martyrs is Hamzah and a man who stands up to a despotic ruler, enjoins him to do what is right and forbids him what is wrong, and is, therefore, killed by that ruler."

The Prophet, peace be upon him, stresses this quality in many other Hadiths which tend to establish beyond any shadow of doubt that this quality is essential to the Muslim community. The Sunnah contains a wealth of directives, which provide the best education for the Muslim community. We unfortunately tend not to give the Sunnah its true value.

This verse addresses the Muslim nation with its own description so that it becomes aware of its position, value and true nature. The first part of this verse imposes on the Muslim community a very heavy duty, while at the same time it honors and elevates it to a position which cannot be given to any other community: You are the best nation that has ever been raised for mankind: you enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid what is wrong, and you believe in Allah.

Reference to the Muslim nation as one which "has been raised" is made in the passive voice. This suggests that a highly skillful hand has neatly molded this nation and brought it forth from behind the eternal curtain, which covers things known only to Allah. The expression adopted here indicates a subtle and gentle movement, which brings forth on to the stage of existence a whole nation which has a unique role to play and a special position to occupy.

You are the best nation that has ever been raised for mankind. The Muslim nation should understand this in order to know its position and its true nature. It should know that it has been raised specially for the purpose of assuming the leadership of mankind, since it is the best nation. Allah wants the leadership in this planet of ours to be assumed by the forces of goodness, not the forces of evil. It follows that it should never be in the position of a recipient, taking what other nations have to offer. It must be the one to offer to others whatever it has of sound ideology, philosophy, morals, knowledge and perfect system. This is the duty of the Muslim nation imposed on it by its unique position and the purpose of its very existence. It is a duty of the Muslim nation to assume the leadership of mankind at all times. By assuming it, it also takes upon itself certain responsibilities. Leadership cannot be given to any nation, which claims it, unless it proves that it is worthy to be the leader. By its ideology and social system, the Muslim community is worthy of this position. What remains for it is to prove that in scientific advancement and in the fulfillment of man's task of building the earth, it is also an able leader. It is clear then that the system which brings this nation into existence demands much from it and gives it the incentive to excel in every field, if only it would follow this system and appreciate its requirements and duties.

The first requirement is that the Muslim nation should work hard at protecting human life from evil. It must have the power to enable it to enjoin the doing of all that is right and to forbid the doing of all that is wrong. It is, after all, the best nation ever raised for mankind. This position is not given to the Muslim community as the result of any favoritism, coincidence or random selection. Far be it from Allah to do that. Allah does not give positions and duties to different nations on any basis of favoritism, as the people of earlier revelation used to describe themselves as "Allah's children and beloved people." The criterion which makes a community worthy of the position of leadership is its active work of the preservation of human life from evil and the promotion of what is right, in addition to implementing the faith which

defines what is right and what is wrong: You enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid what is wrong.

The position of leadership is then earned by active fulfillment of its tasks, heavy as they are, and following the way defined for it, thorny as it may be. In practical terms, it means standing up against evil, promoting every good thing and protecting society against all elements of corruption. All these are hard tasks, but they are nevertheless necessary for the good human society to be well established and protected. There is no other way for bringing about the type of human society, which Allah loves to be established.

Believing in Allah is also necessary so that the community will have a correct standard of values and will have a correct definition of what is right and what is wrong. What is socially agreed by a certain community is not enough. It may happen that corruption becomes so widespread that standards are no longer correct or appropriate. Hence, reference must be made to a permanent concept of good and evil, virtue and vice, right and wrong. This concept should have a basis other than the social norms of any particular generation.

Islamic Community: Best Community Status — Taken For Granted

Why do we, Muslims, always think that we are the best people on earth, whether we do well or badly? We believe as if heaven is waiting for us. Such an attitude is certainly not helpful in identifying our own faults. Please comment.

There is a Qur'anic verse, which may be rendered in translation as follows:

"You are the best community ever raised for mankind. You enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong and you believe in God." [the Family Of Imran — "Aale Imran" 3: 110].

If we consider this Qur'anic verse very carefully we are bound to conclude that the status of the best community ever raised for mankind belongs only to a community which fulfills three conditions: Doing and enjoining others to do what is right; refraining from and forbidding what is wrong and having faith in God. If any of these three qualities is absent in a particular community, then that community cannot be of the best type. Even when people in that community are good believers and always do what is right, they still cannot be considered among the best if they do not fulfill the other condition which is "to forbid what is wrong". In other words, if people in that community see wrong practices being committed in public without taking any action to stop them, then their status is certainly well below that of the "best community". Indeed, the requirements of doing and enjoining what is right as well as its counterfoil of forbidding and refraining from what is wrong make for a great quality. They ensure that the corrective attitude is paramount in the minds of people in that community, urging them all the time to aim for the best standard.

The fulfillment of those three conditions is an essential requirement for acquiring a "best" status. These requirements can be fulfilled by any Muslim community, regardless of its race or ethnic origin. There is no hint in the Qur'anic verse that racial or ethnic affiliation is of any importance in this regard. Therefore, any Muslim community, wherever it exists and whatever its standard of development, belongs to this noble group whom God describes as "the best community ever raised for mankind", provided that it fulfills those three conditions: Doing and enjoining what is right, refraining from and forbidding what is wrong and having faith in God.

Unfortunately, some of us take the first part of the Qur'anic statement and claim that it is a description of Arabs, or Muslims in general. They disregard the three

conditions and claim, out of ignorance or false self-esteem, that God has conferred this best status on the Arabs generally. This is certainly a false claim that cannot be supported by any evidence from the Qur'an or the Sunnah. It has two main defects. One of them is that which you have mentioned; making us unable to identify our faults and correct them. But the other and more important defect is that we attribute to God what He has not stated. Thus, the claim is false. Moreover, it is in conflict with the basic Islamic principle, which considers all people equal. Those who believe in God are certainly better than non-believers because of having faith. The more conscientious they are in implementing their faith, the better they are. This applies to individuals and communities alike. Those who practice their faith are better than those who do not, and those who try to make Islamic teachings the guiding principle in choosing their way of life are better than those who do not. The Qur'an denounces the Christians and the Jews for claiming that they are the beloved sons of God.

"Both the Jews and the Christian say: 'We are God's children, and His beloved ones.' Say: 'Why, then, does He cause you to suffer for your sins? Nay, you are but human beings of His creating. He forgives whom He wills; for God's is the dominion over the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, and with Him is all journey's end.'" [Table Spread — "Al-Ma'idah" 5: 18]

So, any claim to a "favored" status must be supported by the proper action. Therefore, those who think that heaven is waiting for them with open doors to accommodate them, regardless of whether they do well or badly, only deceive themselves.

Moreover, good action must always be based on proper faith. It must be motivated by the desire to earn God's pleasure. If it is not, then it is devoid of the very basis that gives it value. It is through faith and good actions that we hope to earn God's pleasure and gain admittance into heaven in the hereafter.

Islamic Community: Dealing With Non-Muslims, Etc.

In countries where several religions exist side by side, it is normal for people of different religions to have social contacts. How should a Muslim behave in matters where the practice of others differs with our own, say, on food, dress, etc.?

Dealing with non-Muslims must always be understanding, cordial and friendly, provided, of course, that they also treat us in the same way. There is no harm in maintaining good relations with them. Indeed, this is encouraged. However, those of them who are hostile to Islam or try to ridicule our beliefs or practices are to be treated differently. We do not extend kindness to them, but stay away from them. We must not start hostility, but we do not accept humiliation.

As for friendly ones, we should explain to them what limits we are bound to observe. Say, if your non-Muslim neighbor invites you to a dinner, you accept, but you should explain in advance Islamic requirements concerning food so that he would only serve you what you can eat.

Islamic Community: Flouting Laws In Non-Muslim Countries

Is it permissible for Muslims who live in non-Muslim countries to disobey the law or cheat the government by avoiding payments due, such as telephone bills? People who do that maintain that they are not cheating anybody or society, as they also claim that the government is not doing enough for Muslims in education or other matters. Please comment.

Evil may creep into people's thinking and action in a variety of ways. This is one of them. What I would like to emphasize clearly is that a Muslim is a law-abiding citizen. He does not cheat individuals, society or government. If he does, then he is accountable for that cheating to God. Some people may not like it when we say that this is forbidden, but we can prove that very easily. Suppose such a person is asked by a government official whether he is cheating on his telephone or electricity bill, or whether he has paid his train fare, will he not lie in order to get away with what he has done? If he needs to lie about something, how can that thing be permissible? The Prophet, peace be upon him, defines sin as "that which one harbors in one's chest and hates that other people should know of it". I believe no person who is guilty of this type of cheating would like others to know about it. Thus it falls within the Prophet's description of sin.

Such people claim that they are not cheating anyone, but they are cheating not only the government, but also the whole community. When a government needs so much revenue for its tasks, and its income falls as a result of people's cheating, it will need to raise taxes or telephone or electricity prices in order to get what it needs. Hence, everyone will have to pay more for these services.

It is not right to justify such an action by saying the government is not doing enough for Muslims. The fact is that Muslims benefit by the government services like other people. If they are at a disadvantage, then they should organize themselves as a community, so that they can have a stronger voice and they can put extra pressure on the government to give them their dues. This does not happen if too many Muslims cheat with taxes or bills. If they are well organized, and then they can do more for themselves to supplement what the government is doing, in order to improve their situation.

Islamic Community: Identity Of

It is said that at all the troubled spots in the Muslim world, the determination to lead a truly Islamic life has been lacking. People are Muslims only by name. It is further advanced that God will not fulfill His promise unless they demonstrate that they truly deserve to be called Muslims. What are the guiding principles, which enable us to lead a truly Islamic life and save us from continuous misery and destruction being faced by the Muslim world?

The question opens a very wide subject that goes to the basics of what is Islam and who is a Muslim. If we start with a very strict and narrow definition which leads to the isolation of a small group who rigidly claim to be the only Muslims in the community, then we are mistaken. At the same time, there is much in the life of any community in the Muslim world today which is un-Islamic. Hence we must differentiate between an individual fulfilling his Islamic duties as required, and a community leading a truly Islamic life. These are two different levels, and the responsibility of the individual is different at each level.

As an individual, you only have to fulfill what God has ordered His servants and to refrain from what He has forbidden in order to discharge your responsibility and win God's pleasure in this life and admittance into heaven in the next. On the Day of Judgement,

God does not ask an individual about anything over and above the fulfillment of his duties and the avoidance of what is forbidden. However, when a Muslim abides by the Islamic teachings, he will have to foster a sense of belonging to a community and he will try to help that community lead an Islamic life. This he does even without having to do anything special. It is when Muslim individuals acquire a good

understanding of their Islamic duties and try to fulfill them as best as they can that the Muslim community comes into existence. The following Hadith gives us a good example:

"When you steer away from what God has forbidden, you are among the most devoted of God's servants. When you are content with what God has given you, you are the richest of people. When you are kindly to your neighbor, you are a believer. When you wish for others what you wish for yourself, you are a Muslim." [Related by At-Tirmithi]

No long explanation of this Hadith is required to give an idea of what Islamic life really means. It is in avoiding what is forbidden that true devotion to God is evidenced. It is not demonstrated by offering prayers and fasting, or by doing other duties more frequently. That is because what is forbidden often has an appeal and avoiding it requires some real effort, such as the resistance of temptation and the abandoning of pleasure. When one does this for God's sake, one is truly devoted to Him.

Similarly being content with what God has given is a test of richness. It shows that the lure of life's riches is secondary in one's thoughts. Moreover, it demonstrates that one only wants what comes to him in a lawful manner, because God does not give anything that one gets in a forbidden way. He does not give people anything they get by theft, bribery, embezzlement, fraud, or similar methods, which constitute aggression against fellow people or against the community. Hence this aspect confirms the first one and enhances the sense of getting only what is lawful.

The third and fourth point foster the community feeling. Note how the Prophet, peace be upon him, links the quality of being a person of faith to being kind to neighbors. In addition he attaches the very idea of being a Muslim to loving for others and what one wants for oneself. When you add these two qualities to the first two you have a community different from all those known on the face of the earth today. There are some communities where some degree of these qualities exists in varying degrees, but there is hardly any approaching them in all aspects. Until we have a community where all these qualities are in full blossom we cannot say there is a truly Islamic community.

When these qualities are all lacking, then the community is not Islamic, even though all people in that community have Muslim names and claim to believe in Islam. Moreover, it is bound to be weak. The enemies of Islam will still be hostile to it, even though it has nothing of the true Islamic character. Hence, it suffers because it cannot call on God for help and support. It is left to its own devices, and these are not adequate in the face of a determined onslaught by the enemies of Islam.

That is the explanation for the weakness of the Muslims everywhere today. They can start to regain their strength when they try to make their community a truly Islamic one, where people steer away from disobedience to God, feel content with what God has given them, behave kindly to neighbors and wish for their brethren what they wish for themselves.

Islamic Community: Malaise Afflicting Them & the Disparity Within

Many people may find it difficult to believe when they see the miserable condition of Muslims everywhere, as they suffer hardships that come from natural causes and ones which are caused by fellow human beings. If everything occurs by God's consent, how come He allows so much injustice? Why should millions of children be left without parents only because others fight over some wretched causes? Some of these children

are kidnapped and sold as spare parts to rich individuals in rich countries. To whom will these children pray? May I also ask about two people who are very pious and truly religious, but one leads a life of poverty, hardly able to make ends meet, while the other lives his whole life in affluence, with no financial worry. Both their situations occur with God's consent. Both may be admitted to heaven in the Hereafter. Thus, the one living in poverty loses out because he does not experience the comfort of affluent living. Could you give me an explanation to all this without saying that it is all God's experiment?

I am amazed when people cite the misfortunes of human beings as cause for turning away from faith or disbelieving in God altogether. What I understand from such an attitude is that people wish to believe in God on their own terms. It is as if they are saying to God that if they believe Him, then He should spare them any misfortune and ensure for them the sort of life they expect as good believers. He should give them wealth and comfort, and also He should rid them of their enemies. This is certainly the wrong attitude because it is not based on a proper understanding of the meaning of believing in God and what to expect as a result of such belief.

The proper understanding of the terms and conditions of the bargain we make with God when we profess to believe in Him is that manifested by the believers from Madinah, i.e. the Ansar, when they made their covenant with the Prophet, asking him to move over to Madinah, saying they should support and protect him. One of them said to them just before they made their pledge: "Are you aware of what you are pledging to this man [meaning the Prophet, peace be upon him]? You are pledging to support him in the face of much killing among your men and also much looting of your property. If you feel that should this happen and you suffer killings among your chiefs and nobles, and loss of property, then you would let him down, then it is time to withdraw now before you humiliate yourself in front of God and people alike. On the other hand, if you are prepared to honor your pledges in spite of all that, then come forward and give your pledges, for that will ensure for you a position of honor in this life and in the life to come." They told him to step aside, and turned to the Prophet, peace be upon him, to ask him: "What will our reward be if we honor our pledges?" He said: "Heaven." They rejoiced: "That is a profitable deal. We shall not go back on it and we accept no going back."

That is the proper understanding. For all the sacrifices they were asked to give, they were not promised any quick reward. They were not told that they would have so many positions in the government to be formed by the Prophet, nor were they told they would have a certain percentage of any land to be occupied or the booty to be gained in any battle. In fact they were not promised anything whatsoever in this world. What they were promised related to a different world altogether. They were promised 'heaven' and that belongs to the life to come.

This applies all the time to all believers. They have to fulfill their part of the bargain and give any sacrifice that may be called upon to give without expecting any reward in this life. All they may expect is 'heaven,' and that is a 'very profitable deal,' as the Ansar realized. This means that they have to prove what they profess. It is not sufficient to say that one is a believer without proving that in a practical manner. Hence God has made this life a test. I do not quite understand what my reader means when he refers to 'God's experiment.' God does not experiment, because He knows the result of any situation even before that situation takes place. What does He need to experiment for? However, God puts us to a test in this life so that we may prove to ourselves and those around us that we truly believe in Him.

The test is not the same for everyone. Some of us are tested with poverty while others are tested with affluence; some may be healthy while others suffer poor health and in

both situations we are tested. Some may have power and high position while others have neither, yet both are being tested. Certainly God does not need to put us to such tests in order to know our true metal. It is we who have to prove that we deserve heaven because we are able to go through the test and pass with honors. Hence, the two believers in your example are being tested, one with poverty, the other with wealth. If both prove themselves, then both go to heaven. Neither would have lost, because the reward is there for both of them to enjoy. None of us could say whether we would have done better had we had a different test. A poor person may say, 'I wish I could have been tested with wealth. At least I would have enjoyed the comforts of a life of plenty.' Who knows that he may do worse with a test of plenty than with a test of poverty.

People may ask why Muslim communities everywhere are suffering misfortunes at the hands of the enemies of God and man? Well, the test that this life is all about is meant for individuals and communities alike. Communities must prove that they are prepared to sacrifice their all in order that God's word may be held supreme. The Prophet, peace be upon him, and his companions did just that before God gave them the victories that ensured for them a life of supremacy over their enemies. At the Battle of the Moat the Muslims were running the risk of being exterminated with their women and children. When they remained steadfast, God gave them victory without having to fight their enemies.

When we look at the world, we must realize that for a long time the Muslims have been only Muslim by name. They need to demonstrate they truly deserve to be called Muslims. To do so they have to treat Islam as their guiding principle, and to live a truly Islamic life. When they have done so, and when they have fought determinedly to maintain their Islamic identity, God will fulfill His promise to them and give them victory. It is always the case that human beings need to prove themselves first for God's promise to apply to them. When you look at all the trouble spots in the Muslim world, you will find that the determination to lead an Islamic life has been lacking. Even in Afghanistan, victory has not been complete, because of the struggle for power among brethren. Thus power has been placed as more important than Islamic brotherhood. Victory will then be slow in coming. When they were determined to fight the foreign enemy and maintain the Islamic identity of Afghanistan, God gave them that victory. Had they lived up to Islamic expectations, they would have been given a greater victory.

One point remains to be clarified. It is not true to say that everything happens with God's consent, because God never consents to what is evil. But everything happens with God's will. God has certain laws to operate in this world. They take effect by His will. So, when anything happens in accordance with these laws, it takes place with God's will. If the Muslims take the necessary steps to ensure their victory, God will grant them that by His will, in accordance with His laws. If they do not, they will fail to achieve victory, and that will be by His will and again in accordance with the laws He has set in operation. So we must not blame God for not supporting us; we should blame ourselves for not doing enough to deserve that support.

Islamic Community: Mu'min — Who Is A Muslim & Who Is A Mu'min?

There are many references in the Qur'an to Muslims and to Mu'mins, or believers. What is the difference between the two?

The two terms are used frequently in the Qur'an, often interchangeable, but at other times with clearly different senses. We can say in short that a Muslim is a person who declares that he believes in the message of Islam which means that he believes that there is no deity save Allah and that Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is Allah's messenger. A Mu'min or a believer, on the other hand, is someone who truly believes in Islam and tries to implement it in his life. There is, then, a subtle

difference which gives the term "Mu'min" or believer, clear connotations of firm belief and positive action to see that the belief is put into practice. We can also say that Muslim is one who declares that he submits himself to Allah, while a believer is one who fulfills the requirements of such a submission in word and deed. There is a reference in the Qur'an to the two conditions of being a Muslim and being a believer in close Juxtaposition but with a clear distinction. When we reflect on the two verses concerned, we will understand the difference between the two words. The verses may be rendered in translation as follows:

"The Bedouins say: We are true believers. Say: You have not attained faith. Rather say: We accept Islam. For true faith has not yet found its way into your hearts. If you obey Allah and His messenger, He will not deny you the reward of your labors. Allah is much forgiving, merciful. The true believers are those who have faith in Allah and His messenger, and thereafter have no doubt; and who strive hard in Allah's cause with their possessions and their lives. Those are indeed the ones who are true to their word." [Private Apartments — "Al-Hujurat" 49: 14-15].

It is said that these two verses speak of a group of Bedouins from a tribe of Asad who immediately upon accepting Islam claimed to be true believers and began to hold that as a favor they had done to the Prophet, peace be upon him. They said to him: "Messenger of Allah, we have accepted Islam. Other Arabs have fought against you while we have not." Allah wanted them to realize their true condition. They had simply submitted themselves in the literal sense of the word "submission", but they had not experienced in their heart the true nature of faith. That is a condition, which is attained by a person whose faith colors all his life, actions, practices, and habits. Nevertheless, Allah's grace dictates that every single good action that they do will be credited to them and they are given its reward in full. This is an aspect of Allah's grace, which ensures that even the first step into Islam is sufficient to give people the full credit for their good actions. None of what they do is wasted, as is the case with disbelievers. Allah is always more inclined to forgiveness and compassion. He accepts the first step from His servant and rewards him for his obedience to give him a chance and time to appreciate the true nature of faith.

The two verses also define the meaning of faith. A believer is one whose faith is complete, total, unshakable, entertains no doubts, and is ready to strive hard, sacrificing his wealth and his life for Allah's cause. When the true meaning of faith finds its way into a person's heart, he is bound to work hard for implementing that faith in real life. He is keen that people should enjoy that happiness. Hence, he works hard for the implementation of the divine code of living represented by Islam, Allah's message to mankind. His struggle is a mark of his faith.

Islamic Community: Muslims Only Part Of the Time

I often draw examples from the Qur'an and Hadith to stress my point of view when I discuss topics with my friends. I feel that an Islamic argument is always stronger. A Muslim friend of mine, however, says that religious teachings should be left out of such discussions. According to him, a Muslim has to be a Muslim only when he is in the company of Muslims. From what I have learned about Islam, a Muslim must retain his Islamic identity in all situations. I will be grateful for your advice.

When you consider the religion of Islam and look at the actions it requires its followers to observe, be they part of worship or normal social dealings and consider also the practices Islam forbids, you are bound to conclude that it is very difficult for a Muslim who wants to abide by Islamic teachings to hide his identity. Indeed a Muslim has a unique identity, which is reflected in his manners and behavior. He is

always polite, kind, steering away from what is vulgar or obscene in words or actions. His humility, which is enhanced by his recognition that he is liable to make mistakes and slip into error, means that he is likable, sociable and caring for others. These characteristics are imparted to a Muslim first and foremost by his faith. It is Islam that requires its followers to be kind to others and to always prefer what is likely to cement good relations with their fellow human beings.

From another point of view, every Muslim has a task, which he must fulfill. If he fails to do this task, he will be questioned about it by Allah. I am here referring to the duty of every Muslim to convey the message of Islam to other people and make it known to them that Allah requires them to follow his last messenger, Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and implement the code of living embodied in his message. It may be added here that not every Muslim can provide a good example of what Islam means in practice by living up to requirements of his faith. When people see in a Muslim man or woman who is an exponent of every virtue and who refrains from everything that does not fit with the noble position Allah has given to mankind, they want to know what gives him his refined sense of propriety. They do not need to go too far to discover the source. It is Islam, his faith that Allah has perfected as a way of life which brings out and enhances every good aspect in a human being and weakens every evil tendency.

Why on earth would anyone be reluctant to own to the fact that he is a Muslim, unless he fears to lose some of the esteem of other people? Only those who are hostile to Islam or those who are ignorant of its nature may have an unfavorable attitude towards the Muslims. With the first group, a Muslim is not likely to win respect even if he disowns his religion altogether. The mere fact that he comes from a Muslim family is sufficient for those who are hostile to Islam to classify him among Muslims. Not even a person like Salman Rushdie wins any respect or esteem from the enemies of Islam. They may wish to utilize him for their own purposes, but they will never look at him with any genuine respect. With those who are ignorant of Islam, such an attitude does not earn him any privilege. Indeed, if he appears in the distinctive colors of Islam, he has a greater chance of winning their respect. If he speaks to them about the teachings of Islam in those areas, which come under discussion, they are bound to appreciate the wisdom of Islamic legislation. I speak about this from personal experience. Many a non-Muslim who knows very little about Islam begins to appreciate its wisdom and its comprehensive and logical approach to life, once he hears about the Islamic legislation relevant to a practical question that is faced by all human societies. Take for example the Islamic system of divorce. When an open minded non-Muslim learns about the proper Islamic legislation in divorce cases and how Islam safeguards the interests of both partners and gives each one his or her rights, he cannot fail to express his admiration for Islam. This may be the first step toward winning a friend to Islam and may be winning, in time, a new Muslim.

Your friend suggests that you should not quote from the Qur'an or the Hadith in your discussion with non-Muslims. On the contrary, when you support your argument with evidence from the Qur'an or the Hadith, you show that it is not merely a personal view. It is the view of Islam that you are advancing. You will definitely draw attention of people to the strong logic of Islam and its profound argument. They will respect you for being religious.

On the other hand, how will non-Muslims know about Islam if we do not tell them about it? We are required by Allah to make his message known to mankind. If we do not speak to them about it, they will remain ignorant of it. We will have failed in a duty, which Allah has made incumbent on every Muslim. To be a Muslim only in presence of Muslims is to impose on ourselves the life of a mental ghetto, which makes us always inward looking. This is contrary to the nature of Islam, which is outward looking, because it considers every human being a potential believer. Indeed, mankind is the material with which Islam deals in order to produce a super-

society which is characterized by the fact that its members *"enjoin the doing of what is right, forbid what is wrong and believe in the Oneness of Allah."* That is the best human society. We feel that opposite views are weightier.

Islamic Community: Negligent In Major Religious Duties

What is the status of those Muslims who do not conduct their lives in accordance with Islamic teachings? They profess to believe in God and His messenger, but they neither offer obligatory prayers nor attend to other major duties of Islam. Are they Muslim? When they die, are they to be buried as Muslim? I also ask about the difference between being Muslim and being Mu'min.

The Mu'min means a "believer," or a person who consciously believes in the oneness of God, associating no partners with Him in any sense or form, and also believes that Muhammad, peace be upon him, was a Prophet, peace be upon him, whom God chose to carry His final message to mankind.

However, the Prophet, peace be upon him, defines having faith as "having your beliefs firmly entrenched in your heart and giving practical credence to them through your action." A Muslim, on the other hand, is a person who admits to belong to the Islamic faith. The term Islam signifies "submission," and this means that a Muslim submits himself to God in all matters and situations. It is difficult to imagine that a person does that without being a firm believer.

The distinction between the two is real. In the Qur'an we read the following verse which draws a clear line separating the two:

"The Arabs of the desert declare: 'We are true believers.' Say, 'you are not. Rather say, 'We profess Islam,' for faith has not yet found its way into your hearts. If you obey God and His messenger, He will not deny you the reward of your labors. God is Forgiving and Merciful." [Private Apartments — "Al-Hujurat" 49: 14]

So a person may declare that he is a Muslim, but that remains a statement which requires substantiation through action and attitudes. He may attend to his Islamic duties and abstain from what God has made forbidden, but remains only at the stage of being a practicing Muslim. We cannot judge whether he actually submits himself to God in all situations.

That is a matter, which is known only to God. Therefore, we consider him to be a Muslim, because we are ordered to judge people on the basis of what they profess and do. You will realize that a person may claim to be a Muslim and actually appear to attend to all Islamic practices while he is totally devoid of faith.

He may simply be a hypocrite or one who wants to penetrate the ranks of Muslims for some purpose of his own. As we cannot judge his intentions, we have to take his word and leave judgment on his intentions to God who knows what is in everyone's hearts. He actually knows the innermost thoughts of every creature. It is possible, therefore, that a person appears to be a Muslim without actually being one. But if he is truly a Muslim, he matches his declared belief with submission to God in all his life affairs.

When he has done that, he is a true believer, or a Mu'min. When a person who professes to be a Muslim neglects his Islamic duties and indulges in what God has forbidden, there are two possibilities.

Either his attitude is the result of lack of faith or a matter of simple negligence and carelessness. It may be that such a person has been brought up in a Muslim family and he is used to saying that he is a Muslim when he is asked about his faith. Deep inside, however, he does not truly believe. He may find the whole idea of religion to be tiresome but he does not wish to be known as a non-believer. Such a person does not belong to Islam at all.

On the other hand, a person who knows that as a Muslim he has some well-defined duties and that he must attend to them, and yet he remains negligent. When the occasion presents itself, as when he is with a group of people and they begin a congregational prayer, he will join them because on such occasions he finds encouragement or does not wish to be thought of as a non-believer. Such a person is guilty of negligence, which is sinful. He is liable to punishment for disobedience to God, but he may also be forgiven his sins.

These two persons have totally different cases. The first one is a non-believer while the other is only a negligent believer. How can we tell whether a person we know belongs to the first or the second category? There is simply no way of knowing that. We are commanded by God to accept what people profess and leave judgment on their intentions to God who knows all about them.

Needless to say that in the light of the foregoing, anyone who claims to be a Muslim should be buried with Muslims when he dies. We prepare his funeral in the proper manner of Islamic burial. We pray God to forgive him and leave matters at that.

If God knows him to be believer, He will forgive him and we leave matters at that. But a person who is a non-believer will not earn God's forgiveness [no matter how he was buried.]

Islamic Community: Tolerance — Islam Preaches Toleration

In my village, back home, I own a plot of land in the middle of which there is a Hindu temple. Three years ago, when I went home on vacation, a number of Hindu notables visited me to solicit my approval for a road and other services to pass through my land to the temple. Since then, I have been troubled by their request. I have uneasy feelings about helping in the worship practices of an idolatrous religion. I wrote to the management committee of our local mosque suggesting that they take over the land as an endowment, but they seem reluctant to accept. If I refuse the request, I fear that this may lead to hardened attitudes and eventually to religious strife. Perhaps I should add that the majority of the people in our village are Muslim, but there are neighboring Hindu majority villages and the Hindu community receive much support from the political party in power in this area.

Your problem is certainly a tricky one. You own the land surrounding the temple, but you do not own the temple itself. Therefore, you do not have any control over how the building is used, but you have the legal power to stop the people from coming to the temple. If you exercise that power, you will create ill feelings and there will be efforts by the local Hindu population to gain access to the temple by force. This issue may lead to much strife. In a country like yours, which has witnessed frequent sectarian riots, the situation could lead to large-scale trouble and may cause loss of life. You will certainly have exercised your legal right, but what does Islam gain out of that? There is certainly no tangible gain and there may be much loss, which may not be possible to measure in financial or material terms.

What we have to understand is that Islam preaches tolerance. Over the centuries, Muslims all over the world have shown a degree of religious tolerance, which can hardly be equaled by any other religion. When the Islamic State was at the height of its power, religious communities were able to practice their religions without fear of any persecution or disturbance. They could claim their rights even against the opposition of the Muslim ruler. If a dispute were likely to generate strife and troubles, then Islam would do everything possible to prevent it, even if that leads to giving the other party some privileges to which they are not entitled. Islam is not a faith, which seeks the suppression of other religions, nor does it stamp out religious freedom. Indeed, it preaches freedom of belief and tries to protect that freedom wherever possible. Before I suggest to you a course of action, I would like to relate an incident which took place 13 centuries ago, in the year 86 or 87 of the Islamic calendar i.e. over 1300 years ago.

When the city of Damascus in Syria surrendered to the Muslim army in the year 14 of the Islamic calendar, it so happened that half of the city surrendered after a fight in which the Muslim army was able to overcome its besieged defenders, while the other half surrendered voluntarily. In the center of the city, there was a very large temple built 4000 years earlier. It had become a church when Syria became Christian about 300 years before the Muslim army took over the city. A peace treaty was drawn out which made a list of the churches to remain in the hands of the Christian population. As to that big church, it was agreed that one half of it would be a mosque and the other half would remain as a church. This was felt to be fair to both parties, since the Muslims could claim half of it as a result of occupying half of the city by force. Several churches were not included in the terms of the peace treaty. These were handed over to the Muslims.

Damascus was soon to become the capital of the Muslim State. More and more of its population were keen to adopt Islam. In the year 86, Al-Waleed ibn Abdulmalik became the Caliph and he wanted to attend to a need, which became very pressing. The mosque at the center of the city was no longer adequate to accommodate people in Friday prayers. He wished to get the other half and integrate the two portions into a magnificent mosque. He called in the Christian leaders and requested them to give up that church in return for a large number of properties, including four major churches, which were in Muslim hands. His suggestion was met with determined refusal. The Caliph was disappointed, but he could not force the Christians to give up their church.

He later requested them to bring the treaty and read the relevant provisions. As they read out the terms of the treaty to him, he discovered that Saint Thomas's church, which was an even larger church, was not included in the treaty. As such, it was the property of the state, which was now an Islamic one. Al-Waleed told them that since this was the case, he was satisfied to build the mosque in its place. The Christian leaders said: "If the Caliph would leave Saint Thomas's church to us and the other four, we are willing to give up the other half of the church he wishes to have." Thus the matter was settled and Al-Waleed integrated that half of the church into a new mosque, which remains until today in the center of Damascus known as the Omayyad Mosque.

As you see, the Islamic state in its early period was willing to negotiate an agreement which assigned to non-Muslims a number of buildings to be used as places of worship. No scholar had objected to that at any time. Therefore, if you respond to the request of the Hindu community in your area, knowing that such a favorable response would eliminate causes of trouble and would promote the interests of the Muslim community, you do no wrong.

Islamic Etiquette: Anger — Good Believer May Not Give In To Anger
Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

The Prophet, peace be upon him, was a model person whose manners provided an example for us to follow in all situations. We look to him for guidance in all situations. Yet he was an ordinary person who experienced all feelings. Nothing distinguished him from other people, apart from his consistency in following the divine guidance that was revealed to him by God. This means that he was subject to all emotions that people experience in different situations. It is important to ask whether the Prophet, peace be upon him, got angry on occasions? If so, what were the things that made him angry? How did he behave when angry?

Anger is a difficult emotion as it beclouds a person's thinking. If anger is acute, then the angry person could easily do things that he would live to regret. Hence, the Prophet, peace be upon him, warned against anger and considered self-control one of the more important qualities of a good believer. One of his statements on the subject says: "The mark of a strong person is not overpowering opponents in wrestling; a truly strong person is one who controls himself when angry." Indeed controlling oneself when angry so that one does not lose sight of the meaning of one's words or the effect of one's action requires far more strength than a physical fight, even though one's opponent may put up a strong fight.

Since the Prophet, peace be upon him, was the example God wants us to follow, it is pertinent to ask how anger affected him. The first thing we learn on this point when we study the Prophet's character is that he never allowed anger to affect him on any personal matter. He had many opponents among the unbelievers, and they tried hard to do all sorts of things against him, but he never showed the weakness of anger on any personal matter.

But things were different in religious matters. Should any restriction imposed by God be breached the Prophet's anger was seen in his face, and he acted promptly to redress the situation. Reports on several incidents that caused the Prophet, peace be upon him, to be angry suggest that he could be angered by an action of transgression, but he never lost control of himself. Anger could be seen in his face, affecting him physically, but he would remain in control. Let us look at some of these situations.

Ayesha reports: "When God's Messenger, peace be upon him, gave instructions to his companions, he would only ask them to do what they could easily cope with. Some of them said to him: 'We are unlike you, Messenger of God! God has forgiven you all your sins, past and future.' He was so angry that his face showed his anger. He then said: 'I am the most God-fearing person among you, and the one who knows Him best.'" [Related by Al-Bukhari and Ahmad].

The report does not indicate what was the point at issue on this occasion. We have to look at other reports in order to find out. However, we can gauge from such additional reports and how they confirm what this Hadith mentions that some of the Prophet's companions felt that they needed to spend much more time in worship than what the Prophet, peace be upon him, indicated. This is clear in the comparison they drew and their saying that the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not have to pray for forgiveness, since his forgiveness has already been granted by God. Thus we understand that they wanted to go beyond what he suggested to them, or what he himself practiced.

The Prophet's reply reminded them that he was the most God-fearing and the one who knew God best. He was fully aware of what would earn God's pleasure and bring His forgiveness. It behooved them well to listen to his advice and act on his

recommendation. Nothing proved their sincerity better than their obedience of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and acting on his advice.

Islamic Etiquette: Anger & Making Allowance For Man's Nature

Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

The Prophet, peace be upon him, never sought retaliation for any bad turn done to him by anyone. Indeed, he often did a good turn in reply to a bad one. His forbearance was exemplary. Abdullah ibn Al-Zubair comments on the Qur'anic verse, which gives an order to the Prophet, peace be upon him, with regard to his manners:

"Make due allowance for man's nature, and enjoin the doing of what is right; and turn away from those who choose to remain ignorant." [Heights — "Al-A'araf" 7: 199]

He says that this verse orders the Prophet, peace be upon him, to commit himself to forbearance as a personal quality. He should not be hard on people; rather, he should always give them allowances and show understanding. People normally get irritated or angry at something or another. In such a state, their angry words may be uttered without due reflection. The Prophet, peace be upon him, saw and heard much that would infuriate any person. People attacked him, accusing him of every type of fabrication, lying, etc. If he were to give reign to natural human reactions, he would have punished such people most severely. But the Prophet, peace be upon him, was always forbearing, even when others hurled abuse on him.

Abu Abdullah Al-Jadali reports that he asked Ayesha about the Prophet's manners. Her answer to him was: "He was never given to using vulgar language, and he would never deliberately do so. Nor would he raise his voice in the market place. He did not reply to a bad deed with a similarly bad one. Rather, he would forbear and forgive." [Related by Ahmad, Al-Tirmithi and Abu Dawood Al-Tayalisi]

Abdullah ibn Amr gives a similar report, stressing that the Prophet, peace be upon him, never used obscenities, whether by spontaneous reaction or deliberately. He then adds that the Prophet, peace be upon him, used to say: "Those of you who are best in manners are the best of you." [Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

These are general statements that stress forbearance as an inherent quality of the Prophet, peace be upon him. But how did it work in practice? It is useful to quote one or two examples. Anas ibn Malik, the Prophet's servant reports: "I was once walking with God's Messenger, and he was wearing a thick robe made in Najran which had rough edges. A Bedouin caught up with him and strongly pulled him by his robe. I could see the side of the Prophet's neck with a clear mark made by the edge of his robe as a result of the Bedouin's pull. He then said to him: 'Muhammad! Give an order for me to be given something of the money God that has given you.' The Prophet, peace be upon him, turned to him, smiled and gave instructions for a payment to be made to him." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, and Ahmad].

Here we see the Prophet, peace be upon him, being manhandled, with a Bedouin pulling him by his robe in a very rough manner, so as his clothes leave a clear mark on his neck. That must have been painful. Anyone of us encountering such a rough treatment is bound to turn to the person who does it and pour our anger at him. Yet the man did not need to do that. He could have caught the Prophet's attention by calling out to him, or by catching up with him and speaking to him in a gentle manner. The fact that he wanted to get some money from him, to which he had no more entitlement than any other person in the Muslim community, was all the more reason for a different sort of treatment. We all know that if you need a favor to be

done to you by others, you should be polite with them. The surest way to deprive your self of such a favor is to speak to them harshly. Yet this Bedouin follows his ill-mannered gesture with a similarly impolite demand: "Give an order for me to be given something of the money God has given you." He does not only address the Prophet, peace be upon him, by name, without any respectful title, but also make it clear that the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not have any authority over what he had, because it was given to him by God. The whole demand he makes is exceedingly rude.

Anyone of us would have felt very angry if faced at such a demand. Even if the money he asked to be paid did not belong to the Prophet, but belonged to the public treasury, of which the Prophet, peace be upon him, was in control, he could not make such a demand by right. He was only one of the people, and it was for the government to determine how it should be used. Thus, the Prophet, peace be upon him, could have easily dismissed his claim, told him that he had no right to it and left him to reflect on his behavior. Had he done so, we would still admire him for not retaliating to the rough treatment he had. But the Prophet, peace be upon him, goes much further. He smiles to the man, reassuring him that he was not angry with him, and he orders that he be given some money.

Another example is provided by the Prophet's arbitration in a dispute between Al-Zubair, who was a cousin of the Prophet, and a man from the Ansar who fought in the Battle of Badr. The dispute was over their water rights to a stream that ran through Al-Zubair's farm before continuing into the Ansari's farm. When they put the dispute to the Prophet, he said: "Zubair, use the water you need for irrigation, then let it run to your neighbor." The Ansari man was angry, and said: "Messenger of God! Is this because his mother is your paternal aunt?" The Prophet's face changed color, but he said: "Zubair, do your irrigation, then hold the water until it reaches the barrier." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood, Al-Tirmithi and Ibn Majah]

Although the man who spoke to the Prophet, peace be upon him, in such a manner was one of his companions who earned a high status for being among those who fought at Badr, his angry words were uncalled for. He was accusing the Prophet, peace be upon him, of nepotism, giving his cousin what he did not deserve. In fact the Prophet's first instruction to his cousin was very generous to the Ansari man. Had he implemented it, he would have had more water, because Al-Zubair would have used only what he needed and let the water pass on. But when the man showed his displeasure, the Prophet, peace be upon him, was upset as this was reflected in his face. But he did not vent his anger. He did not even reply to the man's accusing remark. He only told Al-Zubair what his right was. So in fact, being ahead of his neighbor along the run of the stream, he was entitled to much more than was sufficient to irrigate his land.

Islamic Etiquette: Anger & Patience

Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

People often get angry because someone says a word that is out of place, or something that detracts from their honesty or integrity. When someone is keen to be fair to people and he is accused of being unjust, he takes the accusation to heart. If he is honest but an accusation is leveled at him that implies dishonesty on his part, he is exceedingly hurt. When there is nothing in his conduct to provide justification of any kind for the accusation, he feels terribly aggrieved. In any such situation, the person's reaction is interesting to monitor, particularly if he occupies a position of leadership.

It is important, therefore, to gauge the reactions of the Prophet, peace be upon him, to such incidents, because to all Muslims, he provides the example to follow. God says in the Qur'an:

"You have in the Prophet a good example to follow, for those of you who hope to earn God's pleasure and to be successful on the Day of Judgment." [Clans — "Al-Ahzab" 33: 21]

We have discussed elsewhere how the Prophet, peace be upon him, conducted himself in a manner that wins people's hearts when he was roughly treated. We will provide some more examples, hoping to show that such forbearance was his normal behavior, which came to him naturally, without affectation of any sort.

Abdullah ibn Masood reports: "God's Messenger divided some property between people. A man commented: 'This division has not been meant to please God!' I reported this to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and color of his face changed. He then said: 'May God have mercy on Moses. He was hurt far worse but he remained steadfast.'" [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, and Ahmad].

The fact that a change of color was visibly apparent in the Prophet's face suggests that he was really hurt by the unjustified remark. Had it been said of a ruler and he came to know of it, he would have taken measures that would give vent to his anger.

That would bring the person concerned into trouble. It would have also ensured that no one would be able to ever utter something of this sort. After all, it is a personal attack that questions intentions. For this to be said of God's Messenger is greatly offensive, to say the least.

What did the Prophet, peace be upon him, say or do to stop such remarks? Nothing more than to recall the attitude of an earlier prophet in similar situations: "May God have mercy on Moses. He was hurt far worse but he remained steadfast." Thus, the Prophet, peace be upon him, sets the example for us to follow: When any of us is hurt by an unfair and unjustified remark that questions his motives and integrity, the best thing to do is to forbear and leave it to God to ensure that justice is done.

Yet the Prophet, peace be upon him, was only a human being that is affected by everything that normally affects ordinary human beings. It is true that God has given him the ability to rise above ordinary human concerns so as to give the best example to follow in all situations, but this does not mean that his feelings are not as keen as any other person. In fact, he was very sensitive, which means that what hurts other people would hurt him even more. Yet God always guided him to the best attitude. During the Battle of Uhud, in which the Muslims suffered defeat, the Prophet, peace be upon him, was injured, with his front teeth being broken. He also suffered other injuries. "As he wiped the blood off his face, he said: 'How could any people be successful when they have stained their Prophet's face with blood as he called on them to believe in their Lord?' God revealed the verse that says: ***'You have no say in the matter.'***" [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Ahmad and Ibn Majah]

Here we see the Prophet, peace be upon him, showing a very natural reaction to his injuries. Such people who are prepared to attack their prophet physically and inflict injuries on him, aiming to kill him as some of them were determined to do: how can they be successful? Natural as this feeling is, God sets all values right. It is not up to the Prophet, peace be upon him, or anyone else to decide. Should these people subsequently believe and mend their ways, they will have all the benefits that faith brings. This was what happened later. The people of Makkah, who were the enemy in that particular battle, subsequently changed their attitude and believed in Islam. They were among its most committed advocates. And they were very successful indeed.

Therefore, the Prophet, peace be upon him, kept this in mind. When he later suffered some misfortune, he took it lightly, putting matters in the proper perspective. Jundub, a companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, reports: "As the Prophet, peace be upon him, was walking one day, he hit a stone and tripped. His toe was bleeding. He looked at it and said: 'You are but a bleeding toe, and what you have suffered is merely to serve God's cause.'" [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Ahmad and Al-Baghawi]

As we have seen, the Prophet, peace be upon him, would not reply to any personal remark that accused him of any wrong. He was not given to retaliation, not even when he was truly hurt. Abu Saeed Al-Khudri reports: "We were attending God's Messenger, peace be upon him, as he was dividing some booty. A man said to him: 'Messenger of God! Be fair.' The Prophet, peace be upon him, said to him: 'Why! Who will be fair if I am not? A true loser I am if I would not be fair.' Omar said: 'Messenger of God! May I have your permission to strike his head off?' The Prophet, peace be upon him, said to him: 'Leave him alone. He has companions whose prayer and fasting are so good that any of you will be dissatisfied with his own prayer and fasting when comparing them to theirs. They read the Qur'an, but it will not go beyond their collarbones. Yet they will slip away from the faith like an arrow passes through game. Their distinctive mark is a black man among them whose upper arm looks like a woman's breast, or like a shaking piece of flesh. They will rebel at a time when the community will be divided.'" Abu Saeed says: "I have certainly heard this Hadith as the Prophet, peace be upon him, said it, and I bear witness that Ali ibn Abi Talib fought them, and I fought with him. After the battle, he ordered a search for the man and he was brought to him. I saw him exactly as the Prophet, peace be upon him, described." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood, Ahmad and Ibn Majah]

In this Hadith, the Prophet, peace be upon him, felt angry as a man criticized his distribution as unfair. But he did not retaliate. He only told the man that he, i.e. the Prophet, would have lost everything if he did not divide the booty in all fairness.

When Omar sought permission to kill the man in punishment for what he said, the Prophet, peace be upon him, told him to leave him alone. He then changed the whole drift of the conversation to spare the man further blame or embarrassment.

He alerted his companions to some future events. His description of the rebels applied most certainly to the Khawarij who rebelled against Ali, the fourth Caliph, at a time when there was already much tension and division among Muslims with Mu'awiah and Ali fighting the Battle of Siffin.

Islamic Etiquette: Anger & Self-restraint

Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

The Prophet, peace be upon him, who has highlighted for us every aspect of good behavior, repeatedly spoke about anger and the need to control it. We all know that people often do things when angry which they regret afterward. When one is in the flight of anger, one may abuse, verbally if not physically, those who are very close to him. An angry young man can often speak ill to his parents, or to his elders. When some people lose their temper, they commit crimes that they would never contemplate when they are in possession of their senses. We also know that many people divorce their wives when they are in the flight of temper, then they regret what they had said and try to find a way out of their dilemma should such divorce be the third time. They may hire someone as halalah, who would marry the woman for a day and then divorce her to make it permissible for her original husband to re-marry her. This sort of trick is forbidden in Islam and it defeats the purpose because it does not make it lawful for the couple to reunite in marriage.

Because of the great harm anger often causes, the Prophet, peace be upon him, spoke repeatedly, and in a variety of ways about the importance of self-restraint. One famous Hadith quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "A strong man is not one who physically overpowers others. A strong man is one who controls himself when angry." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood and Ahmad].

In this Hadith, the Prophet, peace be upon him, redefines strength, making clear that it is totally different from what people think. A person may be physically powerful, and he may be able to wrestle with anyone and beat him. He may be able to physically beat two or three persons when he fights them single-handed. Yet he is not truly strong, according to the Prophet's definition of strength. The one who is truly powerful is the person who, being very angry, is able to exercise self-restraint, controlling his temper and not allowing his anger to get the better of him. We all know this to be true, because we all experience anger and we know that unless we tame our anger with self-control, it can easily make us do what we will soon regret.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, puts this thought in a different way. Anas reports that the Prophet, peace be upon him, passed by some people who were wrestling. He asked about the occasion, and he was told that one of them has been too strong for the others, able to beat every challenger. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said to them: "Shall I tell you about someone who is more powerful than him? A man who is verbally abused by another, but he exercises self-restraint. He thus beat the other person, his own devil and the other man's devil." Thus we see how the Prophet, peace be upon him, uses the occasion of a wrestling match in which people admire physical strength in order to highlight what is more important, which is the need to remain in control even when anger is likely to get the better of us.

The fact that several Hadiths speak about the same thing means that the Prophet, peace be upon him, attached importance to the subject matter because of its relevance to people's lives. In the two Hadiths we quoted the Prophet, peace be upon him, related self-restraint to strength. In another Hadith, he shows that such self-restraint can earn good reward from God. Abdullah ibn Omar quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "No bitter gulp earns greater reward than that of a person who controls his anger only for God's sake." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Ahmad and Ibn Majah].

In this Hadith the Prophet, peace be upon him, describes controlling one's temper as something really bitter which one has to swallow. It is much easier to give vent to one's anger, hurling verbal abuse on the person who has been the cause of such anger, or even resort to physical action. But when self-restraint is exercised for no reason other than to please God, then it earns great reward indeed. This applies in a situation where the angry person can easily avenge himself on the one who caused his anger, but refrains from doing so, controlling himself in order not to worsen the situation, or to ensure some other benefit.

Yet people do not like to be reminded of this great virtue, particularly when they are angry. The following Hadith clarifies this. Sulaiman ibn Sarad reports: "I was sitting with the Prophet, peace be upon him, when two men were quarrelling and abusing each other. One of them was so angry that his face was red and his veins swelled. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: 'I know a word which would dispel this man's trouble if he would only say it: I seek shelter with God from the accursed Satan, or A'oozu billah min al-Shaytan al-rajeem.' People told the man to say it, but he retorted: 'Do you think I am crazy?'" [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Al-Nasa'ie and Abu Dawood].

This example illustrates the sort of reaction angry people may give when they are reminded of the need to control themselves. When the man was told to seek refuge with God against his devil, he retorted that he was not crazy. No one described him

as such, and no one would think that seeking God's protection is a sign of madness, but in his anger the man could not judge things properly. Hence, his angry reaction. Therefore, it is important to study such Hadiths and learn the importance of controlling our temper so that when we get angry we can make use of what we learned and accept advice when we are reminded of the way to control our anger.

Another Hadith tells of a different way to prevent temper from flying high. It is simply to remain silent and to say nothing when one is angry. Ibn Abbas quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "Teach and make things easy, and if you are angry, remain silent." He repeated the first part three times and said the second part twice. This Hadith is related by Al-Bukhari and by Ahmad.

The two parts of the Hadith are not unrelated. Making things easy to learn and to practice is very important. When things are made difficult, people simply would not learn or do them. One thing the Prophet, peace be upon him, teaches us in this Hadith is self-restraint, and this can be achieved by something that is by no means difficult, which is to remain silent. By doing so, we do not only control our own temper, but it also gives the other person no cause to get angry or to reply to anything.

Islamic Etiquette: Anger Is Labeled As Forbidden

How far is anger forbidden? Is there any method to overcome anger?

Being angry is a condition, which cannot be described as permissible or forbidden. Prohibition applies to actions, which a person may do of his own free will. Anger is a reaction to some sort of an event, which is particularly displeasing to a person.

However, anger tends to cloud one's vision. It causes a person to do things that he may not choose to do in normal circumstances. Therefore, one should try as much as possible to cool one's temper, and not allow his anger to get the better of him. The Prophet, peace be upon him, has spoken about the need to control anger. He says: "Strength is not the physical ability of a person to overcome others, but strength is to control one's anger."

It is mostly through common sense that a person can resist acting in anger. If he is made angry in a particular situation, it helps if he walks away from it and stays away until his temper has cooled down. [It is recommended to drink some water or perform ablution. It helps to cool down.] It is also a very good advice to refrain from doing anything when angry. One should neither say nor do anything while angry. Even if he is angered by the behavior of a person over whom he has full authority, it is better for him not to react in anger. Let him first of all cool down, then he can deal with the situation in a sensible manner. That is straightforward wisdom.

Islamic Etiquette: Behavior Unbecoming

I have been married for only a few months, yet when I go out with my husband I noticed that he stares at other women in a way, which is so embarrassing to me. I have tried hard to persuade him to stop this, particularly when I am with him, but to no avail. This has caused me a great deal of misery. Please comment.

A friend of us is very keen to do his worship duties on time. He always prays with the imam at the mosque, and frequently goes to offer the Umrah, and wears a long beard. Nevertheless, he watches movies, which may have scenes that are totally unacceptable from the Islamic point of view. He does not listen to the advice of people who tell him that he should stop this, at least out of respect for his beard. Please comment.

I have grouped these two questions together because they are closely related in the sense that they question behavior, which falls short of our expectations. The lady is perturbed by her husband's behavior, and rightly so, because it does not fit with her idea of how a religious married man should behave when he goes about in the street or when he is in public places. To her, his behavior is so embarrassing.

In the second case we have a man who is expected to be consistent in his behavior showing lack of consistency in his choice of entertainment. Yet the first thing which we should remember is that we are all human beings and we are able to make mistakes, slip, indulge in what gives us immediate pleasure, etc. The best among us, therefore, are the ones who repent whenever they make such a mistake.

The other thing to remember is that we cannot place people in categories and expect them to conform to the standards which we assign to each category. Notice how my reader speaks of "respect for his beard." This suggests that a person with a beard may not do things, which are less unacceptable from one without beard. This is not the Islamic way of looking at things. People may make all sorts of mistakes and they may remain good people, if they always repent and try to bring their behavior in line with Islamic standards. Besides, the whole question of watching movies is not to be equated with grave sins. It belongs to much lesser categories.

The question of the lady is much more serious, not only because the action itself is clearly forbidden, but also because the husband in this case does not heed his wife's feelings. He thus makes another violation of Islamic rules. The Prophet, peace be upon him, has instructed all his followers to take good care of their women, and his action is clearly in opposition to such instructions.

How do we deal with such situations? In general we can only remind the offender and hope that one day he will come to see the offense he commits for what it really is. In the case of the lady reader, she needs to be a little tactful with how she approaches her husband. She should try not to make the matter personal. She should show her husband that she is concerned for his position on the Day of Judgement [and even his position when people observe his gaze.] He may respond better when he feels that she cares for him. He may feel that he should at least show the same care for her. If he does not, she should try to look at her situation in a wider perspective and determine the best method to influence her husband's attitude. Her question does not have an easy answer. May God help her.

Islamic Etiquette: Bowing As A Show Of Respect Or When We Meet

1. You have commented that the way we show our respect to parents, bowing down before them, is un-Islamic. Can we not compare this practice with the bowing down of the angels in front of Adam, or the prostration of Prophet Yousuf's brothers and parents?
2. What is the Islamic view of bowing when we greet someone?

1. My criticism of the practice you have described which involves that children or young people bow and touch the feet of their parents or elders as a gesture of respect remains valid. This gesture can easily be construed as a gesture of worship. Any practice, which may give such an impression, is not permissible in Islam.

Your question seeks a clarification on whether such a practice may not be compared to the angels' bowing before Adam or Yousuf's brothers and parents bowing to him. I am afraid the analogy does not hold good. To start with, the angels prostrated themselves before Adam because they were commanded to do so by Allah Himself. The angels do not disobey Allah. Indeed, they do whatever Allah bids them. Hence, their prostration in front of Adam was not a matter of choice. It was not a gesture of worship, a gesture of recognition of any position. It was simply a demonstration of

their obedience to Allah in all situations. If you have any evidence, which suggests that Allah wants you to prostrate yourself in front of your parents, you may do so. Since you have no such clear instruction, you may do only what Islam says and bow in front of nobody at all. You only bow to Allah and no one else.

In the case of Prophet Yousuf I can only say that at that time, believers were not forbidden to make that gesture. We must not forget his father was Prophet Yaqoob, the son of Prophet Ishaq, the son of Prophet Ibrahim. Prophet Yaqoob could not have contemplated for a moment doing such a gesture if it was forbidden. We can only say that such a practice was forbidden subsequently; may be at the time of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. We cannot rely on what Prophet Yaqoob did in order to support what people in your part of the world do with their parents and elders.

2. Any action, which is similar to an act of worship, is forbidden in Islam when it is offered to anyone other than Allah. To bow one's head or to do any similar gesture when one meets another person is to do something akin to an act of worship. Therefore, it is unacceptable from the Islamic point of view.

As you realize, bowing is part of our prayer. Even when you do not bow fully as you do in prayer, to lower your head in order to greet someone falls in the same category as doing something, which is similar to worship, but you are offering it to a human being. That cannot be sanctioned by Islam.

Islamic Etiquette: Carrying Tales Defaming Others

Could you please explain the Islamic view about those spreading tales against people so as to cause problems between them.

Backbiting is strongly forbidden, as it is universally known. God says in the Qur'an:

"And do not spy on one another, nor backbite one another. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Surely you would loathe it." [Private Apartments — "Al-Hujurat" 49: 12]

This horrid picture is drawn in the Qur'an for someone who is guilty of backbiting, which is defined in Islam as "saying about someone in his absence what he dislikes to be said about him." This applies even if what is being said is true. The very fact that he is absent and people say about him things that he dislikes to be talked about is backbiting, and falls within what is described in the Qur'an as "eating the flesh of one's dead brother."

A similar social evil is to spread defamatory tales about other people. This is what happens when someone tells another a tale about a third person who is known to both. This is shown in the Qur'an as repugnant. It occurs within the denunciation of a particular person who took a hostile attitude to Islam and the Prophet, peace be upon him. Exposing his character, the Qur'an mentions this action of his as a most horrid one:

"Do not pay any respect to the contemptible one swearing of oaths, the slanderer who goes about with defaming tales, the withholder of good, the sinful aggressor, cruel, possessed by greed." [Pen — "Al-Qalam" 68: 10-13]

It is clear that the person concerned had had a very abominable character. One of his qualities was to carry such tales.

In order to describe how repugnant this quality is we may mention that the Prophet, peace be upon him, once passed by two graves, and he placed some green branches on them. He told his companions who were with him that the two people buried there

were suffering torment. He said that the reason for punishing one of them was that he used to spread defamatory tales about his fellow men.

People often ask about the punishment that a certain sin incurs. We cannot specify unless there is some text to outline it. However, we can say that such a person commits a sin against society in addition to his slandering of particular people. Thus God will not forgive his sin unless the people against whom he spread such tales forgive him. On the Day of Judgment he will be brought face to face with them and they will be given some of his deeds in lieu of the injury he caused them. If he does not have sufficient good deeds to compensate them, he is made to bear some of their bad deed, which are then removed from them and added against him.

Therefore, people should guard against doing any such action by avoiding speaking ill about anyone in their absence. If one knows some defect in a person's character, or of a bad deed that person has committed, he should keep it secret. He is rewarded for that.

Islamic Etiquette: Changing Hate Into Love
Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

Many reports by different companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him, speak of their initial feelings toward him, stating that they adopted a hostile attitude toward him before they even met him. They also say how such feelings evaporated on meeting him, and how their hate was replaced by a far more genuine feeling of love. When we examine such reports, we find that the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not do anything of personal nature to bring about such a change. Invariably, he would simply speak naturally, with genuine feeling, stating his mission clearly and truthfully, without mincing words. People would always recognize his truthfulness and his honesty. This is what attracted people to him, and they would soon realize that the message he advocated was the message of the truth.

An unnamed man from Baladawiyah narrates the story of his grandfather's first meeting with the Prophet, peace be upon him, as he himself reported it. He states that he went to Madinah where he stopped at the valley, which he did not name. Most probably it was either Bathan or Al-Aqeeq, which were the nearest valleys where market days were held. "I saw two men negotiating the sale of a single female goat. The buyer said to the seller: 'Be good to me in this transaction.' I thought to myself that this was probably the Hashemite man who has led people astray. As I looked at him I saw a handsome man with a broad forehead, small nose and thin eyebrows, and from just below his neck down to his navel stretched a thin black line of hair. He was wearing two old garments. As he approached us he greeted us saying, 'Assalamo Alaikum', and we replied. He then spoke to the buyer who said to him: 'Messenger of God! Tell him to make me a good transaction.'

"He stretched his hand as if in apology, and said: 'you own your property. I hope to meet God on the Day of Resurrection and none of you having a claim against me that I might have wronged him with anything in his money, in himself or his honor. And that I would not have taken anything from anyone except in accordance with what is right. May God bless anyone who is easy in his buying and selling, easy in taking and giving, easy in settling his debts and in demanding settlement.' He then left, and I thought that I needed to make sure of the man because his words were good. I followed him and called him by his name, Muhammad. He turned with all his body [which was his habit], and asked what did I want. I asked him: 'Are you the one who led people astray, caused them to perish and turned them away from what their forefathers worshipped?' He said: 'That is God.' I asked him about his message, and he said: 'I call on God's servants to turn to God.' When I asked him what did he say, he answered: 'Declare that you believe that there is no deity other than God, and that

I am God's Messenger. You should believe in what God has revealed to me, and disbelieve in Al-Lat and Al-Uzza [the main two idols the Arabs worshipped], attend regularly to your prayer and pay your Zakah.' I asked him what was Zakah and he said: 'That the rich among us should give our poor.' I said to him: 'This is a fine message that you advocate.'

"There was no living person on the face of the earth more hateful to me than him, but now he was dearer to me than my children, my father and all people. I said to him: 'Now I know.' He said to me: 'Then you know.' As I answered in the affirmative, he said: 'Would you bear witness that there is no deity other than God, and that I am God's Messenger, and would you believe in what has been revealed to me?' I said: 'Yes.'

"I then said: 'Messenger of God! I frequent a water spring, which attracts many people, and I will call on them to believe in what you said to me. I hope that they will follow you.' He said: 'Yes, do.' All people who used to frequent that water spring, men and women, accepted Islam. The Prophet, peace be upon him, then wiped his head."

We note that the man started with an extremely negative view of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and Islam. He had a good look at the Prophet, peace be upon him, and noted that his outfit was that of a poor person. The Prophet's talk, however, was impressive as he expressed his strong hope that he would never take anything from anyone except in accordance with what was right. He was not offended when it was put to him that he caused trouble among his people by advocating a message that aimed to change their religion. He put the principles of Islam clearly and called on people to accept it. This is the way to win people's hearts and minds.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, always visited those who were ill, to inquire after their health. But he also took the opportunity to invite them to believe. He did so knowing that an ill person accepts more readily believing that only God grants recovery. Anas ibn Malik reports that the Prophet, peace be upon him, visited a man from the Najjar clan of the Ansar who was ill. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said to him: "Maternal uncle! Say: 'There is no deity other than God.'" The man asked him whether he was a paternal or maternal uncle, and the Prophet, peace be upon him, confirmed that he was a maternal uncle. This is due to the fact that the Prophet, peace be upon him, was related to that clan through his mother. The Prophet, peace be upon him, again told him to declare his belief in the One God. The man asked him whether it was good for him to do so, and the Prophet, peace be upon him, confirmed that. We are not told whether the man believed or not, but we know that the Prophet, peace be upon him, took the opportunity of the visit to call on him to become a Muslim.

He did the same with a Jewish youth that used to serve him. When the youth fell ill, the Prophet, peace be upon him, went to visit him and sat close to him, near his head. He then said to him: 'Accept the faith of Islam.' The youth looked at his father who was present and his father said to him: 'Obey Abu Al-Qasim.' The boy did that and declared that he was a Muslim. When the Prophet, peace be upon him, left, he praised God for having saved the youth from hell.

This authentic Hadith related by Ahmad, shows that the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not seek to do things in a roundabout way. He spoke to the youth in front of his father. The father realized that the Prophet, peace be upon him, only wanted what was good for his son, and he told him to obey God's Messenger.

Not only so, but the Prophet, peace be upon him, did his best to make people who were hostile to Islam accept his message. Ahmad relates a Hadith, which mentions that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said to a man: "Become a Muslim and you will be safe." The man said: "I find myself unwilling to do so." The Prophet, peace be upon

him, said: "Even though you are unwilling." Here we see the Prophet, peace be upon him, undeterred from advocating his message even though his interlocutor clearly says that he does not want to respond. But we should say that the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not threaten the man when he said to him that he would be safe if he became a Muslim. He only meant that he would be safe from God's punishment in the Hereafter. He also said to him that even if he were reluctant at the beginning, by accepting Islam even verbally, he would be in a better position to judge it clearly.

Islamic Etiquette: Conversation — Leaving One Person Out
Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

Islamic manners are the most refined. They take care of the feelings of even the weakest, humblest or youngest in any group or community.

To appreciate the change brought by Islam, let us look at the following Hadith. Abdullah ibn Massoud quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying "Should there be three of you, then let not two of them be in conversation to the exclusion of the third, because this will hurt him." [Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

This Hadith enjoys a high degree of authenticity, and it comes in several versions. Another similarly authentic version uses the third person and drops the cause at the end. Thus, the Hadith runs as follows: "If there is a group of three, then let not two of them be in conversation to the exclusion of the third." [Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim].

A third version adds some qualification. "Let not two people talk to each other to the exclusion of a third until they mix with others, because their action hurts him." [Related by Al-Bukhari]

It seems that the Prophet, peace be upon him, gave this advice on different occasions and in different wordings, so that it would be known and people will act on it. The Prophet, peace be upon him, is concerned here for the third person that is left out of the conversation between the other two. We do not have any qualification to limit this instruction to any situation, which means that whoever the third person happens to be, he or she must not be so obviously excluded. The Prophet, peace be upon him, clarifies that such an action is bound to hurt the excluded person. Hence, it must not be done, and the order he gives represents a very clear prohibition.

Thus, if they are three brothers, or three classmates, or colleagues, or indeed any three, the restriction applies. The Prophet, peace be upon him, mentions the figure three because it is the least number where exclusion may occur. But it applies to any larger number of people where such exclusion takes place. When there is a group of people, they must not leave any one of them feeling excluded.

Another version of this Hadith adds a clarification. When the Prophet, peace be upon him, stated this prohibition, his companions asked: "What if they are four?" He said: "That is all right." This applies when two of the four have some private conversation. The restriction does not apply here because the other two could talk to each other. The feeling of exclusion does not apply. However, if three of them talk together and exclude the fourth, the same prohibition applies.

Islamic Etiquette: Degrees Of Respect & Confused Expression

In an argument I recently had with my brother concerning the celebrations of anniversaries of scholars and religious people, he pointed out that in our language we distinguish in three different types of respect. The first is that which we offer to Allah. This is plain worship and Allah is described

as *Ma'bood* which means the one who is worshipped. The second type is respect, which is due to parents and elders. This is called *Ihteram*. The third type is a position in between, which is called *Taazim*. This last type does not tantamount to worship, but it is the one, which we should show to the Prophet, his companions and other pious and highly religious people. He argues that this is not to be confused with associating partners with Allah. Please comment.

I am afraid your brother's argument is rather lacking in accuracy. He suggests that the three degrees of respect are peculiar to your language, when the three words he has used to identify them are Arabic ones. Indeed, Arabic uses all three terms for exactly the same meanings you have described. Hence, to suggest that in Arabic we have only two degrees and to make this a reason for confusion over a very serious matter is not valid.

However, let us consider this argument for a moment. He suggests that a certain group of people are entitled to a position in between respect and worship which he calls "Taazim". This is a claim which requires supporting evidence from the Qur'an or Sunnah. Placing such people in this grade and claiming that they deserve a particular position and treatment can have one of two possibilities. It can be claimed to be a matter required by Islamic faith and, in this case, it has to have clear basis in the teachings of Islam. Anyone who makes such a claim has to prove it with evidence from the Qur'an or the Sunnah. Alternatively, this is merely a concept, which is not related to Islamic teachings. If so, anyone who makes such a claim should not press it on other Muslims. This is because he would be pressing a concept of his own making and claiming that it is part of our religion. The Prophet, peace be upon him, tells us that anyone who invents anything in Islam, something which is not part of it, shall have it rejected. I can tell you very clearly that there is no statement in the Qur'an or the Hadith, which suggests that any person, should be treated in a special way to give him a place above other people. Hence, the only alternative is that it is an invention and every invention is to be rejected.

Moreover, to speak of a rank in between that of Allah and that of ordinary human being is not something new. The pagan Arabs in Makkah claimed such a position for the idols they worshipped. The Qur'an tells us that they used to claim that they only worshipped those idols so that they could benefit them by drawing them closer to Allah. That did not make them anything but idolaters. The Qur'an denounces their attitude and describes them as idolaters who associate partners with Allah. Therefore, when people claim such a position for other people and consider that those latter ones have some sort of privilege which enables them to improve the position of others with Allah, they are actually claiming for them a position of partnership with Allah. This is not acceptable in any way.

Moreover, why should people insist on glorifying certain other people? What do they gain by such glorification? The fact is that when people attend the death anniversary of someone who is claimed to be a saint, they come out at the end of that function feeling satisfied with themselves, because they consider that they have done something, which pleases Allah. The opposite is true. They have done something, which displeases Allah, and they should feel very unhappy with themselves. If people want to please Him, they have to make sure what actions do please Him. Since He has sent a messenger to mankind to show them the way to gain His pleasure, then they should look up to that messenger in order to know what to do. Earning Allah's pleasure can only be achieved by following the practice of His messenger, Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. He did not tell us to assign a grade of "Taazim" or glorification to any group of people. If we do so, then we are introducing into the faith of Islam something that is alien to it. This is not acceptable to Allah at all. Allah accepts only what He has approved, either through revelations in

the Qur'an or clear instructions by the Prophet, peace be upon him. Your brother's argument does not rely on any evidence of either type. As such it is to be rejected.

Islamic Etiquette: Embarrassment — Objecting & Causing Or Avoiding

A friend of my sister-in-law once invited me to a dinner. I noticed that the cutlery were made of silver, while the plates were trimmed in gold. I whispered my objection to my sister-in-law. Because she was a very intimate friend of our hostess, she went to the kitchen and brought different plates and cutlery which both of us used. I could not speak to our hostess about this or to her guests. Therefore, I kept quite. However, since then I feel that I should have made our objection clear.

Your behavior has been commendable throughout. You avoided embarrassing your hostess, as you certainly should have done. At the same time, you managed to get yourself the right utensils for eating. Perhaps I should state here that it is forbidden in Islam to use utensils made of silver or gold, or indeed to use any articles made of these precious metals for normal usage, apart from a woman using her jewelry. This is due mainly to the fact that these metals can form the currency, or at least [to some extent provide] the cover for the currency of nations. Hence, using these metals for daily business is not proper for the economy or for the social welfare of the community. Therefore, God has forbidden it.

As for advising your hostess, your difficulty is understandable. You were in her house for the first time and she had friends and guests with her. Giving advice in such a situation is not recommended at all. What you should consider is first to strengthen your relationship with the lady. When you have done so and you realize that you have gained her trust, you may tell her in private, between the two of you, making it clear to her that you only want to give her a piece of advice. Most probably she will appreciate that. [Having conveyed the advice, you will have done your duty. Whether or not she accepts your advice should not be a matter for concern.]

***Islamic Etiquette: Embarrassment — Sparing People Of Any
Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News***

In the period leading to the advent of Islam, poetry was highly valued by the Arabs, who were very eloquent and expressive. Hence, their poets were often of high caliber. Many would sum up a clear aspect of universal wisdom in a beautiful line that is easy to memorize. Such wise poetry was often learned and quoted or sung at every opportunity. One such poet who lived shortly before Islam was Labeed. Asma bint Abu Bakr reports that her father once quoted a line of Labeed's poetry which says: "I have a friend who, whatever I ask he is certain to grant, and whatever slip I make he is sure to overlook." Abu Bakr then commented: "Such was God's Messenger, peace be upon him."

This report is not a Hadith, since it is a comment by Abu Bakr on a line of poetry by Labeed. Hence we do not find it in the main anthologies of Hadith, but it is mentioned in books that speak of the Prophet's character, manners and personal attributes. Hence, it is included in *Al-Anwar* by Al-Baghawi, which is dedicated to highlighting the Prophet's personal character. What is stressed here is the Prophet's willingness to overlook every mistake, provided that it is not a willful act of disobedience to God, and his readiness to grant every request. This is the attitude that earns genuine love.

In his care for others, the Prophet, peace be upon him, never spoke directly to anyone about what he disliked if what he wanted to say could embarrass the person concerned. Examples abound showing that the Prophet, peace be upon him, was very

sensitive to other people's feelings. Anas ibn Malik reports: "The Prophet, peace be upon him, was visited by a man who had used yellow makeup. The Prophet, peace be upon him, never confronted anyone with something he disliked. Hence, when the man left, the Prophet, peace be upon him, said to the people present: 'You may wish to advise this man not to use such yellow makeup.'" [Related by Ahmad, Abu Dawood, and Al-Tirmithi].

It should be explained here that women normally wore yellow makeup. This means that the man had used feminine makeup, which is clearly discouraged by Islam. His action is like that of a man using mascara or lipstick these days. What is recommended for men is makeup that gives good smell but does not show, such as perfumes. Women may wear at home any makeup, but when they go out, they are recommended not to wear perfume, while they are allowed visible makeup such as kohl. Given such standards, the Prophet, peace be upon him, felt that it would be embarrassing to the man if he pointed this out to him in front of the people present. But the Prophet, peace be upon him, needed to make it clear to all that such practice is discouraged. Had he not commented, his silence would have been interpreted as approval. Therefore, he made his comment in the gentlest manner, clearly indicating disapproval and suggesting that someone should tell the man privately that he should not use such makeup.

In another example, Ayesha reports that "a man sought admission to see the Prophet, peace be upon him. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Admit him. He is such a disliked person." When the man came in, the Prophet, peace be upon him, spoke to him gently. After he left, I said to the Prophet: 'Messenger of God! You said about the man whatever you said. Nevertheless, you spoke gently to him.' He said: 'Ayesha The worst position is given on the Day of Judgment to one whom others leave alone in order to avoid his abusive language.'" [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Malik, Ahmad and others]

Needless to say, the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not publicize his feelings about the man. He was speaking only to his wife. Nor did he speak ill of him, other than to say that the man did not command respect even among his own people. Nevertheless, Ayesha wondered how the Prophet, peace be upon him, could speak gently to a man whom he knew to be undeserving of such kindness. Hence, her question. The Prophet, peace be upon him, explained that people normally avoid dealing with those who are ill mannered. Such a person will rue his conduct on the Day of Judgment when he discovers that it lands him in a bad position.

That the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not confront people with what they disliked is confirmed in several Hadiths. Ayesha reports: "If the Prophet, peace be upon him, was informed that anyone said or did something wrong, he would not confront the man saying: 'You said this or that.' Rather, he would say: 'Why is it that some people say this or that.'" [Related by Abu Dawood].

This Hadith tells us about a practice the Prophet, peace be upon him, always resorted to in order to spare people embarrassment. He did not even tell them privately what was communicated to him, because he did not wish to create an atmosphere of apprehension with people feeling that whatever they did would be reported. Therefore, he made his comments as general as possible, saying that some people might have done this or that which Islam does not approve. In this way, not only the person concerned would understand, but also anyone else who might do something similar. The advice was to all.

Another Hadith gives us an example of how this worked out in practice. Al-Nu'man ibn Basheer says: "The Prophet, peace be upon him, used to make the rows [in congregational prayer] very straight, so as to look like an arrow ready for release. Once he saw a man with his chest protruding. He said, 'Servants of God! Straighten

your lines, or else God will let disunity creep to you." [Related in all six authentic anthologies].

Although the action that needed correction was done by one person, the admonition was general, and it was certain to make everyone look at his own position to ensure that the row was straight at his own point. Thus, no one would feel that the criticism was directed at him, and the result would remove the fault. There can hardly be a better way of correcting mistakes.

Islamic Etiquette: Gestures Of Respect For the Living Or Dead

I recently visited the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah and noticed how the guards turn people away from the Prophet's grave when they try to touch the outside walls or the gate or anything on the structure. They claimed that all this is a form of "shirk", or associating partners with God. Does this apply to kissing the forehead or the hand of a grandfather, or a Tribal Chief, or a Prime minister, or a ruler?

Gestures differ according to the way they are used and understood in the community. The same gesture may carry opposite meanings in different communities. In Russia, for example, when the audience applauds, the speaker returns their gesture with similar applause.

If this were to be done by a speaker in the Middle East or in Western Europe, it would be found very strange.

During the Prophet's lifetime, people greeted him with gestures expressing their love and respect as was acceptable in their community. After his death, we greet him and request God to grant him peace and blessings. In this way, which he himself recommended, we express our love and respect to him. In our society here in Saudi Arabia, people express their respect to their elders by kissing their hands, or their foreheads. They express welcome to a dear friend by touching noses. All these are acceptable, since there is no confusion in the meaning of the gesture itself.

When visiting relatives' graves, the proper thing to do is to greet the dead and to pray God to shower His mercy on them. No gesture of touching the grave or wailing is permissible. When standing before the grave of a highly respected person, such as a scholar or an ancestor, we should confine ourselves to verbal prayers and greetings. The same applies to visiting the Prophet's grave. We stand there in all humility, greeting the Prophet, peace be upon him, and declaring our belief in him as God's messenger who delivered His message complete and guided us to follow it, giving us good counsel.

We pray to God to reward him as He best rewards a prophet and a messenger. To touch or kiss the walls of his grave is wrong. It is indeed a gesture similar to what polytheists used to do. Islam takes a very strong stand to any gesture or action that is associated in people's minds with worship. People that worshiped ancestors, or saints, or dead people often indulge in actions that are not permissible in Islam. One of these is to touch the grave, or to hold to its gate and pray to God. All this is unacceptable.

Islamic Etiquette: Good Manners At Home

Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

Islam sets some detailed rules outlining good manners, which Muslims are required to observe. Decency is something that must be observed even within the family, so that people close to each other may not be irritated, embarrassed or offended by one

another. Surah 24, Light, contains some detailed instructions about standards of decency that should be observed. Some of these are to be taught to children and adolescents in order that they would grow up having such good manners as part of their natural behavior. Some of these are concerned with what should one do or say when entering a home, whether it belongs to him or to others.

Good manners are to be observed even when one enters a home, which he knows to be empty. Abdullah ibn Omar, a recognized scholar among the Prophet's companions, states: "When a person enters a house with no inhabitants, he should say: peace be to us and to the good ones among God's servants." [Related by Al-Bukhari]. This explains a verse, which requires us to offer a greeting on entering a home. God says:

"Whenever you enter houses, greet yourselves with a blessed, goodly greeting, as enjoined by God." [Light — "An-Noor" 24: 61]

This statement is meant to greet the people in the house we enter, but it is phrased in this way to indicate the strong ties that bind people together in the Muslim community. Thus, when we greet our relatives or friends as we come into their homes, we are actually greeting ourselves, because we all belong to the same community. However, the statement is expressed in the indefinite form, which applies, on entering any house. So how to carry it out if there is nobody in the house? It is this question that is answered by the Hadith we have just mentioned. In this case we should say a greeting to ourselves and include with us all goodly servants of God. This gives us a relaxed feeling on entering an empty home, which is often associated with a rather unhomey feeling.

Another aspect of good manners encouraged by Islam is given in the same Surah:

"Believers! Do not enter houses other than your own unless you have obtained permission and greeted their people." [Light — "An-Noor" 24: 27]

Abdullah ibn Abbas adds that an exception is made in the Qur'an in the case of entering certain houses:

"You will incur no sin if you enter uninhabited houses wherein there are things of use for you." [Light - "An-Noor" 24: 29]

This instruction relates only to premises of more or less public nature, like shops, rest houses, administrative offices, etc. One does not need prior permission to enter such premises. As for private houses, the fact that they may be uninhabited does not give a right of entry to anyone. They still belong to their owners and cannot be entered without their permission.

Furthermore, when one's children attain to puberty they should seek permission before entering their parents' rooms. This is clear in the Qur'anic verse:

"When the children among you attain to puberty, they should ask leave of you like those before them have been enjoined to ask it." [Light — "An-Noor" 24: 59]

This is a question of upbringing. When a child attains to puberty, he or she is no longer a child. Therefore, they should not intrude on their parents, privacy without first seeking permission. We can easily think of different situations when parents would be embarrassed if their teenager children burst into their rooms without first knocking and are given leave to enter. A father may be changing his clothes when his daughter enters, or a mother may have part of her body exposed when her son comes in. In order not to cause any such embarrassment, the instruction is given in this

verse that such children should seek permission before entering their parents' rooms. A Hadith related by Al-Bukhari refers to Abdullah ibn Omar, a scholar companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, who was very keen to implement the Prophet's guidance to the letter. The Hadith mentions that "when any of his children attained to puberty, he would require him or her to seek permission before entering his room."

Some people might find this unnecessary. They wonder whether this puts a sort of barrier between parents and children. The fact is that it does not. It leads to more respect and kindness. A man asked Abdullah ibn Massoud: "Should I ask permission before entering my mother's room?" Abdullah said: "She does not like you to see her in all her positions." [Related by Al-Bukhari] Another Hadith mentions the same question put to Hudhayfah who answered: "If you do not obtain her permission, you would see what she does not like you to see." [Related by Al-Bukhari and Abd Al-Razzaq]. These two Hadiths put in a nutshell why a person should seek his parents' permission before entering their rooms.

The Prophet's companions were always keen to implement his guidance and to teach their children to do as he advised. Moosa ibn Talha, whose father was a close companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, mentions: "I entered with my father in my mother's room. He pushed me hard in my chest so that I sat down. He then said: "Would you enter without permission?" [Related by Al-Bukhari]

All this shows that even with one's parents, everyone who has attained to puberty should respect privacy. This emphasizes the importance of decency, which should be observed even in one's own home. But it is not merely with one's parents that one should seek permission before entry. A Hadith reported by Jabir states: "A man should seek permission to enter the room of his son, daughter, mother, even though she may be elderly brother, sister and father." [Related by Al-Bukhari]

These are the closest relatives who may be living in the same house and are in frequent contact every day. Nevertheless they have to knock on the door and wait for permission before entry. Such are the proper Islamic manners.

Islamic Etiquette: Good Manners In All Situations

Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

The Prophet, peace be upon him, always emphasized the importance of good manners, alerting his companions, and his followers, to the need to show good manners in all situations. According to the Prophet, peace be upon him, good manners include every good thing that is likely to make people happy and strengthen good relations between them, removing causes of doubt and friction. The Prophet, peace be upon him, recognized the needs of different people and allowed whatever was lawful. With children and young people, he understood their need to play and allowed them that provided that whatever they played did not contravene any Islamic teachings. Some people look at child play as unbecoming and try to impose on their children a very serious outlook. This is contrary to human nature, because children need their play, particularly its make-belief aspect. The Prophet, peace be upon him, did not object to this. We understand this from different Hadiths.

Ibn Abbas says: "I was playing with other boys when the Prophet, peace be upon him, passed by. I tried to hide behind a door. He came to me and with his open hand, he hit me lightly once on my back between my shoulders, and said: 'Go and call Muawiyah to come to me.' I did, and when I returned I said: 'He is eating'." [Related by Muslim] The Hadith is a little longer, but we need to emphasize the message of only this portion, which shows that the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not object to play. Ibn Abbas was a teenager playing with boys of his age. When the

Prophet, peace be upon him, passes, he hides, perhaps because he is a little ashamed that the Prophet, peace be upon him, should see him playing. The Prophet, peace be upon him, goes to him and tells him to call one of his companions to come over to him. He does not reproach him for playing or wasting time. On the contrary, he gives him a friendly gesture to remove his embarrassment, before he asks him to call one of his companions whom he needed to speak to.

Ayesha was also a young woman when she married the Prophet, peace be upon him. She mentions that the Prophet, peace be upon him, used to let her friends come to her to play with dolls. [Related by Al-Bukhari]. This Hadith shows that the Prophet, peace be upon him, was aware of the needs of his young wife, and took action so that her friends would come to her to play together. This should not be understood that they were children, because the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not marry Ayesha as a child, but as a young woman. Yet it is normal for teenage girls to play with dolls, sew dresses for them and care for them as if they were real children. This is an expression of the motherly instinct women have.

In both the two Hadiths we see that the Prophet, peace be upon him, has encouraged, or at least accepted, teenagers play. Yet some of us look disapprovingly on it, which we should not do. But when play leads to something forbidden, the Prophet, peace be upon him, made his disapproval clear, as fits the type of play. Abu Hurairah reports: "God's Messenger once saw a man chasing a pigeon. He said: 'It is one devil chasing another.'" [Related by Al-Bukhari in Al-Adab Al-Mufrad, Ahmad, Abu Dawood and Ibn Majah]

Playing with pigeons is often made a cover up for some unacceptable behavior. A person may keep pigeons on the roof of his home, and he flies them in the neighborhood, but his real purpose is to look at his neighbors when they are unaware of his presence. He may cause some damage, such as breaking glass or dropping some dirt in their homes. Hence, Islam looks at such pastimes in a very unfavorable light. Osman, the third caliph, often encouraged the killing of stray dogs and slaughtering of pigeons because of the harm they caused.

A different aspect of Islamic manners is clearly demonstrated by Omar, the second caliph. Zayd ibn Thabit was a close companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, who learned much from him, becoming a scholar. He was the one employed by both Abu Bakr and Osman to supervise the task of putting together the reference, complete copies of the Qur'an. He was also well known for his scholarship, particularly his insight into the Islamic inheritance system.

One day, Omar went to Zayd in his home, and sought admission. Zayd welcomed him. As Omar entered, Zayd was having his head combed by a slave girl he had. He lifted his head to welcome the caliph, but Omar told him to continue. Zayd said: 'Had you sent for me, I would have come to you.' Omar said: 'It is I who need you.' He then asked him about the inheritance of a deceased man's grandfather. [Related by Al-Bukhari in Al-Adab Al-Mufrad and Al-Bayhaqi].

This report shows the respect the Prophet's companions had for one another. Omar, the caliph who was the overall ruler of a vast Muslim state, goes to visit someone who was very much his junior because he needed something from him. He could certainly have summoned him, and Zayd would have no option but to go to him, but Omar shows the respect due to his fellow companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him. Since he had something to ask Zayd, so he goes to him, and seek to be admitted. He did not want to disturb anything Zayd was doing. So, he tells him to continue with having his hair combed while asking him about the problem that he was considering.

A different aspect of mutual respect is that mentioned by Habeeb ibn Abi Thabit: "They disliked that when a man is talking with a group he addresses one particular person among them. He should instead make his address to them all." [Related by Al-Bukhari in Al-Adab Al-Mufrad]. While this is not a Hadith quoting the Prophet, it refers to the first generation of Muslims, i.e. the Prophet's companions who were the ones who transformed their life in accordance with Islamic values and standards. If one was with a group of people, making some point in the discussion, then he should direct his address to the group, rather than a single one among them, as some people do, particularly if that person has a distinguished position. To address him in particular may cause the others to feel uneasy. Hence, to remove any ill feelings, the recommendation is to make the address general.

Islamic Etiquette: Greeting — A Guarantee From God Himself
Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

When we buy something expensive, such as a car, a computer or an electric appliance, we always look at the guarantee that comes with it. We want to be sure that it will function well for a minimum period of time. Such a guarantee satisfies a natural feeling that when you part with a substantial sum of money, you want to be sure that you are getting what that sum is worth. However, a guarantee given by a dealer or a manufacturer is only reliable so long as the status of the party issuing it remains sound. But if we were to compare such a guarantee with one given by God, then the difference is great indeed.

There are many statements in the Qur'an, and in the Hadith which include promises given by God. Every such promise is certain to be fulfilled because God's promises always come true. A Hadith quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "Three people have a guarantee from God: each one of them has the assurance that if he lives, he is spared evil, and if he dies he is admitted into heaven. Whoever enters his home saying a greeting of peace has a guarantee from God, and whoever goes out to the mosque has a guarantee from God, and whoever goes out striving for God's cause has a guarantee from God." [Related by Al-Bukhari and Ibn Hibban]

The Hadith is self-explanatory, but we are more concerned here with the first part, which gives a guarantee to a person who says a greeting on entering his or her own home. If there are people inside, then the greeting is offered to them, and this spreads a friendly feeling inside the home, with one's own family. If nobody is in, then the greeting is to oneself. This is also encouraged, because when we go into an empty home, there is always a feeling of apprehension, until one is certain that nothing wrong has taken place in one's absence.

There are people who think too highly of themselves, or treat their own families as subordinates. A man of this type wants his wife and children to come up to him and greet him as he enters. He is reluctant to be the first to offer a greeting. This is not the proper Islamic practice. Jabir, a companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, who related a large number of Hadiths, says: "When you enter your home, offer a greeting to your family, for it is a blessed, goodly greeting from God." [Related by Al-Bukhari].

A similar Hadith is reported by Anas who quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "Son, when you enter your own home, offer a greeting of peace, or Salam, for it is a blessing to you and to your family." [Related by Al-Tirmithi].

Needless to say, this is part of the good manners Islam teaches. It is aimed at generating the right atmosphere of love and compassion within the family.

There is another aspect to greeting when one goes into one's own home. Jabir reports that he heard the Prophet, peace be upon him, saying: "When a man enters his own home and mentions God's name as he enters and when he eats, Satan says [to his offspring]: 'Tonight, you have neither a place to stay nor food.' If the man enters without mentioning God's name, Satan says: 'You have a place to stay tonight.' Then if the man does not mention God's name when he eats, Satan says: 'You have both a place to stay and food tonight.'" [Related by Al-Bukhari, and Ibn Hibban]

This is obviously a figurative statement. It is not a matter where Satan is looking for a place where he could lodge his offspring, or provide food for them. They do not eat the same type of food we eat. But it is a question of their being able to find a place where they could do their evil work of seduction, persuading people to do what is forbidden and stirring trouble between people. When one is used to mentioning God's name before embarking on any action, including entering one's own home and eating, then Satan has little room to play. Every time a person mentions God's name, he reminds himself of God, and is on his guard, trying to bring his actions and his thoughts in line with what pleases God. In this way, he leaves no room for Satan to influence him in thought or action.

A question arises on whether seeking permission is required at all places, or only when one wishes to enter a home. A Hadith tells us that two people went to visit Anas ibn Malik, the Prophet's companion who served him for ten years in Madinah. "Anas ibn Malik was sitting in his corridor alone. My friend greeted him and asked: 'May I enter?' Anas said: 'come in. This is a place where no one is required to seek permission.' He then put some food before us and we ate. And he brought a large container with some soft drink. He drank of it and gave us to drink." [Related by Al-Bukhari].

It is clear from this Hadith that when a person is at the entrance of his own home, or in the front corridor, where he can see anyone coming near, there is no need to seek permission. It is not a place where one has privacy, which needs to be respected. Rather, it is a place where one is almost in the street. Hence, seeking permission is not required.

The same applies to shops and the market place. Mujahid reports: "Abdullah ibn Omar used not to seek permission before entering shops in the market." [Related by Al-Bukhari].

This is only natural because if we were required to seek permission before entering a shop, then this means that a shopkeeper or an assistant should always be near the door to give such permission. This may be hard for them to maintain. When a person opens his shop in the morning, he is seeking business, which means that people should come in and look for what they need. He is ready to receive whoever calls. It is unlike a home or a private room where one maintains one's privacy. Here neither the shopkeeper nor his customers expect privacy. It is a business place where people are welcome to enter and look for what they need.

Islamic Etiquette: Greeting — As We Depart
Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

We have two Hadiths with an identical message, but different wording. They speak about a person joining a group, then leaving ahead of the others. Both are reported by Abu Hurairah, who was one of the most prolific of the Prophet's companions in reporting his Hadiths. The first may be translated as follows: "If any of you come to join a group of people, he should offer his greeting. If he then departs, he should again offer a greeting. The second greeting is in no way more right than the first." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Ahmad and Al-Nasa'ie].

In this Hadith the Prophet, peace be upon him, gives clear instructions to a person joining a group or leaving them. He should be the one to offer the greeting of peace, Assalamo Alaikum. Both are the right things to do, because they are indicative of good manners and friendliness toward one's community. Sometimes, a person wants to leave silently, either because he does not wish to disrupt the discussion, or because he wants his departure not to be noticed. While circumstances like these may be considered according to the particular situation, the normal thing, which follows the Prophet's guidance is to indicate one's departure by offering a greeting of peace.

Besides, when a person is noticed to leave quietly, without offering a greeting, his behavior may raise questions or doubts, particularly if the people he is leaving have been discussing something private. The greeting of peace is significant in such respect. It tells the people so greeted that they are in peace with the person as he arrives and as he leaves. So, it is reassuring. Hence, the Prophet, peace be upon him, makes it clear that the second greeting, i.e. at the point of departure, is equally right as the first, which people normally expect by all comers.

The second Hadith quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "If any of you arrives at a group of people, he should offer a greeting. If he sits down then wishes to leave before the group is ready to disperse, he should again offer a greeting. The first greeting is in no way more required than the second." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Abu Dawood, Al-Tirmithi and Al-Nasa'ie]. This version is clearer about the situation the Prophet, peace be upon him, describes. It is one in which an individual joins a group, sits with them, and then departs before them. This excludes a person who passes by a group, greets them and leaves. In this case, one greeting is all that is required. But when this individual 'joins the group and sits with them for a while and then wants to depart' he should offer another greeting.

We note that in the second Hadith the order in the concluding sentence is changed. It says that the first greeting is equal to the second in the fact that both are required. People feel that the first greeting is more important. As the man is joining a group, he should be the one to greet them so that his arrival is felt in a friendly way. Hence, the Prophet, peace be upon him, makes it clear that the second greeting, at the point of departure, is not to be taken lightly. It is equally required.

Islamic greeting is encouraged in all situations. Indeed the proper practice includes situations where other people might not even think of offering a greeting. Abu Hurairah mentions that he heard the Prophet, peace be upon him, saying: "Whoever meets his brother should offer a greeting to him. If they are walking together and a tree or a wall separates them, then they are back together, he should offer him a new greeting." [Related by Al-Bukhari and Abu Dawood]

We can easily imagine the situation, with two friends walking together and at one point a tree or some sort of barrier makes them part so as to walk on its two sides. This is a momentary separation. Indeed they may continue to talk without thinking of stopping while they walk past the tree. Yet it is recommended for both of them to renew their greeting by saying it again.

A similar Hadith is related by Anas ibn Malik, who served the Prophet, peace be upon him, for over ten years. He mentions that "the Prophet's companions may be walking together and a tree happens to be along their way. As they walk past it some of them walk to its right and some to its left. When they pass it and join each other again, some of them would offer a greeting to the others." [Related by Al-Bukhari and Al-Tabarani]

This suggests that this was common practice among the Prophet's companions. Today, our practice is different, because we have lost our sense of what a greeting of

peace means in terms of strengthening social relations. The sooner we revive such practices, the more closely knit our community will be.

Islamic Etiquette: Greeting — Grudgingly

It is not unknown in human behavior that some people do not reply to a greeting when one is offered to them. What should our attitude be when we experience such an un-Islamic and uncivilized attitude?

Abdullah ibn Al-Samit reports: "I said to Abu Dharr: "I passed by Abd Al-Rahman ibn Umm Al-Hakam and offered him the greeting of peace, but he did not reply to me. He said: "My nephew, how does that affect you? Someone better than him has replied to you: An angel to his right." [Related by Al-Bukhari].

Let us first ask about the man at the center of this case, Abd Al-Rahman ibn Umm Al-Hakam bint Abu Sufian. His mother was Muawiyah's sister and his father was a man from the Thaqeef tribe called Abdullah ibn Osman. His uncle, Muawiyah gave him several posts, including the post of governor of Kufah, but people were displeased with him. Therefore, Muawiyah sacked him and said to him: "Son, I have tried to promote you, but you insist on being hard to sell. There are other reports, which suggest that he was self-centered. Perhaps he felt it beneath his position to be accosted by ordinary people. Hence, he did not reply to greetings. Abu Dharr, a well-known companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, consoles the man who greeted him, because he was hurt. He told him that his greeting was certainly returned by an angel, even though he himself did not hear it.

Abu Dharr would not have made such an assertion unless he had heard it from the Prophet, peace be upon him. And indeed the Prophet, peace be upon him, said something to this effect in the following Hadith reported by Abdullah ibn Massoud: "Salam is one of God's names, but He has chosen to place it on earth. Therefore, spread it among you. A man who offers a greeting to others and they reply to him earns a step over them, because he reminded them of the greeting of Salam. If his addressee does not return his greeting, it is returned by someone better than him." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Al-Bayhaqi and others].

This Hadith again confirms that the Islamic greeting uses one of God's names, Salam, which means peace. Thus, it is intended to generate an atmosphere of peace within the Muslim community. Moreover, it earns a reward for the person offering it and the one returning the greeting, because both mention God. If some people grudge returning a greeting, this should not be disheartening or causing any of us to abandon the highly recommended practice of offering greetings to others. He should know that a greeting is always returned, either by the greeted person or by an angel close to him. Moreover, he earns a better position because he is the one who starts, using God's name and reminding others to use it.

But what is the ruling concerning someone who does not reply to greetings? Al-Hassan says: "To offer a greeting is highly recommended, and to return a greeting is obligatory." Thus, a person who does not reply to a greeting fails to do a certain duty. As a result, he makes himself open to God's punishment. Furthermore, such a person is very miserly. In a Hadith reported by Abdullah ibn Amr ibn Al-Aas we have the following definitions: "A confirmed liar is a person who lies against his oath, and a miserly person is the one who begrudges greetings, and a thieving person is one who knocks off his prayers very quickly." [Related by al-Bukhari].

This Hadith uses an adjectival form that implies a higher degree of the three qualities it describes. Thus, it speaks of a confirmed liar who does not hesitate to lie. This is when a person lies despite having taken an oath to the contrary. Thus, his assertion flies in his face to condemn him as a confirmed liar. Similarly a person who knocks

off his prayers, without allowing himself time to properly fulfill its requirements, aiming to finish it very quickly is described as a thieving person. He actually steals from himself, because in his hurry, he does not give proper attention to the various actions, recitation, glorification and praise of God, which are required in prayer. Hence, he deprives himself of much of the reward he would have earned. Thus, he steals from himself, and who is a worse loser than that? In the middle of these two qualities the Prophet, peace be upon him, places the one who begrudges others a greeting of peace, either by not replying to their greetings or not offering a greeting when he should. Such a person is on a higher degree of miserliness.

A similar Hadith is reported by Abu Hurairah: “The most miserly person is the one who begrudges greetings, and the most lacking in ability is one who is unable to pray to God.” [Related by Al-Bukhari].

We note that this Hadith speaks in the superlative degree, condemning one who does not greet others, or does not reply to their greetings, as the most miserly of people. Such a person is placed on a par with one who is unable to pray to God for what he wants. God listens to our prayer, no matter in what language or how clearly stated they are. He knows what we think, say or do. Thus, we only need to appeal to Him, put our request, as we would put them to a person with whom we are most familiar. It is a matter of articulating what we feel and need. This is a simple thing that all people, regardless of their degree of education, eloquence or intellectual ability, can easily do. To feel unable to pray to God is certainly a mark of the worst disability.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, has taught us in every possible way that greeting others is to be praised and rewarded. He used to greet all people including young children. When we follow his example, we do not only follow the right path, but we also earn reward from God. Hence, we should know that greeting children is a commendable action that earns reward for us, in addition to the fact that it teaches these children to be sociable. Thabit Al-Bannani reports that Anas ibn Malik, a companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, who was very close to him, passed by young boys and offered the greeting of peace to them. He then said: “The Prophet, peace be upon him, used to do this.” [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood and Ibn Majah].

A similar Hadith states, “The Prophet, peace be upon him, used to visit the Ansar, greet their young and pat them on their heads.” [Related by Al-Nasa’ie]. This is just another example of the Prophet’s care for the young.

Islamic Etiquette: Greeting — Kissing Hands & Feet

In my home country, young people greet their parents on Eid Day by bowing and kissing their own hands after touching their parents' feet. Is this acceptable?

This act is based in tradition in some areas of the Indian Subcontinent. It looks similar to an act of worship, because it involves lowering one's head, touching someone's feet with one's hands and kissing them. As such it is totally unacceptable from the Islamic point of view.

While parents expect it, it is the duty of sons and daughters to explain to their parents that it is against Islam, and that they continue to respect them and value their position. They should assure them that they would do everything in their power to remain kind and dutiful, as God wants them to be.

Islamic Etiquette: Greeting — Responding To the Non-Muslims
Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

Some people suggest that non-Muslims should not be offered the same greetings as Muslims. It is well known that the Islamic greeting is one of peace. It uses the word Salam, which is one of God's names. Hence, it should not be offered to a non-Muslim. However, when we look at Hadiths that refer to this subject, several points become apparent.

A Hadith reported by Abu Basrah Al-Ghifari mentions that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said to his companions: "I am going to visit the Jews tomorrow. Do not begin by offering them the greeting of Salam. Should they offer it to you, then say: "And to you." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Ahmad and Al-Nasa'ie]

The import of this Hadith is clear. The Prophet's companions who would be traveling with him were instructed not to start by offering the Jews the greeting of peace. They were to reply when offered a greeting by giving a reduced form, which returns the same greeting to the speakers.

Thus, we have here clear instructions to adopt what may be described in modern terms as a strictly formal attitude. The question that may be asked here is whether this applies in all situations or on that particular occasion?

There is nothing in Islam that prevents us from developing and maintaining good and friendly relations with non-Muslims, particularly those who are citizens in an Islamic state, or those who enter into a peaceful agreement with the Muslim community.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, says that harming such a non-Muslim is like causing harm to the Prophet himself. The Prophet's companions were keen to follow his teachings and they maintained very good relations with their non-Muslim neighbors. However, the Islamic greeting is a very special one because it uses a name of God, and it should always be answered in the same form or in an even better one.

Hence it should be offered only to those who are certain to answer it properly. Those who do not may be greeted in a different way, such as we wish them good morning, or good day.

From another point of view, the Jews of Madinah used to twist their tongues with the Islamic greeting so as to give it a different meaning. A Hadith related by Abdullah ibn Omar quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "When a Jew offers you a greeting of peace, he actually says: as-Saam Alaik. Hence, you better reply by saying "and to you." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood and Al-Nasa'ie]

Here the Prophet, peace be upon him, alerts his companions to the way the Jews used to twist their tongues when they said their greeting in order to alter its meaning. The correct form of the Islamic greeting is as-Salam Alaik, when offered in the singular, and adding the plural makes it Alaikum, when offered to more than one person.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, points out that the Jews used to omit the letter so as to make the first word sound as Saam, which is an Arabic word that means death. Thus, they wished death to the addressee while giving him the impression that they were wishing him peace. Hence, the Prophet, peace be upon him, tells his companions to return their wish to them.

Apparently some of the Jews in Madinah thought that this was a way to ridicule the Muslims, laughing at them privately. Anas reports: "A Jew passed by the Prophet, peace be upon him, and said: as-Saam Alaikum, and the Prophet's companions returned the greeting as though he said his greeting properly, wishing them peace. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said to them that the man said as-Saam Alaikum. The Jew was held and, on questioning, he admitted [that what the Prophet, peace be upon him, said was true]. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said to them: "Return his wish to him." [Related by Al-Bukhari as well as Muslim, Abu Dawood and Al-Nasa'ie]

This Hadith speaks of a practical example of what the Jews used to say, changing the words of the greeting so as to wish the Muslims death. In other reports of this incident, some Muslims were really angry with the Jew who thought that he could fool so many Muslims as they sat with the Prophet, peace be upon him. Therefore one or two of them suggested that they should kill the Jew. However, the Prophet, peace be upon him, put the matter into the right perspective and told them to return his wish to him.

It should be said that the reaction of those companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him, was a natural one, but the Prophet, peace be upon him, stressed that they should deal with others according to Islamic standards.

Another Hadith stresses the same point. A number of Jews came to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and instead of offering the proper greeting, they said: "As-Saam Alaikum." The Prophet, peace be upon him, answered: "And to you." His wife, Ayesha was nearby and she said: "And to you be death and God's curse." The Prophet, peace be upon him, told her to be patient and cool down. She said: "Have you not heard what they said." The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Yes, I have, and I replied. Our wish will be answered while theirs will not." [Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim].

Again the Prophet, peace be upon him, urges his wife to be patient and to reply to the insult in a cool way. He assures her that their wish will not be answered because God does not answer a wish for harm against an innocent person. However, the reply is answered because it is from the aggrieved party. It was the Jews who started this, trying to fool the Muslims and ridicule them. Hence, they are totally in the wrong. On the other hand, if one is to carry this too far and repay the offender in an unjust way, he would be in the wrong.

Some Muslims feel that these Hadiths mean that we should not offer the Islamic greeting to non-Muslims. There is no strict rule to suggest so. The rule that applies to Muslims and non-Muslims alike is that if a non-Muslim offers us the Islamic greeting of peace, we return it at least in equal measure, but it is always preferable to return a greeting with a better one. Abu Moosa Al-Ashari wrote to a priest and offered him the greeting of peace. He was questioned about this, and he explained: "He wrote to me offering me this greeting, and I am replying to him." This shows that Abu Moosa, a scholar companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, understood the Islamic criterion.

A Muslim does not fail to reply to a greeting with a better one, or at least a similar one. Moreover, there is nothing sacred about the Islamic greeting of peace. We offer it to all, if they are willing to offer it to us. This is supported by Ibn Abbas, who says: "Return the greeting of peace to a Jew, a Christian or a Magian. God says: ***When a greeting is offered you, answer it with an even better greeting, or [at least] with its like.***" [Women — "Nis'a" 4: 86]" [Related by Al-Bukhari]

Islamic Etiquette: Greeting — Shaking Hands With the Opposite Sex

Is it true that the Prophet, peace be upon him, never shook hands with a woman?

It is true, according to authentic reports, that the Prophet, peace be upon him, never shook hands with any woman who was not his wife or a close relative.

I should add that I have not seen any Hadith, which describes shaking hand with women as forbidden. Hence, the Prophet's example should be the one for us to follow. One is highly encouraged to avoid shaking hands with members of the opposite sex.

Islamic Etiquette: Greeting — Shaking Hands

When two Muslims meet and greet each other, should they shake hands as well? Is that part of Islamic greeting?

Shaking hand is part of a welcome and friendly greeting in many cultures. While there are some Hadiths to show that it is encouraged, there is no obligation or requirement to shake hands when we greet our brothers and friends on meeting them. [We should recognize, however, that following the Prophet's Sunnah is a good act and earns reward from Allah].

However, in such matters, social and cultural norms dictate people's behavior.

Islamic Etiquette: Greeting — Standing Up

Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

Standing up to greet a person, indicating respect, is acceptable. What we should know is that standing up to honor a man of good conduct who occupies a position of authority, or one's teacher or friend is even desirable, provided that it is done of one's own accord and without being expected to do so by the other person.

What is not acceptable is that a person in a higher position should sit down, leaving subordinates standing up around him, to indicate that they are inferior to him.

This is clearly illustrated in the following report, involving Muawiyah, perhaps after he became a caliph. "As Muawiyah started to leave, Abdullah ibn Amir and Abdullah ibn Al-Zubair were seated. Ibn Amir stood up while Ibn al-Zubair, who was the heavier of the two men, remained seated. Muawiyah told Ibn Amir to sit, adding that he heard the Prophet, peace be upon him, saying: Anyone who loves to see people standing in his presence will have his position reserved for him in the fire." [Related by Al-Bukhari]

Islamic Etiquette: Greeting & Replying While Eating

It is suggested that replying to a greeting while eating is discouraged. Is this true?

This is simply a wrong interpretation of a social tradition, which suggests "no greeting during eating". What this social tradition means is that a person who passed by another or a group who is eating need not greet them. He may join them without even saying hello.

This should not be interpreted literally. It simply means that a passer by is welcome to share the meal. If someone greets you when you are eating, you must return his greeting, because this is a duty in all circumstances.

Islamic Etiquette: Greeting Or Not Greeting — Some Situations

It is said that we should not say Assalamo Alaikum to people who are doing their ablution, or eating, and if someone says Salam to people in either state, that person should not reply. Is it correct? On the other hand, when we visit a graveyard or pass by it, we are recommended to say Salam to the dead. How can they reply?

If people are doing the ablution in a bathroom, then Salam should not be addressed to them, because this word is also one of God's names. Hence, it should not be used in such places. If a person is performing the ablution by the side of a stream, or a pool, there is no harm in saying it to him. The same applies to replying to such a greeting. As for eating, people generally say: "no Salam over food", but it appears that it is now misunderstood. Originally, the people eating say this phrase, when someone passes by them and greets them. It means an invitation to him to join them for a meal. As for offering the Salam greeting, there is no harm in that.

When we pass by a graveyard, we are recommended to say: "Assalamo Alaikum, or peace be to you. This is the dwelling place of people who were believers." This is a greeting to the dead, which is communicated to them by God. The angels reply to us on their behalf, even though we do not hear their reply.

Islamic Etiquette: Greetings Exchanged On Christmas, Etc.

Back home, the followers of three religions live side by side: Muslims, Christians and Hindus. In any feast of any community, members of the two other communities congratulate those who have the festivity. For example, Hindus and Christians come and greet us on the occasion of Eid, and we congratulate Christians at Christmas and so on. Some people protest saying that this is unacceptable. Please comment.

Islam is keen on maintaining good relations with neighboring communities. It is clearly stated in the Qur'an that Allah likes us to be kind to those of the followers of other religions who do not try to fight us or turn us away from our land. And He loves those who are fair. It is only those who are hostile to us and who try to turn us out of our land with whom we are not allowed to have kindly relations. When different religious communities live peacefully together, it follows that they should congratulate each other on happy occasions. There is nothing wrong in that, nor is it forbidden to partake of their food unless we know that they slaughter their animals in a way, which Islam forbids [Added: or if the food offered is otherwise forbidden by Islam.]

Islam goes further than that and imposes on the Muslims a duty to defend those non-Muslims who live peacefully under its fold. If they are attacked by a foreign power, we should help them repel it. [Added: Greeting them on their religious festivities or feasting with them is one thing, but Muslims should not, of their own, celebrate religious occasions of the non-Muslims.]

Islamic Etiquette: Hospitality — the Level & Its Acceptance

Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

The Prophet, peace be upon him, was very easy in his manners. He cared for everyone and never despised any form of hospitality given to him, or showed that he expected something better. If he visited a poor person, he would sit wherever was suitable and show no dissatisfaction. People welcomed him and gave him the best they had, but their best might be not very comfortable. He would pay no attention to

poor conditions. He was concerned more with the people themselves, and every one of them was important to him.

We learn from his manners described in numerous Hadiths, related by a large number of his companions that it was very easy to get along with him, and he respected everyone. Abdullah ibn Bisir reports that the Prophet, peace be upon him, dropped at his father's place. His father gave him a velvet mat, and he sat on it. [Related by Al-Bukhari]

This Hadith does not tell us anything about what went on between the Prophet, peace be upon him, and his host. The reporter merely mentions how the Prophet, peace be upon him, was received. Apparently, there is nothing special on this occasion to comment on. It shows that the Prophet's companions reported every movement and action he did, and every word he said. In this instance, nothing of importance took place. Therefore, the reporter merely mentions the sort of mat the Prophet, peace be upon him, was offered and how he reacted.

Various reporters of Hadith do this. There is a similar action reported in another Hadith in which Abdullah ibn Amr mentions that the Prophet, peace be upon him, came to him when he had heard that he fasted very often. The report goes like this: "When he came in, I gave him a cushion made of leather and stuffed with the fiber of the date tree. He sat on the floor and the cushion was between the two of us." Here we see the Prophet, peace be upon him, being given a hard cushion, which is not very comfortable. But he simply takes it and places it between him and his host, so that both of them could use it for support. When we hear or read such Hadiths, with such detailed description, we realize that the Prophet's companions could not have left anything unreported.

Islamic Etiquette: Imaging, False Claims & Eavesdropping ***Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News***

When the Prophet, peace be upon him, advised his companions, and all Muslims, to avoid certain actions, he always made his advice short and precise. He neither dwelt too long over descriptions, nor used two sentences where one was sufficient. But he might link two or three pieces of advice together, seeking to establish such a link by different means, even though the points he tackled might be widely diverse. However, his description was always very clear, graphic and life-like.

An example may be given quoting a short Hadith that speaks of image making, false claims and eavesdropping. Ibn Abbas quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "Whoever makes a likeness will be required to blow spirit into it, and will be punished as he will never be able to blow spirit. Whoever claims to have seen a dream will be required to tie two pieces of hair together, and will be punished as he will never be able to tie them. And whoever eavesdrops on people who try to be away from him will have melted lead poured into his ears." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim and Al-Nasa'ie].

The first point the Prophet, peace be upon him, warns against is that of making a likeness. This is a reference to making images of living things, such as people or animals. This is clearly understood from the reference to his being asked to breathe spirit into the image or likeness he has made, so as to make it a living one. Obviously, he will never be able to do so, because God alone breathes the spirit into the living.

But what sort of likeness the Prophet, peace be upon him, is here speaking about? The Arabic words used in the Hadith are the same we use today for photography and photocopying. Needless to say, the Prophet, peace be upon him, was not talking

about these, because they were not known during his lifetime, and for many centuries later. Some people say that this Hadith, and others prohibiting likeness-making, refer to photography, but such a view is mistaken, because the Prophet, peace be upon him, could not speak about something that was not known by mankind during his lifetime. Even if God tells him about it, his audience would not understand his meaning. God describes both the Qur'an and the messenger to whom it was revealed, i.e. Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, as "making things clear." He could not make things clear if he were to speak of things unknown to his audience. Therefore, we have to look at the usage of the word during the Prophet's lifetime so as to associate it with what the Prophet's companions could associate it with. When we do so, we discover that the term used here means "to shape, mold, fashion, etc."

Moreover, when we take this Hadith with others addressing the same topic, we conclude that the Prophet, peace be upon him, speaks about making something so much life-like that people may think it real. In a sacred, or Qudsi, Hadith, the Prophet, peace be upon him, quotes God as saying: "Who can do more wrong than one who tries to create something like my creations. Let such people create a speck, or a seed, or a seed of barley." [Related by Muslim]. The wording of this Hadith is so strong, leaving us in no doubt as to the strict prohibition of making anything with the intention of leading people to think that it is comparable to what God creates.

It is particularly this sort of likeness that is strongly forbidden, whether it comes in the form of a statue, or in any other form. As for photography, it does not come into this category, because a photograph is nothing more than a print of a reflection in a lens. As such it is not different from a reflection in a mirror, which is indeed truer than a printed photo.

Because the attempt to produce a likeness of this sort seeks to imitate God's creation, the person who tries it will be required to breathe life into it. Needless to say, no person can do that. Hence, he will be punished for his deed.

The second point the Prophet, peace be upon him, warns against is to make a false claim of a dream a person did not see. Why should this be so serious? First of all, it is a lie, and Islam views telling lies very seriously. Islam simply makes no allowance for what people term as a "white lie," or a "lie of convenience." All lies are false and falsehood is strongly shunned.

Secondly, a dream is an aspect of God's creation. It may have no substance as far as we are concerned, but it takes place by God's will. Any dream seen by any of us occurs by God's will and as He determines. Therefore, a false claim of having seen a particular dream, and relating such a false dream to others, means that one is lying to God Himself. As such, this action has a linkage with the previous one of creating a likeness of a living thing. Both are false and lies — one in words and the other in action. Both are required to do something akin to their claims. The one who lies about his dream is required to tie up two small hairs so as to make them look like one, which is practically impossible. As he fails, he is punished for his sin.

Thirdly, the Prophet, peace be upon him, warns against eavesdropping on people. He makes a graphic picture of such a person who tries to hear others talking, but they are trying to hide away from him. Such a person would raise his hand to his ear in order to hear people's whispers. This is totally unacceptable from the Islamic point of view and earns a severe punishment.

We have to realize that this punishment is earned for trying to overhear others, even though the attempt to do so fails and that person cannot hear other people's conversation. It is the intention that earns such a person his or her punishment. A similar case is that of one who spies on people through a hole in the door or in a

wall, or through a window, etc. If any of us is in his home and realizes that he is being spied on in this way, he may use a stick to hit the spy in his eye. If that person loses his eyesight as a result, he has no claim to make against the house owner who hit him, because the initial fault is his own.

Similarly, the punishment for an eavesdropper is incurred by his very attempt to eavesdrop, even though he does not manage to hear anything being said. The Prophet, peace be upon him, describes the punishment graphically, as he tells us that melted lead is poured into that person's ears. Needless to say, he would lose his hearing faculty as a result, but such a loss is only one aspect of his punishment.

Islamic Etiquette: Interference Or Advice Where It Is Due

A relative of my wife has been in love with a Hindu man who is already married. My wife would prefer that we do not discuss the subject with the two people involved because that would be interfering in their private affairs when they are adults and know what they are doing. Please comment.

Giving good counsel is an important aspect of Islam. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: True religion is giving good counsel." When he was asked to whom such counsel should be given, he answered: "For God's sake, His book and His messenger, to the leaders of the Muslim community and to all Muslims generally." So, when a close relative is in need of advice, it is only right that one should give such advice, particularly if it is to point out a source of likely danger or misfortune. We need not wait until advice is solicited. If we feel that a close friend or relative is going the wrong way, we should come forward and give advice for God's sake and to save that person from danger."

[Read, if you will, the following verse of Surah 3, which states:

"You are the best nation that has ever been raised for mankind; you enjoin the doing of what is right & forbid what is wrong, and you believe in Allah. ..."
[the Family of Imran — "Aale Imran" 3: 110]

In this case, a woman indulges in a behavior that is likely to result in great trouble for her and her family. She is in need of honest advice. Someone has to tell her that such love will either end in frustration, as she cannot marry this man, or in disobedience to God if she tries to arrange a civil marriage, such a marriage will not be recognized as valid in Islam. Hence, she would be in an illegitimate relationship with this man. If she loves him and does not marry him, she will end up in sadness.

If such advice were given in the right way, it would be appreciated. It will not be construed as interference. Rather, an expression of care for the lady involved.

Islamic Etiquette: Licking Fingers After A Meal

It is said that the Prophet, peace be upon him, used to lick his fingers after eating and he has recommended his followers to do so. Is it true that this prevents intestine trouble?

It is true that the Prophet, peace be upon him, used to lick his fingers after he finished his meal, and he used to wipe the plate clean, using his fingers to lick out what remains in the plate. This he did by way of showing gratitude to Allah for His grace in providing food. His action was also meant to teach us that part of being grateful to Allah is to take care of what He was provided. We should not throw away or waste any small portion of food.

The Prophet's action does not have any medical connotation. It is not true that if you lick your fingers after a meal, you do not get intestine trouble. If the germs which cause such a complaint are present in your food, then you will get it, whether you lick your fingers or not.

[People who have food, which they no longer need or require, should give it away to those who are in need of it. They should not throw it in the dustbin. That is the least they could do by way of thanking Allah for His grace and giving them abundance.]

Islamic Etiquette: Modesty — Islam Makes It Part Of Faith

Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

Islam encourages Muslims to adopt certain qualities and characteristics so that they are able to cope with the problems of life and conduct their social relations in the best way. This helps to cement relations within the Muslim community and maintain strong ties between its members. Islam adopts a totally different attitude from that of other communities, including modern Western civilization, which consider modesty a weakness and encourage overcoming it through assertiveness. That modesty encourages a person to sacrifice some of what belongs to him in order to earn reward from God or win other people's love and respect fits perfectly with the Islamic approach to social relations, material values and the concept of action and reward. At the same time, Islam insists that everyone should have their rights and no one can limit or disregard the rights of another.

Islam makes modesty part of faith, a fact that is stressed in several Hadiths. One of them is reported by Abdullah ibn Omar, the companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him: "Modesty and faith are inter-linked: if either of them is lacking, the other is lacking too." We see this clearly apparent. Good believers are, generally speaking, modest, easy to get on with, and would not stress their own roles. By contrast, people who lack faith often lack modesty. This is due to the fact that when faith is lacking, the life of this world becomes people's primary preoccupation. Therefore they try to get as much as possible out of what they hold to be important for them. This leads them to be presumptuous, overbearing, assertive, and may often lead some people to trample over the rights of others. A believer who is convinced of meeting God and having to account for what he does in this life will hesitate before stressing his own importance, let alone usurping someone else's rights.

Islamic Etiquette: Modesty & Claiming What Is Legitimately Due

Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

Modesty is a virtue the Prophet, peace be upon him, was keen to stress. Indeed it is a universally acclaimed virtue, with most religions and traditions praising it. However, Western societies sometimes try to cast an air of disapproval on modesty, picturing it as a weakness that inhibit a person from claiming what is due to him. Instead, they emphasize the need to be assertive so that others do not take advantage of our modesty.

This is a wrong view of looking at things. Being modest in social dealings does not mean that a person should abandon what is rightfully his or hers. Modesty is the opposite of boasting and asserting what one does not have. It is thus the opposite of presumption, temerity or cheek. Assertiveness, on the other hand, is often associated with being aggressive or domineering. As such, it may be a virtue where people generally do not give due consideration to others, but it is far from being so where people are very considerate and willing to allow others not only what is rightfully theirs, but a little more in addition.

In a Muslim community people are always encouraged to be kind and generous, morally and materially. The Prophet, peace be upon him, makes it a condition of faith that one considers others in the same way as one considers oneself. He says: "By God! A person is not a believer unless he loves for his brother what he loves for himself." This applies to all situations. Where a person finds something that he loves to have or to enjoy, he should love that all his brothers and sisters should have or enjoy the same thing. Thus, selfishness is reduced within the Muslim community, as everyone is considerate of other people.

This is why Islam stresses the virtue of modesty as it helps us to keep the selfish tendency down and to stress the brotherhood of all believers. One does not seek to stress one's own position, but rather he considers himself as part of a greater entity, the Muslim community. The Prophet, peace be upon him, even says that modesty is highlighted by earlier prophets as a virtue to be sought: "Among the words people received from early prophets are: if you feel no shame, then do as you wish." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Abu Dawood, Ibn Majah, Ahmad and others]. It is modesty that makes a person feel ashamed when he does something wrong. Hence a person who has no sense of shame is not affected by people's reaction to whatever he may do.

In a different Hadith, one of the Prophet's companions, Imran ibn Hussain, mentions: "The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: 'Modesty brings nothing but good.' A person named Basheer ibn Kaab said to him: 'It is written in Al-Hikmah: It is part of modesty to maintain propriety, and to have inner serenity.' Imran said to him: 'I am reporting what God's Messenger has said and you speak to me of what is written in your scroll.'" [Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

We need to explain two things here. First is the Prophet's statement that modesty brings only what is good. This is obviously in any situation, which does not necessitate asserting the Islamic point of view or the Islamic rule. Where these need to be stated and clarified, refraining from doing so under the pretext of modesty is not to be condoned. Similarly, choosing not to speak out against some evil action is closer to cowardice than modesty, and the two are different. While cowardice is unacceptable by any standard, modesty is praised in most societies and by all divine religions.

The other point is the objection the Hadith reporter made when someone in the audience tried to confirm his statement by quoting from Al-Hikmah, or the book of wisdom. The objection is not to what is stated. There is no doubt that it is correct and in line with Islam. But the person making the statement appeared to be making a counter-statement, rather than quoting something in support. It is as though he was saying: "Oh, yes. This has been said before by others." While this may be acceptable when we have a discussion with colleagues, or between equals, it is not acceptable when it is in a rejoinder to a Qur'anic or Hadith text. It would be putting people's own statements on a par with the Qur'an, or with the Prophet's Hadith, when Hadith is a form of revelation. This is what is clear from the rejoinder from Imran, Prophet's companion: "I am reporting what God's Messenger has said and you speak to me of what is written in your scroll."

Another Hadith in praise of modesty quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "Modesty is part of faith, and faith leads to heaven; while vulgarity is part of unfaith, and unfaith leads to hell." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Ibn Majah and Al-Hakim].

There are several Hadiths, which describe modesty as part of faith. This means that it is an essential quality of the believers. A true believer refrains from claiming anything that does not belong to him. In fact he is hesitant to claim all that is due to him for fear that he might be thought of as ill mannered or presumptive. He is always ready to forgo something of what is due to him as an act of goodwill or generosity, or when he feels that forgoing it serves a better purpose, or pleases others or brings

them happiness. All these qualities are encouraged by faith, which teaches all virtues and as such leads the faithful to the right destination in the life to come, i.e. heaven.

The opposite quality, which is rendered in the Hadith as vulgarity, includes a range of bad manners, including vulgar language that demonstrates lack of propriety and decorum. Needless to say, such a quality encourages contravening Islamic values and standards. As such it leads its people to disobey God and His Messenger, peace be upon him. When this becomes a habit, it certainly leads the perpetrator to hell where he suffers God's punishment.

Islamic Etiquette: Modesty & Love Or Hate
Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

An important quality Islam stresses is the need to tame one's feelings of love and hate. It is reported that Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's cousin who was a great scholar, said to Ibn Al-Kawwa. "Do you know the old statement: Love moderately, for the person you love today may be the one you hate in future; and hate moderately, for the person you hate today may be your loved one in future." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Al-Tirmithi and Al-Tabarani].

This is a very sound advice because when feelings of love and hate are too strong, they blur a person's vision and he or she is unable to put things in the proper perspective. It is universal wisdom that tells us that when we love we tend to overlook the faults of the person we love. Should that person make mistakes, we try to find justification for them. If others criticize him for his mistakes, we are ready to defend him. Sometimes we go to great lengths in order to show that what is a clear mistake or flaw of character is not what it appears like. Such an attitude will always lead to problems, because it expects perfection where it is not possible. Hence, when a mistake is repeated one time too many, or a flaw consistently appears to be visible, facts stare us in the face and we have to admit that what we valued too high is far from meeting our expectations. If this happens over something of importance, then it could lead to love giving way to hate. The stronger our love used to be, the greater our disappointment and the more likely that it would be replaced by hate that could again be too strong. Therefore, the first part of the advice contained in this Hadith is absolutely correct: "Love moderately, for the person you love today may be the one you hate in future."

The same thing can be said in reverse. Should we hate someone for misdeeds, unacceptable conduct or some other cause, our hate should be tempered with reason. If it is exaggerated, it will blind us to that person's positive points. It should be remembered that no one is without some goodness that reflects in his or her actions or character. To ignore such good points and think only of the hate we feel toward such a person is wrong, because it could lead to further complications. On the other hand, some people whom we may not like may prove us wrong and allow their good side to prevail in their dealings with us. This puts us in bad light, because we will be ignoring what is universally approved as good.

On the other hand, our hate might be due to a mistake or some failing on our part, and the person concerned may take some positive action to clear a misunderstanding or remedy a bad situation. When we allow this to take place and give a positive response to a good initiative we may set in a complete transformation in our relationship. In time, the old hate may change into love. If our initial hate is too strong, it could hamper such a process and deprive us of a chance to win over a good friend. Hence, the second part of the advice in the quoted Hadith: "Hate moderately, for the person you hate today may be your loved one in future."

Indeed, strong love or hate should never be the feelings entertained by adults. This is stressed by Islamic values. Aslam reports that Omar ibn Al-Khattab once said to him: "Do not allow your love to be too passionate, or your dislike to be ruinous." When Aslam asked him to explain, he said: "When you love, do not do like a child who is too passionate about the things he loves, and when you hate you feel like you would like to ruin the one who is the object of your hate." [Related by Al-Bukhari and Abd Al-Razzaq]

This Hadith sums up the point about allowing passions to be too strong and the need to temper them with moderation and reason. Unless we do this, we would be like children when we love and we would wish ruin on the ones we do not. This is

Islamic Etiquette: Muslims Praise God & Express Gratitude To Him
Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

Good manners are observed in the Muslim community all the time. While other communities may have their own high standards of good manners, Islamic manners are characterized by the fact that Muslims praise God all the along, thanking Him for every good thing they have in their lives. Muslims acknowledge that whatever they enjoy in life is given to them by God. Hence, they praise Him and acknowledge their gratitude to Him. If a person does not do so, his conduct is seen as strange.

Ana ibn Malik reports that he heard Omar ibn Al-Khattab as someone greeted him. Omar replied to his greeting, and then asked him: How are you? The man said: "I praise God to you." Omar said: "This is what I wanted to hear from you." [Related by Al-Bukhari & Malik]

Perhaps Omar was testing the man, or making sure that he would give the proper answer. It may be that Omar was aware of something that put him in doubt as to the man's knowledge of Islamic manners. Hence, he was pleased to hear the man praising God for His blessings, when asked about his condition. This is the proper way Muslims should answer. They remember the many favors granted to them by God. Even when a Muslim is suffering from an illness or a disability, he always praises God, knowing that he is in a better condition than many other people. It is sufficient of a blessing that we have faith and we believe in God. This puts us in a better situation than that of any person who lacks such faith, even though such a person may be extremely wealthy, enjoying good health and high position. No blessing or favor is equal to the blessing of being a person of strong faith.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, has taught his community the best of manners. Foremost among these is to praise God and express gratitude to Him in all situations. The Prophet, peace be upon him, also taught us to remember situations that could bring grief or sadness. He was once asked: "How are you this morning?" He said: "I am well, belonging to a community that has not seen a funeral or visited an ill person." [Related by Al-Bukhari and Malik] This means that a community that does not have a death or an illness in its midst one day is in a good situation indeed. God is to be praised for that.

The Prophet's companions followed his example and related their good situations to their faith. Muhajir, who belonged to the Tabieen generation said: "I was sitting with one of the Prophet's companions, who was of large stature and belonged to Hadramout. When he was asked: 'How are you this morning?' he would answer: 'Well. We do not associate partners with God.'" [Related by Al-Bukhari in Al-Adab Al-Mufrad]

The man realizes that the fact that he believed in God's oneness and did not associate partners with Him is a great blessing. Hence, it did not matter what his physical

condition was. An illness or physical disability is of a much secondary importance compared to believing in none other than God. This is what he was keen to stress in his answer to the question about the way he felt on the day.

Islamic Etiquette: Passing By A Graveyard

What is recommended to say or recite when passing by a graveyard, particularly if it is a graveyard of non-Muslims?

The Prophet, peace be upon him, recommended us to visit graveyards because such a visit reminds us of the Hereafter. It certainly reminds us of our situation after death and how every human being ends up in a dark hole, leaving behind power, wealth, friends, offspring and family. This reminder is generated by any graveyard, whether used for the dead of the Muslim community or non-Muslims.

When we visit a Muslim graveyard, we should greet its dwellers with the normal greeting of peace, saying: "Assalamo Alaikum to the dwelling place of people who were believers. You went ahead and we will be following you." We pray for the forgiveness of the dead and that God may bestow His grace and mercy on them. If the graveyard is used for non-Muslims, we should show true respect.

Once a funeral passed by the Prophet, peace be upon him, when he was seated. He stood up in respect. Someone told him that the dead person was a Jew. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Is it not the funeral of a human being?" However, we are not allowed to pray for the forgiveness of unbelievers. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said that he sought God's permission to pray for forgiveness of his mother but God did not give him that permission. However, we know that God is merciful to all His creation and we believe that He will not be unjust to anyone either in this life or in the life to come. He says in the Qur'an:

"Your Lord does not deal unjustly with anyone." [Cave — "Al-Kahf" 18: 49]

Therefore, we say and recite anything that reminds us of death and the hereafter, praying God for mercy to all.

Islamic Etiquette: Peeping Into People's Homes Before Entry

What if people look and see their relatives and friends inside their homes without permission? Is this an offense? If so, how serious?

To answer these questions we may quote the following Hadith: "If a man looks at the inside of your home, and you throw a pebble at him, and it hits his eye causing him a bad injury in his eye, you have nothing to answer for." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim and others].

This is a very clear answer to your question. One may take any action to stop a person looking at the inside of his home without permission, to the extent of causing such a person a serious eye injury. This is supported by other Hadiths. Anas reports: "The Prophet, peace be upon him, was standing up in prayer when a man looked at the inside of his home. He took an arrow out of his bag and directed it at the man's eyes. [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Al-Nasa'ie and Abu Dawood].

We note here that the Prophet, peace be upon him, did this while he was engaged in his prayer. So, even if one is praying and discovers someone looking at his family in his home, when the people inside are unaware of his presence, he may take action to stop the man, without interrupting his prayer. It is clear that the Prophet, peace be upon him, only threatened the man in this way, but we understand that if the man did not stop immediately, the Prophet, peace be upon him, would have aimed the arrow at him. This is within his right.

Another Hadith mentions that a man looked at the Prophet's home from a hole in the door. The Prophet, peace be upon him was scratching his head with a comb of a certain sort. When the Prophet, peace be upon him, saw the man, he said to him: "Had I known that you were looking at me, I would have hit you on your eyes with this." He was referring to the comb. [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim & Al-Tirmithi]

A similar Hadith is reported by Anas who says: "A man looked through a hole to see the inside of the Prophet's home. The Prophet, peace be upon him, aimed at him a blade, so the man took his head away." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Al-Tirmithi, Abu Dawood and Al-Nasa'ie]

All these Hadiths are highly authentic. They confirm that any injury caused to a man peeping into some body's home without permission will have no compensation, because the man is the offender, and the homeowner has the right to look after his family and property.

Islamic Etiquette: Permission To Enter — Sought Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

When a person visits friends or relatives, he normally knocks on the door and waits until someone opens. This is how we seek permission to enter other people's houses. But this is part of our contemporary urban life. The situation may be different in other places, particularly in rural areas, remote villages, or indeed in shantytowns. In a safe neighborhood, people may leave their doors open because they frequently come in and out, treating their neighbors, homes as their own. At the time of the Prophet, peace be upon him, people generally did not have doors for their homes. This meant that it was easy for anyone to come into a house unannounced. Thus, people might find someone entering when they are not ready to receive any visitor. Hence the Prophet, peace be upon him, was keen to teach his companions how to seek permission to enter. His guidance was detailed. Apparently he repeated his advice and instructions on numerous occasions, with different companions, so that his purpose would be known to all, and to subsequent generations.

One point he stressed is indicated in the following Hadith: When the Prophet, peace be upon him, approached the entrance of a house, he did not face it directly. He would be either to the right or to the left. If he was invited, he would go in. Otherwise, he would leave." [Related by Al-Bukhari]

This Hadith shows how the Prophet, peace be upon him, respected the privacy of his companions. Although it was normal that people entered each other's houses freely, he would not even approach a house directly facing the entrance, so that he would not accidentally see what he is not supposed to see. Preferring to approach on either side of the entrance leaves no chance of that. He would then seek permission to enter, by offering the people in that house his greeting. He would wait for permission. If it is not forthcoming, he would go away, not feeling any irritation, because people are free to admit anyone in their homes.

Sometimes a person is not ready to receive anyone in his home. He prefers to meet his visitor outside. This is perfectly understandable, and should be no reason for being upset. One of the Prophet's companions, Muawiyah ibn Khaddej, once visited Omar ibn Al-Khattab during his reign as caliph. He says: When I sought permission to enter, I was told to stay outside and the caliph would come out soon. I sat close to his door. He came out and then asked for water to be brought to him. He performed his ablutions, wiping over his shoes. I asked him whether he needed to have a fresh ablution because he had urinated. He said: "May be because of passing urine or because of something else." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Ahmad and Abu Dawood]

It is clearly understood that when the reporter of this Hadith wished to see the caliph, he caught him at a time when he was not ready to receive him in his home. Hence, he was told that the caliph would be coming out. Apparently, the caliph did not wish his guest to wait long, so he did not have his ablution before coming out. Rather, he went out to welcome his guest first. It is assumed, even though not indicated in the Hadith, that he welcomed his guest and had asked him if he wanted something in particular, or whether his visit was merely a social one.

It is also clear that when Omar had been talking to his guest for a while, he wanted to have a fresh ablution. Perhaps the time for prayer was drawing near, and he wanted to be ready. He then performed his ablutions while his guest was watching. Perhaps the guest was at a loss for a topic of conversation. Hence, his question about the reason for Omar having a new ablution. This is a very private matter. Hence, Omar politely indicated that it is so, and he did not answer the question.

The question arises how to seek permission to enter someone else's home. Anas ibn Malik, who served the Prophet, peace be upon him, for ten years, tells us: The Prophet's doors were knocked with people's nails." [Related by Al-Bukhari]

It is clear that the Prophet, peace be upon him, had doors fixed to his wives' homes, because they opened to the mosque and were small homes. Hence, he needed to ensure privacy by having these doors. Moreover, at one stage, the instruction was given to the Prophet's companions that they might not speak to the Prophet's wives except from behind a screen. Thus people who wished to speak to the Prophet, peace be upon him, had to knock at his door when he was in. However, they feared to disturb him if he was resting or busy.

Therefore, they only knocked very softly, so that if he was asleep, they would not wake him up. This manifested itself in using their fingernails for knocking. It was all a gesture of respect to the Prophet, peace be upon him.

This need not be emulated when people knock at each other, particularly when the house they are visiting is large and a soft knock might not be heard in a part of the house. A knock at a door is a request for permission to enter. Hence, the people inside should be able to hear it. Otherwise, it is meaningless. In the case of the Prophet, his companions resorted to this method of using their fingernails to knock on his doors because they wanted to be absolutely sure that they were not disturbing him. If he was busy or engaged, he was unlikely to hear their knock. Thus, there is no disturbance. They would go away and try to see him later.

Islamic Etiquette: Permission To Enter — When Not Given ***Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News***

Islamic manners make it clear that privacy must be respected. No one should intrude on another. However, when Islam makes a certain requirement, it looks at all aspects and provides guidance for different situations. Hence we need to look at this guidance so that we know what to do in any circumstances. One important point is that seeking permission to enter a place may be done three times only. If one does not obtain permission after three requests, he should go back. Thus, if you are visiting a friend or a relative and you knock on the door three times, you have done all that you may do to obtain permission. If the people inside do not open the door for you, then you should leave.

This is borne by the Hadith reported by Abu Moosa Al-Ash'ari who says: "I sought permission to see Omar and I did not have permission after three times. Hence, I left. He called me and said: "Abdullah, have you found it hard to wait at my door? You better know that people may find it hard to wait at your door." I said: "No. I have

sought permission three times and I did not obtain it; so I returned, as we have been ordered to do so.” He said: “Whom have you heard this from?” I said: “From the Prophet, peace be upon him.” He then said to me: “Have you heard from the Prophet, peace be upon him, what we have not heard? You will either support your statement with further evidence or I will certainly punish you.” I left him and went to the mosque where I found a number of the Ansar. I asked them about the case, and they said: “Is this to be doubted?” I told them what Omar said to me. They said: “Then the best way is that the youngest among us should go with you as witness.” Thus, Abu Saeed al-Khudri came with me to Omar and told him: “We accompanied the Prophet, peace be upon him, when he went to Sa’ad ibn Ubada. When he arrived, he offered the greeting of peace, “Assalam Alaikum” but no permission was given to him. He repeated his greeting a second time and a third, but no permission was given. He then said: “We have done what we can.” Then he left. Sa’ad came fast after him, and said: “Messenger of God! By Him who has sent you with the message of the truth, every time you said the greeting I heard it and replied. But I only wanted that you offer more greetings to me and to my household.” Abu Moosa then said [to Omar]: “By God I am worthy of trust when it comes to reporting the Prophet’s Hadith.” Omar said: “Certainly. I only wanted to ascertain the matter.”

This Hadith is related, in more than one versions, by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Al-Tirmithi, Abu Dawood and Ibn Majah. We have chosen here the version, which is more detailed and attributed directly to Abu Moosa, the Prophet’s companion at the center of the report.

The first point to make regarding this Hadith is the teaching that one may seek permission to enter someone else’s home three times. If he does not gain such permission he should not try a fourth. This is easily understandable because if you are at the door of a friend or relative, you should get an answer with the first or second request. The request here may be the mere knocking at the door. If no one opens after you have knocked three times, it follows that either there is no one inside, or if there are any, they must be very busy. In this case, it is better to leave and come back some other time. Needless to say, this is better all round. The visitor does not wait too long, or try to knock too hard. The people inside can attend to their business without embarrassment.

The other point is Omar’s attitude, which sounds strange. He knew that Abu Moosa was a learned companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him. He would not have doubted his knowledge. Nevertheless, he asks him to support his statement. In some reports of this Hadith, Omar tells him later that he has not doubted his knowledge, but he only wanted that people should not attribute things casually to the Prophet, peace be upon him. It might have been that there were with him some new Muslims who had not learned how to treat the Hadith. Therefore, Omar wanted to demonstrate to them that when anything is attributed to the Prophet, peace be upon him, the person making the quotation should be absolutely certain of his knowledge.

Another point is that the people who learned of what Omar wanted, decided to send the youngest among them. Abu Saeed Al-Khudri was one of the best-learned companions of the Prophet, who reported a large number of Hadiths. In sending the youngest, they wanted to say to Omar that the matter in question is common knowledge.

Finally, the report given by Abu Saeed refers to one of the closest companions of the Prophet, Sa’ad ibn Ubada, a leading figure among the Ansar. When the Prophet, peace be upon him, visited him, he delayed his permission, because he wanted the Prophet, peace be upon him, to say more greetings to him and his household. He felt that such a greeting was a blessing for him and his family. Who would not try to get more of such a blessing when the Prophet, peace be upon him, himself is its source?

But the Prophet, peace be upon him, taught his companions the right attitude in such a case: seek permission three times, and if you do not obtain it, leave.

A different point about seeking permission is that made in a Hadith reported by Abdullah ibn Massoud who says: "If a man is invited, then he has already been given permission." [Related by Al-Bukhari]

A similar Hadith quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "If someone is requested to come and he comes with the messenger giving him the request, then that is the permission he needs." [Related by Al-Bukhari and Abu Dawood] A different version of this Hadith also quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "A man's messenger to another man is the permission the latter needs." [Related by Al-Bukhari]

All these three Hadiths stress the same point. If a person is requested to attend, then the request is all the permission he needs. He should come in straightaway. However, he needs to make his presence known because although he is expected, the people of the house may not be aware of him. Therefore, he should offer a greeting to the people inside before entering their home. Although the permission is there in the fact that he was sent for, rather than coming on his own accord, he should still be considerate and allow people a chance to be ready to receive him.

Islamic Etiquette: Permission To Leave

Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

The Prophet, peace be upon him, also taught his companions to seek permission from their guest if they wish to leave. Abdullah ibn Sallam was a companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him. Abu Burdah, one day a man from the following generation sat with him. After a while, Abdullah said to him: "You are sitting with us and it is time for us to leave." Abu Burdah reports: "I said, 'as you wish'. He rose and I walked with him to the door." [Related by Al-Bukhari]. This means that there is nothing wrong if one should wish to leave, provided he explains to his guest, or host, before he departs.

Islamic Etiquette: Personal Hygiene — Five Practices Of

Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

The Prophet, peace be upon him, addressed all situations and indicated the best guidance in all respects. One aspect that he addressed was personal cleanliness and hygiene. He is quoted to have said: "Five practices are based on sound human nature:

- 1 Circumcision,
- 2 Shaving pubic hair,
- 3 Plucking armpit hair,
- 4 Trimming the moustache and
- 5 Clipping one's nails."

[Related by Al-Bukhari, Al-Nasa'ie and Al-Tirmithi].

This Hadith is related in more than one version, but all these versions mention the same five practices, in different order, and emphasize that these are part of uncorrupted human nature. Other Hadiths indicate a time range for some of these practices, such as shaving pubic hair and plucking armpit hair, which should be done at intervals of no more than 40 days. Needless to say, these two areas have strong body odor and if they are left without removing the hair, the smell becomes

strong and offensive. Clipping one's nails is a mark of cleanliness. If nails are left to grow long they attract dirt and germs, which could fall in one's food. Keeping them short is the best precaution against that.

Similarly, if one leaves one's moustache untrimmed, it grows long and covers one's upper lip. Its hair will then dip in one's drink and particles of food may be trapped in it. This is not merely unsightly, but it could also be injurious to one's health.

The case is similar with regard to circumcision. Unless the piece of foreskin is cut, it attracts dirt that becomes trapped under its folds. It could represent a health risk. Islam takes care of all these as a measure of health protection and personal hygiene.

Islamic Etiquette: Praising A Person To His Face

A friend of mine argues that it is not permissible in Islam to praise someone to his face. Others argue that such praise encourages him to do more good. Moreover, medals, awards, and certificates of appreciation are given by different bodies in appreciation of good work done by different people. Please comment.

There is no doubt that Islam does not encourage praise to one's face in public. Some people may begin to feel that they are superior to others when they are praised time and again for their good work. Moreover, praise is shunned when it is offered to a governor, ruler or a person in authority, even one's superior at work. That is because in most cases the praise is made for ulterior motives, or to win favor with the person who is so praised. There is often an element of hypocrisy in such praise.

On the other hand, when a person praises another in private with the intention to encourage him to do more good actions, and without any personal or ulterior motive, then that is acceptable. People do like to be appreciated. If such appreciation will encourage a person to do more good work, and there is no question of hypocrisy in the matter, then praising a person for the qualities he certainly has is appropriate.

The point concerning medals and awards does not come in the same category, because that is a gesture of appreciation and not praise.

Islamic Etiquette: Prophet's Easy Manners & Lying Down ***Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News***

Another aspect showing the Prophet's easy manners is mentioned in a Hadith reported by Abdullah ibn Zaid ibn Asim who says: "I saw the Prophet, peace be upon him, lying down having placed one leg over the other." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Malik, Al-Tirmithi, Al-Nasa'ie and Abu Dawood]

This was apparently in the mosque, which makes clear that it is perfectly permissible to lie down in a mosque. Some people suggest that the Prophet, peace be upon him, warned against lying down with one leg over the other. This Hadith, which is definitely authentic, makes clear that there is nothing wrong with that. The problem arises only if it is feared that by doing so one exposes the part of his body, which should remain covered. If this is the case, then it is strongly urged that one should not do so. If, on the other hand, one is certain that there is no chance of this happening, then one may do so, since the Prophet, peace be upon him, is reported to have done it.

Islamic Etiquette: Prophet's Easy Manners & the Children

Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

The Prophet, peace be upon him, was easy in his manners. Muslims never tire of stressing that he was a human being in every sense of the word. His feelings and manners were what is normal with all men, except that he had a greater share of every good thing, and had no faults in his morality or manners. He behaved naturally. He sat the way that was most comfortable for the time and place. Hence, his companions report what they saw of him, giving us a detailed picture of his character.

A Hadith reported by Dhayyal ibn Ubaid mentions: "I went to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and I found him seated with his legs double crossed." [Related by Al-Bukhari in Al-Adab Al-Mufrad].

This Hadith simply describes the way the Prophet, peace be upon him, sat on this particular occasion. Apparently he sat on the floor, because the way he sat could only be done on the floor or on a flat surface with large area.

His legs were double-crossed, which is a comfortable form of sitting, with each foot placed under the other thigh. If a person is used to this way of sitting, he could sit for hours without need to change his position.

Another Hadith quotes a woman named Qaylah who seems to relate something that took place when she was a young girl. She says: "I saw the Prophet, peace be upon him, sitting in a squatting position, and when I saw him in deep thought, I felt terrified." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Abu Dawood and Al-Tirmithi]. The Hadith reporter does not mention why she felt terrified, but we can deduce from the fact that the Prophet, peace be upon him, was in deep thought that he looked exceedingly serious. With him sitting in the unusual squatting position, the girl was scared. Al-Tabarani, who also relates this Hadith, provides more details: "The man sitting with the Prophet, peace be upon him, said to him: 'Messenger of God, the poor girl is scared. Without looking at me, he said: 'Poor girl, have peace.' All the fear that I felt went away."

Here we see how the Prophet, peace be upon him, was very kind to young people. When he realized that the girl was scared, he did not try to speak to her or calm her by direct speech, because with children this could easily be counterproductive. He prays for her to have inner peace, and soon enough she sheds her fear. Whenever the Prophet, peace be upon him, prayed for anyone, his prayer was answered in the most perfect manner.

In fact, the Prophet, peace be upon him, was very kind to children. He loved them and cared for their welfare. Naturally, he loved his own grandchildren more, but can we get a glimpse of such love?

Abu Hurairah, the Prophet's companion who was very often with him in the last four years of his life, reports: "Whenever I see Hasan [the Prophet's grandson], tears spring to my eyes. This is because one day the Prophet, peace be upon him, came out and found me in the mosque. He took me by the hand and I walked with him. He did not speak to me until we arrived at the Bani Qaynuqa marketplace. He walked and looked around. He then left and I was with him until we returned to the mosque. He sat down and covered himself. He then said to me: "Where is the little one? Call the little one for me." Hasan came in running and fell in the Prophet's lap. He put his little hand in the Prophet's beard. The Prophet, peace be upon him, opened his mouth and put his own mouth in his mouth. He then prayed: "My Lord, I love him;

so, do love him and love everyone who loves him.” [Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

This is a very normal picture of a grandfather wanting to play with his little grandson. He allows the child to play with his beard and he lovingly puts his mouth over the child’s mouth. But the prayer he says is moving indeed.

He prayed to God not only to love the child but to love those who love him as well. And history records that all Muslims loved the Prophet’s grandson. He did not only merit this love on account of his relation to the Prophet, peace be upon him, but he was a man people liked and wished to associate with.

We also know that the Prophet, peace be upon him, indulged his grandchildren, without spoiling them. An often-quoted Hadith mentions that the Prophet’s grandson mounted him as he prostrated himself in prayer in the mosque. As usual, the Prophet, peace be upon him, was leading the congregational prayer. He waited for the child to dismount before he lifted his head. It took quite a while, and people thought that something might have happened to the Prophet, peace be upon him. They asked him after the prayer was over about his long prostration. He said: “There was nothing wrong, except that my grandson mounted on my back and I did not like to rush him.”

This attitude of the Prophet, peace be upon him, was extended to all his grandchildren. Needless to say, with his own daughters, he was the kindest of parents. He was also kind to all children. They loved him and he prayed for any child he saw or was brought to him for any reason.

Islamic Etiquette: Pursuing People’s Faults Makes Them Corrupt

I have learnt of a Hadith in which the Prophet, peace be upon him, says: “If you were to pursue points of suspicion in peoples, you will make them corrupt.” I am unable to understand as I thought pointing suspicion will rectify the addressee. Obviously I am missing the point. I would appreciate comments.

I will relate the Hadith you are referring to. Muawiyah is reported to have said that he heard the Prophet, peace be upon him, saying certain words which were of great use to him. He confirmed hearing the Prophet, peace be upon him, says: “If you were to pursue points of suspicion in peoples’ character you will corrupt them.” Muawiyah comments: “I therefore, do not pursue such points of suspicion in peoples’ character, so that I may not corrupt them.” [Related by Al-Bukhari, Ibn Hibbaan and Al-Baihaqi. Another version of this Hadith puts it in the following words: “If you were to pursue people’s faults, you corrupt them.”

What is meant here is a pursuance which leads to direct confrontation, which shows the other party that you know where he is suspect or what faults he commits. The effect of that is to make him more defiant, unashamed of his faults. That makes them boldly do what they may have been too shy to reveal. They realize that there is no point in hiding what is already known. They lose their sense of shame and feel no need to hide what is common knowledge.

It is like the case of a boy who picks up the bad habit of smoking, but he dares not smoke in front of his father. If the father, suspecting that his son smokes because he smelled tobacco in his room, or for any reason, deliberately tries to catch his son actually smoking, the son may become so defiant as to smoke in front of his father. The net result of pursuing this particular fault is to make the son more defiant and aggressive. He will not want to stop smoking. For sometime at least, he will be unwilling to listen to advice, which seeks to explain to him the harmful effects of smoking. Indirect advice can always be more productive. Similarly, if you make a

sensitive person understand that you expect of him a certain standard of good manners or moral values, he will try to live up to that standard. If on the other hand, you will show him that you know his faults, he may feel that he no longer needs to remedy these faults.

When the Prophet, peace be upon him, said this to Muawiyah, he must have been informed by God that by the time Muawiyah becomes the ruler of the Muslim state, there would have been a great deal of internal strife within the Muslim state. It is at such junctures in the history of a certain nation that weakness of character may surface. It needs an extra effort to control. That could not be helped by pursuance of peoples' faults on the part of ruler. A wise ruler will always allow people a chance to live up to what is expected of them. This means that they must try hard to overcome their weaknesses. Hence, the Prophet's advice to Muawiyah.

Muawiyah benefited by that advice of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and acted on it. It stood him in good stead throughout his reign. It is needless to say that it applies to all of us, not only to rulers. Pursuing peoples' faults does not benefit the one who pursues them but can cause a great deal of harm to the other person and to the community at large.

Islamic Etiquette: Sleeping — Useful Tips Before Going To Sleep ***Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News***

The Prophet, peace be upon him, provided us with guidance for all situations. Although his message is primarily about faith, it is a complete way of life. Therefore, we find in the Prophet's guidance instructions concerning certain aspects of human life, including health, safety and other useful tips. For example, Ibn Abbas quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "If one goes to sleep after having touched some fat, without washing it off, and he comes to some harm, he has only himself to blame." [Related by Al-Bukhari in Al-Adab Al-Mufrad, Al-Nisa'ie and Al-Tirmithi].

The action the Prophet, peace be upon him, is encouraging us to do is to wash our hands after handling any sort of fat, including edible meat, before going to sleep. The smell of fat lingers on, even if no visible trace is left on one's hand. And the smell may attract different sorts of animals or insects, some of which may be harmful. Rather than giving a direct order to wash our hands, the Prophet, peace be upon him, highlights the adverse effect that may result in certain situations if this is not done. A small animal may bite one's hand, thinking that it is a piece of meat or food. Although the possibility may be rare in towns and cities where people live in secure houses and apartments, but there are numerous situations where the possibility is much greater. Anyway, washing one's hands after handling any type of fat is a good practice, and the Prophet, peace be upon him, has recommended it.

Another Hadith gives further instructions, making clear that one should take all precautions against harm that may result from negligence. Jabir ibn Abdullah quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "Secure your doors, tighten your drinking water containers, cover your saucepans, and put off your lights. Satan does not open a secured door, loosen a knot, or uncover a saucepan. However, a mouse could set a house on fire." [Related by Al-Bukhari and Al-Tirmithi]. Similar instructions are given in another Hadith also narrated by Jabir quoting the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "Refrain from staying up late after the night has become quiet, for you do not know what creatures God sends around. Secure your doors, tighten your drinking water containers, cover your saucepans and put out your lights." [Related by Al-Bukhari in Al-Adab Al-Mufrad and Ahmad].

Taking the two Hadiths together, we see that they contain very useful instructions, which remain valid for most people. The first instruction is to secure our doors

before going to sleep. Today, in most places, this goes without saying because burglary is very common. But it need not be so.

There are places in many parts of the world where people are safe from burglars, either because they live in a small community where everyone knows everyone else, or where social conditions provide enough security. Yet one may not be safe from other creatures finding their way into homes to cause people some harm when they are asleep. Hence, securing our doors provides the necessary standard of safety.

Today, people have water supplied into their homes by pipes and tanks, where it is safe from ordinary contamination. However, in old days, people had to make sure that they had sufficient water for their drinking and home use. Hence, they had it in containers, some types of which are made of hide or some other material. It is such containers, and indeed any other type, that the Prophet, peace be upon him, wants us to make sure that they are tightened so as to prevent any harmful object or insect from falling into them. The same applies to any pot or saucepan where food is kept. While today we leave much of our food in refrigerators, there remains around the house much food that may be left exposed. The important thing in this Hadith is that food should not be left exposed overnight. Some insect might get into it or dust and harmful particles might drop on it, making it a cause of harm instead of a source of nourishment.

Putting off the light is the next injunction in the two Hadiths, particularly when we talk about oil lamps and similar lights. Such a lamp may be blown over by wind, or by a cat or a mouse, and it could then cause a fire. This is what the Prophet, peace be upon him, warns against when he mentions that a mouse could set a house on fire. What attracts a mouse is the wick of a lamp, and it could pull it and cause the lamp to fall over, spilling its oil and causing a fire. Hence, the Prophet, peace be upon him, warned repeatedly against leaving lamps on at night, or in a position where a mouse could drag it away. Here are some of the Hadiths pointing to this risk.

Ibn Abbas reports: "A mouse once began to drag the wick of a lamp, and a maid tried to frighten it away. The Prophet, peace be upon him, told her to leave it alone. The mouse pulled the lamp until it dropped it on the mat he was sitting on, burning an area as small as a coin. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: 'When you go to bed, put off your lamps. Satan points them to such mice and they would burn you.' [Related by Al-Bukhari in Al-Adab Al-Mufrad and Abu Dawood].

Abu Saeed Al-Khudri reports: "The Prophet, peace be upon him, woke up one night to find that a mouse had dragged the lamp by its wick up to the roof, and was about to set fire to the house. The Prophet, peace be upon him, cursed it and made it permissible to kill, even by a person in the state of consecration, or Ihram." [Related by Al-Bukhari in Al-Adab Al-Mufrad]. It should be pointed out here that when one is in the state of consecration he may not kill any animal except one that poses serious danger to man, such as snakes, scorpions and very aggressive dogs.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Do not leave a fire burning at home when you go to sleep." [Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim, Abu Dawood, Al-Tirmithi, and Ibn Majah].

Abdullah ibn Omar quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "Do not leave open fire in your homes; for it is an enemy to you." [Related by Al-Bukhari in Al-Adab Al-Mufrad].

Abu Moosa Al-Ashari reports that a house in Madinah was set on fire one night while people were asleep. This was reported to the Prophet, peace be upon him, who said: "Fire is an enemy to you. When you go to sleep, put it out." [Related by Al-Bukhari in Al-Adab Al-Mufrad, Muslim and Ibn Majah].

Islamic Etiquette: Sneezing Or Yawning

I have noticed that many people here do not cover their mouths when sneezing, coughing or yawning. I have been brought up in an environment, which teaches that covering one's mouth is necessary in all these situations and that one must resist the yawn if possible. Please comment.

Covering one's mouth when sneezing, coughing or yawning is recommended. That people may omit it shows that they are lax about observing the Sunnah. The Prophet, peace be upon him, has taught us all good manners, in all situations. Following his example is the best option, whether he makes an order or a recommendation. Whether it is possible to resist the yawn is another matter, because yawning suggests that one is sleepy, and the best thing to do in this case is to go to sleep.

If one cannot, then one may avoid yawning by getting himself alert again, through washing one's face, moving about a little and perhaps taking a cup of tea or coffee.

Islamic Etiquette: Social Behavior & Rights Of Others

In a Muslim society, we normally know how to pray and to do other acts of worship. We love to visit Makkah and Madinah, to read the Qur'an and we may also offer voluntary prayer and other types of worship. Seldom, however, do we care for human rights, cooperation, doing our duty, etc. We do not mind contravening laws. We do not behave in a civilized manner. Rarely do we differentiate between what is right and what is wrong; and few of us know how to live with respect and show good manners. In my view, all responsibility is on the shoulders of parents and teachers who neglect to teach children how to behave and observe Islamic manners. Please comment.

Much of what you have said is correct. Our social behavior lacks so much refinement. The Islamic nation has taught much to the world in this area, but since Islam went on the decline in the Muslim world, so did our social behavior and our respect for other people's rights. Our respect of the law is very much lacking, and this is entrenched in our behavior due to the fact that we, in most areas of the Muslim world, lived under foreign rule. They begin to try to outmaneuver the oppressive authority. With time this develops into a normal attitude of disrespect to the law. Even when they live under the benevolent government, their entrenched attitude often takes the better of them. This is unfortunate, but true.

It is true that we tend to give a great deal of emphasis to worship, and that we do not give due importance to other people's rights. This is due to the fact that we tend to overlook the numerous Hadiths, which make it clear that our faith requires us to love for others what we love for ourselves. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "None of you is a true believer unless he loves for his brother what he loves to have himself." Islam does not know the selfish attitude. It inculcates in every Muslim the concept that a Muslim must always be one of a community where mutual love and compassion are paramount characteristics.

I think you are asking parents and teachers a little too much. You cannot get out of anyone something that he has not got himself. All the parents and teachers are in the same boat as the rest of us. How can they inculcate such values in their children or students? The matter requires much more than that. It requires a return to our Islamic values, and this cannot be achieved unless scholars begin to teach people that Islam is much wider in outlook than the whole list of acts of worship.

Governments should also give a helping hand by according such values the supremacy they deserve.

To develop such social attitudes as Islam desires is a complete process, and the approach to achieve the desired goal must tackle all its aspects at the same time. The issue is much too serious to be given to teachers at schools or parents at home. It requires a whole national and community effort.

Islamic Etiquette: Sound Advice Or Outright Condemnation

What should be one's attitude to friends who may pray and fast, but engage in different types of sin?

The attitude is one of care and love. One should encourage such people to continue their worship, but also one should remind them that they should not waste the reward they earn for their good deeds by committing bad ones. One should give such reminders when one is sure that they will be well received.

You do not tell a person that drinking intoxicants is forbidden when he is sitting with a group and they are all drinking. He would not respond well to such a reminder. You may give him such an advice when he is sober, ready to discuss matters on their merit. But care and sound advice should always be our standard approach. Outright condemnation is wrong and counterproductive.

Islamic Etiquette: Sunnah & the Practical Aspects Of Following

A friend of mine said that only what the Prophet, peace be upon him, said is Sunnah. If he simply did something but did not state that people should do it, then it is not Sunnah. My argument is that everything the Prophet, peace be upon him, said or did is Sunnah. Please clarify.

Your friend's argument is perhaps more accurate. I will give you an example. Sometimes the Prophet, peace be upon him, read long passages of the Qur'an in his prayers. It is reported that once he read 26 pages of a Surah in Maghrib prayer, dividing it between the two Rak'ahs. On another occasion, he was offering night worship alone when some of his companions joined him.

It is reported that in the first rak'ah he read the three longest Surahs in the Qur'an which together are about one hundred pages. But when it was reported to him that an imam elongated his prayers, he was very angry. He spoke very strongly against making prayers very long and gave the example of a number of Surahs suggesting that they are the appropriate length of any rak'ah in a congregational prayer. These Surahs are about 10-12 lines each. This meant that the Sunnah is what the Prophet, peace be upon him, has said, but not what he did. On another occasion, he explained that further, stating that if a person is praying alone, he may elongate his prayer as much as he pleases, but if he is leading a congregation, he should make his prayer of reasonable length.

There are certain things which the Prophet, peace be upon him, did as matters of personal choice or because they were normal practice in his society. They have no bearing on religious matters. Such practices include the wearing of a particular shape of clothes, or the wearing of a turban or a head-cover in prayer or in normal situations, or the use of kohl [or Surah] to darken his eyes. He did not suggest at any time that we should do likewise. Therefore, such practices remain his own personal choice. They are not Sunnah. However, if one follows the Prophet's example with no intention other than doing what the Prophet, peace be upon him, did, he will earn reward from Allah, not because he has done a Sunnah but because of his keenness to follow the Prophet's lead. To suggest that those practices are Sunnah, is to make

them recommended to all people when the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not recommend them.

Islamic Etiquette: the Standards To Set
Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

On many occasions, Ayesha, the wife of the Prophet, peace be upon him, whom he loved most and who was the closest person to him in the last ten years of his life, was requested to describe his personal manners and his moral standard. A woman of great knowledge and profound insight, she always sought to relate her account of the Prophet's personality to the teachings of the Qur'an. Sa'ad ibn Hisham reports: "I spoke to Ayesha, the mother of believers, and said: 'Tell me about the Prophet's manners.' She asked me: 'Don't you read the Qur'an?' When I answered in the affirmative, she said: 'His manners were [an embodiment of] the Qur'an.'" [Related by Muslim].

Several people reported this short answer and each asked on a different occasion. It is thus related in different anthologies of Hadith with different chains of transmission and different reporters. This makes the Hadith both famous and authentic. One of these reporters, Jubayr ibn Nafeer, mentions that it was when he went on pilgrimage that he visited Ayesha and asked her this question to which she gave the same answer. It is a short answer in which we had to interpolate the words in between brackets to give a clear sense that an Arab Muslim would immediately gather. But what does it mean in practice? Ibn Katheer gives us the following explanation:

"What this means is that he would comply with whatever the Qur'an orders to be done, and he would make sure to refrain from whatever the Qur'an prohibits. Such was his great, natural inclination, which is certain to give anyone the best moral standard of all and the most perfect and beautiful manners. Moreover, God has given him a great and perfect faith, which He gave none before him. Moreover, he was the last of all prophets, which meant that God would send no messenger or prophet after his mission is completed. Therefore, his character combines a standard of modesty, generosity, courage, forbearance, forgiveness, compassion and all other virtues that is beyond description."

Sometimes Ayesha gave some insight as to what she meant when she answered this question, which was frequently asked by people who wished to emulate the Prophet's standard, knowing that he provided the most perfect role model. Abu al-Dardaa', a companion of the Prophet, says that he asked Ayesha about the Prophet's manners. She said: "His manners were [an embodiment of] the Qur'an: He was pleased when the Qur'an was complied with, and he was angry when it was disregarded."

This sets the standard very clear. Whatever the Qur'an ordered was to him something that must be complied with. If the Qur'an ordered that certain practice should be prohibited, then it must be abandoned by all. The Prophet, peace be upon him, would be the first to implement any Qur'anic injunction, whatever it said, because he knew that it was a divine order that must be carried out.

On another occasion, Ayesha was talking to a group of people who asked her the same question. She replied: "His manners were the Qur'an in practice. Read, if you will, the first ten verses of Surah 23, The Believers, and you will know what the Prophet's personal manners were." [Related by Al-Bayhaqi].

Here Ayesha refers her interlocutors to a specific passage of the Qur'an, which outlines certain commandments. These ten verses are as follows:

"Truly, successful shall be the believers, who humble themselves in their prayer, who turn away from all that is frivolous, who are active in deeds of charity, who refrain from sex except with those joined to them in marriage, or those whom they rightfully possess — for then, they are free of all blame, whereas those who seek to go beyond that [limit] are indeed transgressors, who are faithful to their trusts and to their pledges, and who are diligent in their prayers. These shall be the heirs that will inherit the paradise; therein shall they abide." [the Believers — "Al-Mu'menoon" 23: 1-11]

These ten short verses outline a code of morality that covers private and public situations, as well as relations with God and social dealings. Thus, humility in prayers symbolizes man's relation with God to whom prayers are addressed, while turning away from frivolity indicates following a code of serious morality. Charity is a fulfillment of a social duty by which the rich look after the poor so as no one is left without being looked after. Maintaining virtuous standards in the fulfillment of the sexual desire means that sex must be confined within the bounds of marriage. No excess is permissible in Islam. This preserves a standard of purity and cleanliness in family and community relations that is bound to benefit everyone, parents and children, as well as the community as a whole. Fulfillment of trust and pledges sets relations within society on a basis of complete honesty and sincerity. This makes for a much closer community in which every individual finds support and the whole community prospers. When such standards are maintained, the result is virtuous life in this world and heaven in the hereafter. This is a double success.

Needless to say, Qur'anic morality and good manners are much wider and more varied than what these ten short verses sum up. Ayesha simply gave a clue and left it to her listeners to reflect on what her reply that the Prophet, peace be upon him, practically implemented all Qur'anic directives meant. It is in this light that we should read the Prophet's own statement: "I have been sent with my message only to perfect good manners and morality." Thus, setting moral standards on a level of perfection is the objective of the final divine message, which remains the point of reference for all humanity, at all times. And when we say that the Prophet's manners were an embodiment of Qur'anic teachings, we are saying that he provided the perfect example of perfect morality. Hence, it is not surprising that he is described in the Qur'an as having a 'great moral standard' [68: 4] And it is no exaggeration to say that none can do better than to emulate the Prophet, peace be upon him, in all actions and situations.

Islamic Etiquette: Treating People With Respect & Kindness ***Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News***

It is often mentioned that the Prophet, peace be upon him, was very kind to his people. Indeed, he was kind even to non-Muslims, treating them with respect and showing them sympathy. He was never unkind, even though he dealt seriously with some of the very hardened opponents who never wavered in their hostility to Islam. He was never angry over a personal issue, but if an express divine order was violated, he could be very angry. His kindness always took a practical direction, dealing with every situation in a way that ensured the best results.

We may all find ourselves in situations that require a very quick response, particularly when something that we value or cherish is violated. This could cause anger or a flight of temper. But the Prophet, peace be upon him, always handled such situations with exemplary ease, ensuring that his approach benefited all people present, and all Muslims. He did not abandon his gentle approach, even in the most infuriating of situations. Today, we cannot imagine that anyone would deliberately urinate inside a mosque. If we were to face such a situation, what would our

immediate reaction be? Perhaps we will be angrier than the Prophet's companions were when a Bedouin did that in front of them. But what was the Prophet's reaction?

Anas ibn Malik reports: "God's messenger was sitting in the mosque with some of his companions when a Bedouin urinated inside the mosque. The Prophet's companions said: 'What is going on?' 'What are you doing?' The Prophet, peace be upon him, said to them: 'Do not interrupt him.' He subsequently called the man and said to him: 'These mosques are not the place where one can throw any dirt, urine, or stools. They are meant for reciting the Qur'an, glorifying God and prayer.' He then called for a bucket of water and he poured it over the urine." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Al-Nasa'ie, Malik and Ahmad].

This is a situation, which is certain to infuriate any onlooker. It certainly made the Prophet's companions angry and we can imagine that some of them were about to rush to the man to stop him. If several of them did that, the Bedouin would have been scared. He could not have understood the reason for their anger, because he was uncouth and could not see why he could not urinate there. The mosque was a large place, and he was urinating in a corner, some distance from the people. Being used to desert places, he might have felt that both smell and wetness would be cleared by the sun or by rain. So, there was no problem with what he was doing. Should he have been scared by the people rushing to stop him, he might have suffered a reaction, or the urine might have fallen over a larger area. It might have also fallen over his clothes. Hence, the Prophet, peace be upon him, was quick to tell his companions not to scare the man, but to leave him until he had finished. Needless to say, the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not like what the man did, but he did not wish the situation to get worse. When things cooled a bit, the Prophet, peace be upon him, explained to the man what he did wrong and told him what the mosques are for. He also showed the Muslims how to remove the impurity that resulted from the man's urination. Thus we learn that pouring a bucket of water over the place where someone has urinated is sufficient to remove that impurity.

A similarly embarrassing situation happened to another companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, in his early days of Islam. Mu'aweya ibn Al-Hakam Al-Sulami reports: "I joined a congregational prayer led by the Prophet, peace be upon him, when a man sneezed. I said to him: 'May God have mercy on you.' People looked askance at me. I said to them: 'I am undone! Why are you looking at me like that?' They began to hit their own thighs. I realized that they wanted me to stop talking. When God's messenger finished his prayer, he neither punished, nor rebuked nor expressed displeasure with me. He just said to me: 'It is not permissible to say any ordinary talk during prayer; it consists of God's praise and glorification and reciting the Qur'an.'" [Related by Muslim, Ahmad, Al-Nasa'ie and Abu Dawood].

It is clear that the man at the center of this Hadith was a newcomer to Islam. Otherwise, he would have known that it is not permissible to talk during prayer. What he said first was merely to bless the person who sneezed, which is a form of supplication. But even then, this was a response to something that happened at the moment. It is not permissible to pay attention to it. Instead, one must concentrate on the prayer itself. Hence, the other worshippers looked uncomfortable when they heard the reporter of this Hadith blessing the one who sneezed. But he was irritated when he saw that they looked skeptically at him. He asked them what was the matter. Clearly they could not answer him, but wanted him to stop talking, and they gave him a clear signal, which he understood.

However, we note how the Prophet, peace be upon him, dealt with the matter, calling the man to him and explaining that talking is not permissible during prayer. He defines Islamic prayer as consisting of nothing other than praising God, glorifying Him and reading parts of His book, the Qur'an. Thus the Prophet, peace be upon him, taught the man something very important in a very gentle manner. The man was

so affected that when he reported the case, he was full of praise of the Prophet, peace be upon him. Needless to say that he was embarrassed as he was the only one in the congregation who did not know that it was not lawful to talk during prayer. But his embarrassment disappeared when the Prophet, peace be upon him, explained the situation to him.

We may add here that in the version reported by Abu Dawood, the Hadith has a long addition, which is useful to quote. Muawiyah ibn Al-Hakam continues: "I said: 'Messenger of God! Our people have only recently abandoned their ignorant ways and embraced Islam. Some of us visit fortunetellers.' He said: 'Do not go to them.' I said: 'Some of us speak about bad omen.' He said: 'This is something they might feel in their hearts, but has no effect.' I said: 'And some of us write.' He answered: 'One of the prophets of the past used to write. Whoever writes in a similar way does something acceptable.' I then said: 'I have a maid who used to tend some sheep for me as they grazed near Uhud and Al-Juwaniyah. I once looked to find out what she was doing, and I saw a wolf having taken a sheep. I am only human sharing people's feelings. I gave her a beating.' The Prophet, peace be upon him, was seriously disturbed by that. Therefore, I said: 'Should I set her free?' He said: 'Bring her to me.' When she came, he said to her: 'Where is God?' She said: 'In heaven.' He asked her: 'Who am I?' She said: 'You are God's messenger.' The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: 'Set her free, as she is a believer.'"

We should explain that the reporter asked the Prophet, peace be upon him, about three methods by which people try to predict the future: Visiting fortunetellers, omen and writing in some way. The Prophet, peace be upon him, made clear that it is forbidden to go to fortunetellers, regardless of what they may say. Omen is totally discounted as it has no effect. And what people write about the future can only be right if it relies on true knowledge, such as the earlier prophet mentioned in the Hadith. That prophet had knowledge given to him by God and he wrote it down. So if a person relies on such knowledge, he may write what he knows. Otherwise, any claim to knowledge of future events is to be disregarded.

Islamic Etiquette: Tribal Allegiance Misplaced & Verbal Abuse Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

One aspect Islam disapproves of and is indicative of values that prevail in non-Islamic societies is that of treating tribal or national allegiance as paramount. When a person finds himself in difficulty or under pressure, he appeals to his family, tribe or community for support. He expects them to support him only because he belongs to them, not because he suffers injustice or oppression. When such bonds are made paramount, and then Muslims must take the right-stand and show their rejection of such bonds. Once a man appealed for support in the fashion of pre-Islamic days in the presence of Ubayy ibn Ka'ab, and Ubayy immediately abused him in clear terms. The people present looked at him with disapproval. He said to them: "it seems that you disapprove of what I said. I do not fear anyone at all. I heard the Prophet, peace be upon him, as he said: 'Whoever appeals on the basis of ignorant bonds should be abused in clear terms'." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Ahmad and Ibn Hibban]

What is significant in this Hadith is that it recommends the use of clear abusive language, not merely indirect disapproval. Such language may be thought contrary to the values Islam advocates, which disapprove of express and clear abuse.

There is no contradiction between the two, because the warning against the use of such language is made in the case of people who do not deserve such abuse. The situation to which this Hadith applies merits such usage as part of the punishment for the one who resorts to the values of ignorance. [Let there be no confusion what

constitutes permissible abuse in Islam. Islam certainly does not endorse any pornographic expressions at any time or situation.]

Indeed the Prophet, peace be upon him, disapproved even when some people made an appeal for support invoking ties much closer to Islam than tribal loyalties. In a dispute between two Muslims, one called out to the Muhajireen and the other to the Ansar for support. But the Prophet, peace be upon him, told them: "Abandon such blind loyalty, for it stinks." Although the two men called out invoking an Islamic loyalty, it was akin to what the people of ignorance in pre-Islamic days used to make. Hence, the Prophet's censure.

Islamic Etiquette: Unacceptable Use Of the Prophet's Name

Some people use the name "Muhammad" as a means of calling any person or drawing his attention. Instead of using any of the common calling words, such as Sir, Mr., Brother, etc. they say, "Hey, Muhammad!" when the man's name is not so. They do not even know whether the person whom they are calling is a Muslim or not. Is this acceptable?

No, it is totally unacceptable. Whoever thought of such usage has little respect for the Prophet, peace be upon him. God tells us in the Qur'an:

***"Do not address God's Messenger in the manner you address one another.
....."*** [Light — "An-Noor" 24: 63]

If the Prophet's companions were not allowed to address him as they addressed each other, and ordered instead to use his title as 'God's Messenger', how can we imagine that using his name as a common word for drawing people's attention can be acceptable.

Anyone using it without giving the matter a thought should know better. He should reflect and ask himself whether he would accept that people use his own name in this way. How could he accept this for the Prophet's name?

[Added: One simple way of inviting attention is the use of expression *Assalamo Alaikum*]

Islamic Etiquette: Use Of the Expression — Mankind Is Ruined Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

The Prophet, peace be upon him, took particular care to make his companions mindful of what they say. He told them frequently that the wrong word may lead to serious results. He also chose certain phrases and statements that people frequently said to enlighten his companions on their desirability or otherwise. This is one aspect of his careful upbringing of the model generation of Muslims, i.e. his companions, may God be pleased with them all.

An authentic Hadith reported by Abu Hurairah quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "When you hear a man saying, 'Mankind are ruined', then [know that] he is the most ruined of them all."

This Hadith alerts us to a common fault to which people rarely pay any attention. It is that of finding fault with people and remaining oblivious of one's own fault. When this becomes a habit, a person would become preoccupied with the faults of others, making a simple fault far more serious than it actually is and an individual fault a common one. He may add to this an expression of sorrow at the degeneration of moral values among Muslims generally, showing eagerness to reform them and

admitting inability to do anything in that regards. This will begin to give such a person a sense of self-satisfaction, which may develop to a feeling of moral superiority. He may even tend to despise people.

All this makes such a person, as the Prophet, peace be upon him, says, the most ruined among them. This is due to the fact that such a person's remarks are recorded against him as backbiting, which is sinful and earns grievous punishment. Moreover, the fact that such people overlooked their own faults leads them to be arrogant and arrogance is an attitude that incurs God's displeasure.

The net result of such an attitude is that this person will have his normal faults as well as the sins of backbiting and arrogance, while other people have their normal faults. Hence, he is in a far worse position, or, to use the Prophet's expression, he is the most ruined of them all.

The foregoing applies to a person who sees himself superior to other people. But one who means his remark only a sort of diagnosis of the ills of society to which he belongs, considering what he says as applicable to him also, is in a different situation altogether. This latter person may be keen to do something to help his community to get rid of its faults, and he may seek the cooperation of others in such an endeavor. To such a person this statement by the Prophet, peace be upon him, does not apply. On the contrary, he may earn reward from God for his words and action because he only seeks to improve the situation of his community.

Islamic Etiquette: Use Of the Prefix Br.

In many Muslim communities of North America I have noticed the tradition of prefixing each other's name with the word "brother" as in "Br. Ahmed" or "Br. Ali". While I understand the strong message of brotherhood that it denotes, I am curious to know if this practice is supported by the Sunnah of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and his companions. Most Hadith references seem to have names prefixed by "Ya" or "O" rather than the word brother.

There is nothing wrong with the way Muslims in a certain community address each other, as long as the mode of address is one of respect. We do not have any particular teaching to require that we conform to a particular way. The Prophet's companions used the forms that were commonly used in their community. They did not invent any new method of address. The word "Ya" which is frequently encountered in their dialogue is a form of address, often translated as "O". Nowadays, many Muslims stress the importance of the bond of brotherhood that unite them all, and call each other as "brother" or "sister". There is nothing wrong with that. When they shorten this in written material to Br or Sr, they are starting a convention that accepts these short forms for these words. Again, there is nothing wrong with that.

Islamic Etiquette: Uttering Not Even A Bad Word

Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

The Prophet, peace be upon him, was not known to use bad or vulgar language in any situation. Nowadays, when there is need to publish a verbatim transcription of a political leader, we often come across the phrase, 'expletive deleted,' which refers to some obscene words interjected by that person within his speech. It is generally accepted that people use such words in their speech. We have become so used to the idea that we think little of it. Yet it is not appropriate from the Islamic point of view that obscenities and vulgarities should be used in speech, even when one is angry. The Prophet, peace be upon him, has often spoken against such a practice, making it

clear that we are accountable for what we say, in the same way, as we will have to account for our deeds. Providing the perfect model for us to follow, he never used such bad language in any situation. When he was asked to condemn certain people for their bad actions, he might condemn the action itself but never the people.

Al-Tufail ibn Amr Al-Dawsi visited Makkah in the early days of Islam, and despite being warned by the Quraish against meeting the Prophet, peace be upon him, or listening to him, he met him, understood his message and embraced Islam. The Prophet, peace be upon him, told him to rejoin his people and to invite them to accept Islam. He did so, and although a number of his relatives and tribesmen embraced Islam, the majority took a hostile attitude. He went once to see the Prophet, peace be upon him. When he asked him about the situation at the Daws tribe with regard to accepting the Islamic message, Al-Tufail said: "Messenger of God! Daws has taken an attitude of determined rejection, and they deserve that you pray to God to punish them." The Prophet, peace be upon him, turned to face the direction of the Qiblah and raised his hands to pray. People nearby said: "Daws are doomed." However, the Prophet's prayer was: "My Lord, guide Daws to the truth and bring them into the fold." [Related by Al-Bukhari and Ahmad].

We note how Al-Tufail wanted the Prophet, peace be upon him, to pray against his own people. This indicates how frustrated he was, having been trying for years to show them the truth of Islam, but they continued to reject his entire advocacy. He despaired that they would ever change their attitude. Having given up on them, he thought their punishment could not come too soon. Hence, his request to the Prophet, peace be upon him, to pray against them. Such a prayer, had the Prophet, peace be upon him, said it, would ensure their total destruction, because the Prophet's prayer was sure to be answered. This is why the Prophet's companions thought that Daws were doomed when he was about to pray against them. The example of the Prophet Noah and what happened to his people after he prayed against them is clearly stated in the Qur'an. But the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not say a word against them. On the contrary, he prayed for their guidance so that they would see the truth and accept it. This was what eventually took place. The next visit saw Al-Tufail bringing with him around 80 of them to meet the Prophet, peace be upon him, and learn from him.

Many were the people who were hostile to Islam, and to the Prophet, peace be upon him, fearing for their positions or interests, should Islam triumph. The Jews in Madinah were particularly hostile to Islam, despite the fact that the Prophet, peace be upon him, concluded a treaty of peaceful relations with them shortly after his settlement in the city. Sometimes they twisted their tongues when they greeted him so that they would use an abusive rather than a greeting word. Instead of Assalam Alaikum they would say Assam Alaikum, thus changing the word that means 'peace be with you' to one that means 'death be yours'.

Ayesha, the Prophet's wife, reports: "A group of Jews came to see the Prophet, peace be upon him, and as they entered, they said: 'Assam Alaikum' and the Prophet, peace be upon him, answered saying, 'And yours.' I said to them: 'Death be your own, together with God's curse and His wrath.' God's Messenger said to me: 'calm down, Ayesha. Take things easy, and refrain from what is harsh or abusive.' I said to him: 'Have you not heard what they said?' He said: 'I have replied to it, and God will answer my prayer, but he will not answer their prayer against me.'" [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Ahmad and Al-Tirmithi].

Taking things easily, without returning a bad word or an abusive remark, was the Prophet's consistent practice with all people. Needless to say, all the Prophet's companions treated him with exemplary respect. They loved him more than they loved their own children. They could not tolerate the slightest insult voiced by anyone against him. If anyone said such a remark, they would immediately rise against him,

but the Prophet, peace be upon him, always restrained them. He preferred to treat all people with kindness, overlooking their mistakes. He realized that this approach was more conducive to making people look at Islam in a favorable light. He wanted people to realize that the guidance he brought them was to their own advantage.

Ayesha reports: "Once the Prophet, peace be upon him, bought a slaughtered camel from a Bedouin in return for a load of preserved dates. He brought the man home to give him the dates, but he found the load of dates had gone. He went out to explain the situation, saying: 'we have bought this meat from you in return for a load of dates, thinking that we have this amount. But we have discovered that we do not have it.' The man cried out: 'What a trick!' People poked him saying: 'Do you say this to God's Messenger?' The Prophet, peace be upon him, ordered them to leave the man alone." [Related by Al-Bukhari]

The same incident is reported in a longer Hadith related by Ahmad, giving more details. It mentions that the Prophet's companions said to the man: "Confound you! Would God's Messenger play a trick on anyone?" The Prophet, peace be upon him, said to them: "Leave him alone. A person who has a right to claim enjoys a privilege." But the man repeated his remark two or three times and people were against him. When the Prophet, peace be upon him, realized that the man would not understand the situation, he said to one of his companions: "Go to Khuwaylah bint Hakim ibn Ummayyah and say to her that God's Messenger requests you to lend him a load of preserved dates if you have one, and we will repay you later." The man went to her and she confirmed that she had the dates, requesting him to send someone to take it. The Prophet, peace be upon him, told the man to take the Bedouin to her home and give him the load of dates. When he had done so, the Bedouin passed by the Prophet, peace be upon him, and his companions on his way back and said to him: "May God reward you well. You have paid in full and given well." The Prophet, peace be upon him, commented: "Such people who pay in full and give well are the best in God's sight on the Day of Judgment."

Islamic Etiquette: When Apology Is Merited
Commentary By Adil Salahi , Arab News

Sometimes we find ourselves in a situation that requires an apology. We may say or do something that gives offense to another person, or we may omit to do something that is expected. It may often be through lack of concentration, or preoccupation with something important that our omission or commission takes place. We should never be reluctant to offer a suitable apology or an explanation so that our action, or lack of it, should not have an adverse effect on our relation with the person concerned.

Yet it is often the case that people find it difficult to apologize or even offer an explanation. They feel that offering an apology is degrading. The higher one's position, the more difficult it is for him to apologize. Yet this should not be the case, because we are all human, and human beings often make mistakes. Nothing helps to reduce the effects of a mistake more than an explanation that makes it clear that no offense is intended. No one occupies a higher position than the Prophet, peace be upon him, the last of God's messengers. Yet he was always ready to offer an apology or an explanation when an action of his could upset any of his companions. That the affected companion is young or of a lowly status never stopped the Prophet, peace be upon him, from offering an explanation or apology.

Jabir ibn Abdullah was a young companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him. He reports: "God's Messenger sent me on an errand, and I proceeded to do it. When it was over, I came back to him, and offered a greeting, but he did not reply to my greeting. I felt very bad in my heart. I thought that the Prophet, peace be upon him, might have been upset because I have been slow, and this might have been the

cause for him not replying to my greeting. This made me feel even worse. A while later, I offered a greeting to him once more and he replied to me. Then he said: 'What stopped me from replying to your first greeting was that I was in the middle of my prayer.'" [Related by al-Bukhari, Muslim and Ahmad].

We note first how the Prophet's companions were very sensitive to every gesture, word, or reaction the Prophet, peace be upon him, shows. They always wanted him to be pleased with them. If they detected any sign of displeasure, they would examine their own behavior, trying to find out what could have been the reason. Here we see Jabir feeling sad when the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not answer his greeting. He thought that he might have taken too long over the business the Prophet, peace be upon him, wanted him to attend to. He began to blame himself and felt miserable. But then the matter was cleared. He got the right response to his second greeting, and with it an explanation by the Prophet, peace be upon him, who stated that he was praying.

The question might arise here: Why did not Jabir realize that the Prophet, peace be upon him, was engaged in his prayer? This is a valid question, because a person in prayer is easily recognized as he bows or prostrates himself. But in this case, the Prophet, peace be upon him, was praying while he was riding his she-camel. In this situation, when a person might offer voluntary prayers only, he gestures the movements of prayer with his head, and he does not have to face the Qiblah or the normal direction of prayer. Hence, Jabir did not recognize what preoccupied the Prophet, peace be upon him. The explanation was necessary, and the Prophet, peace be upon him, immediately offered it.

Al-Saab ibn Jaththamah Al-Laythi, a companion of the Prophet, reports that he once gave a zebra as a gift to the Prophet, peace be upon him, when he was at a place called Al-Abwa' or Waddan, but the Prophet, peace be upon him, returned his gift. "When the Prophet, peace be upon him, noticed how my face changed, he said to me: 'We have only returned your gift because we are in the state of consecration.'" [Related by Malik, Muslim, Ahmad, Al-Nasa'ie, Al-Tirmithi and Ibn Majah]

This is another highly authentic Hadith that mentions how one of the Prophet's companions felt upset at having his gift returned. In Islam, a gift must not be returned unless there is a valid reason for that, such as when a gift is given in order to gain an unfair advantage. In this case, it becomes akin to a bribe. But nobody could have ever thought of gaining an unfair advantage with the Prophet, peace be upon him, because he was the most fair of people. Hence, Al-Saab felt sad at having his gift returned. The Prophet, peace be upon him, immediately explained that he was in the state of consecration, or Ihram. This is the state in which we enter when we travel for Umrah or pilgrimage. The Prophet, peace be upon him, was apparently on such travel, as the gift was given to him at a village near Makkah. When one is in the state of consecration, it is forbidden for him to hunt or kill any game. It is also forbidden for him to eat the meat of any animal or bird killed by a hunter, even though the hunter is not in the state of consecration at the time of capturing the animal or killing it. Therefore, the Prophet, peace be upon him, had no option but to return the gift. His explanation removed the ill feeling that his companion felt at having his gift returned.

A similar situation was that in which Al-Muhajir ibn Qunfudh, a companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, found himself. He reports that he went to the Prophet, peace be upon him, but the Prophet, peace be upon him, was urinating. Yet Al-Muhajir greeted him but the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not answer his greeting until he had finished and performed his ablution. He then apologized to Al-Muhajir, explaining: "I did not like to mention God's name until I had had my ablutions." [Related by Al-Nassaie, Abu Dawood and Ibn Majah].

The Islamic greeting uses God's name in both situations of offering the greeting and replying to it. The word "Salam", which is the basic word in the Islamic greeting, means "peace", but it is also one of God's names and attributes. But in reply we are always encouraged to give a better greeting. Hence, we add "wa Rahmatullah", which means "God's grace". This is exactly what the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not wish to utter until he had completed his ablutions. It is recommended to perform the ablutions before mentioning God's name or glorifying Him. The Islamic greeting is a form of supplication, and the Prophet, peace be upon him, explained that he preferred to complete the ablution before he returned the man's greeting.

Islamic Etiquette: Winning People's Hearts
Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

It is universally agreed that kindness is a good way to win people's hearts. People are normally grateful when they receive kind treatment, particularly from someone who has nothing to ask them in return. A good person may wish to be kind to others as much as he can. But sometimes kindness may not come easy, particularly when one feels that the recipient does not appreciate it. Hence, to be kind at all times is a seldom-found quality. The Prophet, peace be upon him, provides a rare example of a kind person even to those who are not rude and unappreciative.

Abu Hurairah reports: "A Bedouin came to the Prophet, peace be upon him, asking for help. The Prophet, peace be upon him, gave him something, and asked him: 'Have I been kind to you?' The man said: 'By no means, and you have not done me well either.' The Muslims present were very angry, and they rose to punish the offender. The Prophet, however, signaled them to stop. The Prophet, peace be upon him, then rose and went home. He sent for the Bedouin and asked him to come into the house. There he gave him something over and above what he had already given him. He then asked the man: 'Have I been kind to you?' The Bedouin said 'Yes, certainly. May God reward you well, for you are good to your people.' The Prophet, peace be upon him, then said to the man: 'You came to us and we gave you something, but then you said your words and my companions were displeased with you. You may wish to say in front of them what you have just said to me, so that what they feel against you will be removed.' The man agreed.

"The following day, or may be in the evening of the same day, the Bedouin came over. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said 'This friend of yours came to us and asked for something, and we granted his request, but he said what you heard. We then invited him home and gave him something extra, and he claimed that he was happy. Is it so?' The man said 'Yes, indeed. May God reward you well, for you are good to your people.'"

Abu Hurairah continues: "The Prophet, peace be upon him, then said: 'The case between this Bedouin and me is like that of a man whose she-camel went on the loose. People chased her, but they only made the camel more rebellious. The man called out to them: Leave me alone with my she-camel, as I know her best and I can turn her round. He then went to his she-camel facing her, taking something from the ground and got her to slowly and gradually calm down, until she came to him and sat down. He then saddled her and mounted her. Had I left you to your feelings as the man said his words, you might have killed him and he would then be in hell.' [Related by Al-Haythami in *Majma' Al-Zawaid*.]

What is clear in this Hadith is that the Prophet, peace be upon him, had to put up with rough manners from all sorts of people. In this instance, the man is given something, but he thinks that it was too little. Rather than expressing his feeling gently, which could have easily brought him an increase, he is rude, expressing his anger very bluntly. Yet he did not have any claim to anything. He was not asking for

something, which was owed to him. It was only a case where someone thinks that he has a right to be given money by the state. Hence, it was only natural that the Prophet's companions should feel angry with him, and some of them would rise to punish the offender. The Prophet, however, handled the situation in a totally different manner. He took the man home and gave him what made him satisfied and happy.

Had the Prophet, peace be upon him, stopped at this, he would have given us a great lesson in handling uncouth, rough mannered persons. But the Prophet, peace be upon him, goes further, suggesting to the man that he should make his feelings clear to the people so that none of them would continue to think ill of him. When the man comes in to do so, the Prophet, peace be upon him, might have sensed that he was embarrassed. So he helped him by stating the case. The man then finds it easy to confirm the new situation.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, now gives his companions and followers in all generations, a clear lesson in handling people. He gives an example close to people's life, which they encounter, everyday: A rebellious camel going on the loose and people chasing it. This will only frighten the camel and drive her further away. The possibility that it might not be caught is very clear. Only the calming and wise interference of the camel's owner who patiently tries to soothe her will get the camel round. In dealing with the man, the Prophet, peace be upon him, gave him what he wanted out of his own personal resources. Thus, he showed him that he did not take his rough manners against him. He also showed him that he cared for the man's standing with his companions and pointed out to him how to rectify the situation.

This is in line with what people who were very close to the Prophet, peace be upon him, said about him. Perhaps no one gives a more accurate picture of another person than a servant describing his master does when he is no longer in his service. A person's attitude toward a servant tells us whether that person is kind, understanding, forbearing, compassionate, or otherwise. Anas ibn Malik served the Prophet, peace be upon him, for ten years, starting at the age of ten. He says: "God's Messenger was the best mannered person. He once sent me on an errand, and I thought that I would not go. Yet deep inside I wanted to go. I left and aimed to join some kids who were playing in the street. Soon the Prophet, peace be upon him, was behind me, holding me by the collar from behind. I looked at him and he was smiling. He said to me: 'Unays! Have you gone where I told you to go?' I said 'Yes, Messenger of God! I am going now.'" [Related by Muslim, Ahmad and Abu Dawood].

It is clear that Anas was still a young boy when this incident took place. He was still entertaining thoughts of not doing what he is told to do. Later, as he became mature, such thoughts would not even occur to him. Yet, he realized that he should do what he was bid, but went nevertheless to play with other kids.

This could have brought him painful punishment had he been in the service of any person other than the Prophet, peace be upon him. But what the Prophet, peace be upon him, did when he saw him playing with other boys? Nothing more than to smile and to call him Unays instead of Anas, which is a form indicating smallness, and used generally for endearment.

Islamic Etiquette: With Friends & Family ***Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News***

The Prophet, peace be upon him, was always loving and caring with his companions, but his loving feelings were at their strongest with members of his own family. He always wanted the best for everyone. He was pleased when he saw anyone in a good position and grieved if he saw someone in distress. A good example of his care is seen in these two Hadiths.

Abu Moosa Al-Ashari reports that one day he followed the Prophet, peace be upon him, as he went into a date farm where he had some private matter to attend to. "I walked behind him. When he entered the farm, I sat at the door and thought that I would be the Prophet's doorman for the day. He did not order me to do so. He went deep into the farm for his business and then returned and sat at the mouth of a well, baring his legs up to the knees and lowering them into the well. Abu Bakr came and told me that he wanted to go in. I told him to stand there until I asked the Prophet, peace be upon him, whether to permit his entry. He did while I went to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and said 'Messenger of God! Abu Bakr requests permission to enter.' He said: 'Let him in and give him the happy news that he will be in heaven.' He came in until he was to the Prophet's right and bared his legs and lowered them into the well.

Then Omar came and I told him to stand there at the door while I asked the Prophet, peace be upon him, if I could let him in. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said to me: 'Let him in and give him the happy news that he will be in heaven.' He went in until he was to the Prophet's left and bared his legs and lowered them into the well. That side of the well was thus fully taken and no one else could sit there. Osman then came, and I told him to wait at the door while I asked the Prophet, peace be upon him, if he could enter. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: 'Let him in and give him the happy news that he will be in heaven, but that he will have to endure some trouble.' He went in and found that he could not sit on their side. So he moved to the opposite side, by the mouth of the well and bared his legs and lowered them into the well. I hoped and prayed that my brother should come, but he did not until they left." Saeed ibn Al-Musayyib said: 'I interpreted this as indicating their graves with the three being together while Osman is buried away from them.' [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim and Al-Tirmithi].

This Hadith is reported in several versions, with the one we have just quoted being of middle length. It tells us how the Prophet's companions used to behave when they were with him.

They showed him all the respect and love he deserved. Abu Moosa sees the Prophet, peace be upon him, walking alone, and he walks behind him so that he could give him any help he required. When he enters the date farm, he decides to be the Prophet's doorman so that he could have his privacy if he wanted. It so happened that this was a special occasion, because the Prophet, peace be upon him, received there three of his closest companions. Apparently the Prophet, peace be upon him, received special revelations on this occasion concerning the destiny of his three companions. Hence, every time one of them arrived, the Prophet, peace be upon him, told Abu Moosa not only to let him in, but also to give him the happiest news any believer could receive from the Prophet, peace be upon him, namely the promise of entry into heaven.

In the case of Osman, however, the good news is coupled with a reference to the trouble he endured at the end of his reign as the third caliph, when he faced rebellion engineered by some hostile elements that falsely accused him of abuse of power. Thus, this Hadith provides a clear indication to all Muslims that Osman was right and his accusers were in the wrong.

We also note how Abu Moosa dearly loved that his brother should come next, hoping that if he did, the Prophet, peace be upon him, would give him the same happy news, but this was not to be. It is also interesting to read how Saeed ibn Al-Musayyib, a renowned scholar of the generation that followed the Prophet's companions, sees the way the four sat at the well as mirroring their graves, because the Prophet, Abu Bakr and Omar were buried in Ayesha's room, with Abu Bakr to the Prophet's right and Omar to his left. Osman, however, was buried in Al-Baqee', the Madinah graveyard where most of the Prophet's companions are buried.

Abu Hurairah reports the second Hadith, mentioning that “the Prophet, peace be upon him, went out on a hot day. He did not speak to me and I did not speak to him. He went up to the Qaynuqa’ market. He then went to Fatimah’s place and sat outside, and asked: ‘Is Luka’ there? Is Luka’ there?’ She kept him a little while and I thought she was either changing his clothes or washing him. He then came running and the Prophet, peace be upon him, took him close, hugging him and kissing him. He then said: “My Lord love him and love anyone who loves him.” [Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim].

When Abu Hurairah mentions that he did not speak to the Prophet, peace be upon him, as he walked by his side, he only indicates the attitude of the Prophet’s companions when they were with him. They always were in awe, speaking to him only when they realized that they had his permission to say what they wanted. The Prophet, peace be upon him, would have normally spoken to his companion, but on this occasion he might have been preoccupied with something. Hence, Abu Hurairah did not venture to speak to him.

The reporter does not tell us what the Prophet, peace be upon him, did at the market place, perhaps because it was an ordinary matter, which happened all the time. He is more interested in telling us about the Prophet’s action at his daughter’s place. He sits at the entrance and inquires whether her young son, Al-Hasan, was there. He then describes the meeting of the little boy with his grandfather, the Prophet, peace be upon him. He is a loving grandfather who takes the little boy to himself, carries and kisses him. He then says a most caring prayer, appealing to God to love the little one and to love everyone who loves him. Needless to say, that everyone who knew Al-Hasan loved him, and he is loved by countless millions of Muslims in the following generations.

Islamic Society: Acting As A Career

Could you please explain whether acting is acceptable from the Islamic point of view? I am wondering whether a Muslim can take up acting so as to become an actor in Hollywood films. I know that certain things, like kissing, must be avoided, but if one avoids these can one be an actor?

In principle, acting is permissible, provided that the viewers are aware that what they see is acting, not reality. If the purpose of acting is to deceive the viewers, then it becomes forbidden. Having said that, we should also say that what is involved in a certain action could change its verdict from being permissible to being obligatory or forbidden, as the case may be. As far as acting is concerned, the profession involves, in the overwhelming majority of cases, doing things that cannot be approved by Islam. If a Muslim actor is to refrain from these, he will find that producers will not assign to him any meaningful roles.

To succeed as an actor, he will need to compromise on his Islamic values. If he does, then he commits what is forbidden. In this case, acting becomes forbidden to him.

Moreover, a role in a particular film may not involve doing anything forbidden, but the film itself may promote an action, a principle or a value that is contrary to Islam. In this case also taking part is forbidden.

Until there is a film industry that abides by Islamic standards, a Muslim who has a talent for acting is better advised to keep that as a hobby. He may take part in local productions where he can have a say, in what is involved so that he would take part only in what is acceptable from the Islamic point of view.

Islamic Society: Actions, Not Words, Make One

I have noticed that there is little difference between Muslims and those who profess other faiths these days. Most people commit all sorts of sinful actions whenever the occasion arises. Some Muslims may go to the mosque on Fridays but when the prayer is over, they may not pray until the next Friday, or they may pray but they nevertheless indulge in forbidden practices to satisfy their desires. When they are reminded of their religious duties, they accuse the person reminding them of fundamentalism or extremism. Please comment.

Much of what you say is regrettably true which serves to show that faith has not taken firm roots with many of those who claim to be Muslims. Much of this is due to the fact that in most Muslim countries, little attention is given to providing the young generation with proper Islamic education. Such education is provided neither at home nor at school.

The result is that many people understand the Islamic faith no more than a set of worship practices that you do regularly or occasionally to demonstrate your belonging to this faith and that is the end of the matter. Hence, when you speak to them about the broader Islamic concepts, most people would take this as imposing certain concept that have other motives.

Indeed most people do not understand that to be a Muslim means to bring your whole life in line with Islam. They wonder what has religion got to do with this or that matter, which are pure human transactions that may be social or commercial or political.

They forget that Islam is God's message providing guidance to human beings so that they are able to conduct human life in accordance with God's guidance, which has the dual purpose of bringing happiness to human beings and earning them God's pleasure.

Without the implementation of Islam as a code of living, no society can be described as truly Muslim.

What to do in such a situation? There is no alternative to exerting a determined effort to explain the message of Islam to people and to make them aware that Islam is much more than a set of worship practices such as prayer, fasting, payment of Zakah and going on pilgrimage. The Prophet's task was simply to convey God's message, and this task continues to be the responsibility of those Muslims who are endowed with knowledge of God's message and its applicability to human life in all times and communities.

The charge of fundamentalism and extremism betrays people's ignorance of the true nature of Islam. Moreover, such accusations happen to be in vogue these days. Unfortunately, the behavior of some of the advocates of Islam give credence to such charges.

Hence it is important that the advocates of Islam are fully aware of the limits of their task of advocacy. They must shed the image of rigidity, which they unfortunately often give. Such rigidity is alien to the true nature of Islam.

When Islam is felt to provide a realistic and clear code of living which is flexible enough to cater for the needs of societies in different stages of development, and geared to ensure human happiness both in this life and in the life to come, people will be more than happy to follow Islamic laws and principles, and to observe Islamic values and ideals.

This is borne by history and we need to understand it and implement it with clear understanding and well-defined objectives. If we are sincere, God will favor us with His guidance, and when we follow His guidance, success is assured.

Islamic Society: Advice To Parents, Elders

How can I advise my parents and elders to offer their prayers regularly and to fast during Ramadhan?

The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "Good faith is to give good counsel." In his reply for a clarification as to whom good counsel should be given, the Prophet, peace be upon him, included the leaders of the Muslim community and everyone in that community. Encouraging anyone to attend regularly to his prayers and Islamic duties is certainly to give him good counsel. If one's parents are lax in observing such duties, it is certainly required of their son to try to persuade them to do so. In so doing, he should be gentle and kind and should remind them of the gravity of incurring Allah's displeasure. He should also show them that it is very easy to observe such duties. One should not give the impression that he is a better person than the one he advises. This is particularly offensive if it is addressed to a parent or an elder.

Islamic Society: Airlines & Women's Charms

It is well known that Islam requires women to dress modestly when they appear in public. How do you view the advertisements inserted by certain national airlines of Muslim countries in these terms: "A superb in-flight service is assured by our charming air hostesses"?

Islam cannot accept such advertisements. It is sad that national carriers of Muslim countries feel obliged, in order to compete with other airlines, to try to highlight such aspects of their service. Indeed, they do not need to go to these lengths. When a particular airline provides good service, that service will speak for itself, without the need to stress that at the delivery point of the service there is a "charming" hostess. The overwhelming majority of passengers are interested in the service itself, not in the person who gives it. Such advertisements are an example of how much we have borrowed from Western civilization, without scrutinizing what we are getting in the process.

[Added: Why not look at the advertisements of other foreign airlines that emphasize on the technical supremacy in providing on time schedules and avoiding delays and hazards. That should be something to follow.]

Islamic Society: Begging In An Islamic Community

Giving alms and charity and feeding the poor is highly recommended in the Qur'an and the Hadith. Does it not encourage pauperism in the community? As a result of this we frequently see people who are physically and mentally fit and able to work but they prefer to resort to pauperism as an easy way of making money. There are always reports about beggars amassing a great wealth out of what they get from other people. As you realize, pauperism has been abolished by law in many civilized countries. Why then is the Islamic world lagging behind in eradicating this awful social evil which injures the human dignity to a great extent? Can we set certain parameters to allow certain categories to live on charity on a license?

Perhaps people have some justification in thinking that an Islamic community is one in which beggars go around in the streets, able always to rely on Muslims' unfailing charitable sense. It is indeed this permanently alert sense of charity that leads to the cases which you have mentioned of those who beg, pretending to be very poor, yet amassing a great wealth. But is this truly the sort of behavior Islam encourages or even approves?

One thing is certain: Islam finds poverty repugnant and does not allow its followers to accept it as a matter of fact, but requires them to take positive action to stamp it out. Islam has in fact put in place specific legislation to combat poverty and ensure its eradication. That legislation is embodied in the provision governing Zakah, which is the third pillar upon which the structure of Islam is built. Every Muslim is liable to pay Zakah provided that he is in possession of an amount of money, which exceeds the threshold of Zakah. A specific percentage is required to be put aside immediately once a person becomes liable to pay Zakah. It should be pointed out that Zakah is neither a favor granted by the rich to the poor, nor is it a voluntary charity, which makes the poor keenly aware they need to receive favors from the rich. Zakah is indeed an act of worship required of all Muslims provided that they meet certain conditions.

Some people may wonder how we can call the payment of money an act of worship. Islam looks at worship in a much wider perspective than the strict sense of devotion and rituals. In the fulfillment of this religious duty of Zakah, Islam treats the person who pays Zakah and the one who receives it as equal. Both seek to win Allah's pleasure. The payer by the fulfillment of his duty, setting aside every year the amount of Zakah he is required to pay and ensuring its payment to those who deserve it, and the recipient by trying to maintain the straight path of Islam as he goes about meeting the needs of his family. When we look carefully at the Zakah system, as outlined in Islam, we can easily find out that Zakah is not a handful of pilasters, or halalahs, or a couple of Riyals given to a beggar, nor is it some victuals to silence the pangs of hunger. Zakah is a complete self-financing system, which aims to eradicate poverty and achieve a fair distribution of wealth.

The first thing about Zakah is that it is a duty defined by Allah who will eventually question people about its fulfillment. When the Prophet, peace be upon him, was once asked by some people to give them a portion of Zakah money, the Prophet, peace be upon him, told them that 'Allah has not assigned the task of distributing Zakah either to a Prophet, peace be upon him, given a message, or an angel who occupies a high position. He Himself has ruled over its distribution, dividing it among eight classes of people.' The Prophet, peace be upon him, then told those who requested to be paid some money from the Zakah fund that if they belonged to any of those classes, he would willingly pay them, but he would not exceed that limit. He also stated that "No share of Zakah may be paid to a person who is self-sufficient or to one who is physically strong." He meant that the one who is physically strong should find it easy to obtain a job and earn his livelihood.

The eight classes of beneficiaries of Zakah are outlined in verse 60 of Surah 9, which may be given in translation as follows:

"Charitable alms may only be paid to the poor, and the needy, and those who are employed [to conduct its collection and distribution], and those whose hearts are to be won over, and for the freeing of slaves, and relieving insolvent debtors, and for serving Allah's cause, and to help stranded wayfarers. It is a binding duty imposed by Allah, and Allah is well knowing, wise." [Repentance — "At-Taubah" 9: 60]

When you look at those eight classes of people, perhaps the first thing to draw your attention is that those engaged in the collection and distribution of Zakah are to be

paid from Zakah funds. This is what we mean by the system being self-financing. The system looks after those who are chronically attached to whom reference is made in the first two beneficiaries, and it looks after those whose need is accidental, such as stranded wayfarers and who have incurred debts but cannot pay them back. In addition to payment for the freeing of slaves [and slaves no longer exist in society], the system also addressed certain tasks that serve the Muslim community as a whole.

Islam does not like that a certain group in society continues to depend on Zakah. It wants poverty to be terminated. Hence, the poor are given enough to meet their needs. Moreover, a poor person who is able to work is helped to find employment. Scholars have discussed how much a poor person is to be given of Zakah. Many scholars are of the view that he is to be given enough to satisfy his needs for the rest of his life. That does not mean that his annual needs are calculated and then multiplied by the number of years he is expected to live. Rather, he is helped to have a job, which generates for him enough income to meet his needs.

This is a far cry from the picture you have painted of paupers roaming the streets in a Muslim community to be helped with a Riyal here and half a Riyal there. Indeed, Islam does not approve of begging. It makes it a sin that a person should beg when he has enough to satisfy his immediate needs.

All begging is forbidden in Islam except in one of three situations, as outlined by the Prophet, peace be upon him, who says: "Begging is not permissible except for one of three: a man who has taken upon himself a large payment [for a good purpose such as achieving peace between two warring tribes], he may ask others for help until he can fulfill his pledge; a man who has suffered a disaster that has left him without money, so he may ask other people's help until he can meet his needs by himself, and a man who has suffered a financial loss to an extent that makes three wise people in his community say that he has suffered such a loss. He may ask other people's help until he can get his situation straightened." [Related by Muslim]

This is clear that it is not permissible from the Islamic point of view to beg. We on our part must not encourage beggars unless we know that the person who is asking for help belongs to one of the three types that are allowed to seek other people's help.

We can say with all certainty that if Islam is properly implemented in a community, that community will steadily progress towards the eradication of poverty, until all its people attain the standard of self-sufficiency.

Islamic Society: Boy Meets (Or Goes Out With) A Girl

I have tried to find a ruling in the Qur'an or the Hadiths on a man going out with a woman, but I could find none. Since it is only natural to be attracted to the opposite sex, it seems to me that such a meeting, or going out, is permissible. If you disagree, how could you justify your ruling, when it is Allah who has made this mutual attraction part of our nature?

It is true that Allah has placed this attraction in our nature. Otherwise, humankind would not have been preserved. Allah, however, wants us to satisfy our natural desire in a clean, legitimate way. Therefore, He regulated the relationship between the two sexes on the basis of marriage.

This applies to every natural desire common to all mankind. We need to eat in order to live and there is a natural desire to eat which is common to all people. Unlike animals which satisfy their hunger in a mechanical, instinctive way, man has refined his approach to food so as to make it part of human civilization. It is natural for men to enjoy tasty food. If you are walking along a country road and you see a fruit tree,

heavy with ripe, tasty fruit, you are not allowed to pick one and eat it without the permission of the owner. Yet, if you do, you are only satisfying a natural desire, which is closely related to your existence. As you know, without food we cannot live more than a few days. All human beings agree that only goods obtained in a legitimate manner are permissible to eat. You cannot just take what does not belong to you. You have to buy it or be given it as a present. Otherwise, you commit a sin if you take it away. The same applies to the satisfaction of natural tendencies of establishing a relationship, which must be legitimate, and the only legitimate relationship in this connection is that of marriage. The fact that the attraction is natural does not mean that we can seek its satisfaction in an unruly or undisciplined manner. Its satisfaction is regulated within the marriage institution. This distinguishes Islamic society by its clean, healthy relationship.

It is forbidden in Islam for a man to be alone with a woman who is not his wife, or a very close relative [i.e. one whom he cannot marry], in a room where they cannot be seen. This is not due to any lack of trust in either the man or the woman. It is only meant to strengthen them against any temptation. Abdullah ibn Abbas quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "Let no one of you be alone with a woman except in the presence of a relative whom she may not marry." [Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim] Ahmad also relates a Hadith in which the Prophet, peace be upon him, is quoted to have said: "He who believes in Allah and the Last Day must not be alone with a woman without the presence of a close relative of hers which she may not marry. Otherwise, Satan would be the third one with them." This applies even to a relative whom the woman may marry such as her cousin. She must never allow herself to be alone with him where they cannot be seen.

Islamic Society: Boycott Amongst Muslims Precludes Heaven
Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

It is well known that Muslims may not boycott one another. If they quarrel or disagree, they should always keep their relationships alive and strong. It is not right that they should allow the relationship, which exists between them by God's blessing to deteriorate to the extent that they turn their backs on each other. Such an attitude does not fit at all with the bond of brotherhood, which Islam establishes between its followers. We have often said that to Muslims, this bond of brotherhood is very real. Whatever happens between brothers, their relationship would always be strong enough to overcome it. That applies in an even greater measure to the bond of Islamic brotherhood. When a quarrel takes place between two persons, it is only to be expected that they boycott one another.

For this reason, the Prophet, peace be upon him, took every possible chance to emphasize to his companions and to his followers in all generations that estrangement between two Muslims must not be allowed to continue for over three days, whatever the circumstances. Consider the following Hadith reported by Hisham ibn Amir Al-Ansari who quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "It is not permissible for a Muslim to boycott another Muslim for over three days. Both of them continue to be away from the path of the truth as long as they continue with their boycott of each other. The first of them to move towards reconciliation atones by that for his earlier attitude. Should they die boycotting each other, neither of them will be admitted into heaven. If one of them greets his brother but the latter refuses to accept his greeting, an angel will answer the greeting while the other will have his answer from Satan." [Related by Al-Bukhari]

This Hadith describes most vividly and clearly how Islam views quarrels and boycotts between Muslims. The Prophet, peace be upon him, tells us that regardless of which party is in the right and which is at fault, both are in the wrong as long as they boycott each other. Should they continue with their boycott for the rest of their

lives, that it is sufficient grounds to deny them admission into heaven? Of course, this presupposes that they have deliberately continued with their boycott despite having a chance, or indeed repeated chances, for bringing about reconciliation. It also suggests that people who allow a quarrel to continue throughout their lives do not have the sort of character which encourages them to do what they should in order to earn adequate reward from God to qualify for admission into heaven. They cannot bring themselves to attach the proper Islamic value to their bond of brotherhood. They allow their ego to have the better of them.

Yes this may not apply to both of them. Either one may try to achieve reconciliation and start with greeting the other. The very fact that he has started is sufficient to ensure his forgiveness for his part of the boycott. If his overture is not answered, God makes sure that an angel answers him. The other has the worst of all answers, because his reply comes from the devil.

Some people may find it difficult to understand why the Prophet, peace be upon him, makes the punishment for a lifelong boycott between two Muslims so severe as to deny them admission into heaven. For one thing, a person who does this demonstrates his total disregard for the principle of Islamic brotherhood. When God describes the believers as “brothers”, Muslims must demonstrate that this bond of brotherhood is real. They have to rear and foster it all the time. Nothing negates such brotherhood more than a total boycott between two Muslims. It is inconceivable that two people who claim to be believers demonstrate the total collapse of a quality, which God describes as essential to believers. When they do that, they automatically disqualify themselves from admission into heaven. Moreover, a prolonged boycott does not only kill Islamic ties; it kills something else. The Prophet, peace be upon him, is quoted to have said: “He who boycotts his brother for a year is like one who sheds his brother’s blood.” [Related by Al-Bukhari, Abu Dawood, Ahmad and Al-Hakim]

Commenting on this Hadith, scholars say that a person who boycotts his Muslim brother for a year goes beyond all limits in insisting on his wrong attitude. He actually kills him, using the sword of boycott. When we have such a description by the Prophet, we can add nothing.

It is understandable; nevertheless, that things may happen between any two persons which could strain their relations. This happens between brothers, sisters and between husband and wife. Islam teaches us that when we get angry with someone who is close to us, or with any Muslim brother or sister, we should not carry our anger any further than is absolutely necessary. Moreover, we must not forget that what exists between us cannot be washed over easily. Islamic ties are much too important to be trampled over casually.

Like every household, there were some disagreements in the Prophet’s own home. It may be pertinent to ask here how the Prophet, peace be upon him, or his wives conducted themselves when such a disagreement took place. Ayesha, the Prophet’s wife, reports that he once said to her: “I know when you are unhappy and when you are happy.” She asked how he knew that. He said: “When you are happy you may answer: ‘Yes indeed, by God, the Lord of Muhammad.’ When you are unhappy you would say: ‘No, by God, the Lord of Ibrahim.’” She said: “That is true. I only stop using your name.” [Related by Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

This shows how Ayesha was keen to observe Islamic values even when she was unhappy. Obviously, the only reason, which made her unhappy with the Prophet, peace be upon him, at any particular moment, could be attributed to jealousy. Since she was one of several wives of the Prophet, and since the Prophet, peace be upon him, was always keen to maintain absolute justice between his wives, she might have felt on occasions that something was not to her liking. She might be dissatisfied. Her

dissatisfaction, however, did not manifest itself in any way other than swearing by the Lord of Muhammad. That is indeed the sort of moderate expression of dissatisfaction, which we should emulate when we are unhappy with our Muslim brothers or sisters.

Islamic Society: Boycott For Reasons Of Conduct

If one distances himself from another Muslim because of his bad conduct, does one incur a sin?

If you boycott someone because of his Islamically unacceptable behavior, you are to be commended. It is always better to steer away from whatever and whoever encourages sinful practice.

Islamic Society: Boycott Of Goods From the Anti-Islamic West

There is much criticism, false allegations and negative propaganda targeted at Islam these days. Some of it is perpetrated by politicians. How should we react to such campaigns? Some scholars have issued rulings requiring Muslims to boycott American goods. Are these rulings based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah?

There has always been false propaganda against Islam. It began on the day the Prophet, peace be upon him, declared his message in public, and has not stopped since then. When Muslims are strong and feared by others, such propaganda cowers down and resorts to rumors and secret communication. When Muslims are weak, as they happen to be in our present times, anti-Islamic hate campaigns shout loud. Some Western leaders have been involved in such campaigns of false allegations, while others participated in military attacks against some Muslim countries.

Muslims are supposed to defend their faith, because it is God's final message to mankind. The best way they can defend it is to make it known to people, and the best way to achieve that is through proper implementation and practice of Islam. The other most important thing is for Muslim countries to add to their strength, so that any enemy will hesitate before embarking on an unlawful and unjustified attack against them. The two elements work hand in hand and strengthen each other's effect.

As for the ruling against buying American goods and services, this is a valid ruling, based on the fact that America is engaged in an unlawful war against Islam and the Muslims. It also provides Israel with unwavering and unlimited support in its aggression against Islam and the Muslims of Palestine and other Muslim countries.

Islamic Society: Boycotting Each Other

Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "Do not hate each other and do not envy one another, and do not turn your back on each other. Servants of Allah, be always brothers. It is not lawful for anyone to boycott his brother for over three nights. They may meet and each of them turns his face away. The one who is first to greet the other is the better one of the two of them. "

This Hadith shows how much importance Islam attaches to the brotherhood of Muslims and how it discourages any action that tends to weaken the bond of his brotherhood.

That means that it is permissible, although by no means encouraged, for two Muslims not to be on speaking terms for a shorter period. This should be understood as a concession, which is given in view of what quarrels, may take place between people who are otherwise good Muslims. It is only natural for a human being to get angry at times and to allow his anger to get the better of him. This may lead to an estrangement or a boycott between them. Muslims who find themselves in such a situation are allowed three days to let their tempers cool down. Quarrels, which result from long harbored hate or envy, will take much longer to mend. However, we are commanded by the Prophet, peace be upon him, not to entertain such feelings for any length of time against fellow Muslims.

Perhaps it should be added here that when a person fears that his continued relationship with a particular person is bound to cause him harm, whether in respect of his worldly interest or in respect of his fulfillment of his Islamic duties, he will be right not to maintain a very close relationship with that person. He need not boycott him altogether, but he may keep him at arm's length.

Sometimes when a quarrel takes place between two persons, they regret it and both of them are eager to mend the relationship, but they cannot bring themselves to start the process of reconciliation. Each of them feels that he will be compromising his dignity if he goes to the other and greets him warmly as if there has been no quarrel. The Prophet, peace be upon him, encourages us not to allow such a consideration to stop us from doing what is right.

It is not easy for people to overcome their ego and bring themselves to greet a person with whom they have quarreled especially when they genuinely feel hurt that the other person was totally in the wrong. But it is this particular attitude which the Prophet, peace be upon him, wants to play down so that it does not prevent Muslims from making things up after they have quarreled. A Muslim always tries to excel. He wants to earn more reward so that he makes sure of being forgiven for his sins on the Day of Judgement. So the overriding criterion for a Muslim is what to do in order to earn Allah's pleasure and receive more reward from Him. When the Prophet, peace be upon him, points out a method or an action, which makes a person better, his very statement proves a motive for every Muslim to follow that message or to act on that advice. This particular concept makes it easier for a Muslim to overcome his pride and to start the process of making up, although he may feel that he was the one oppressed.

Islamic Society: Celebrating Birthdays & Anniversaries

I am opposed to celebrating birthdays and anniversaries because this is an imported tradition. However, I am under pressure because people suggest that I hurt the feelings of my wife and little children when I deprive them of such a celebration. Please comment.

What is not allowed in Islam is to follow in the footsteps of unbelievers in their customs and traditions, feeling that they are superior, or that it is good to be like them. But this does not mean that everything they have or do is bad, or that we should not learn from them what is beneficial or useful. We may adapt that to what is suitable to us.

A birthday is an occasion that can be marked in a variety of ways. There is nothing in Islam to prevent celebrating such an occasion, provided that the celebration is not done strictly in imitation of unbelievers. Thus, if you invite some children from your son's or daughter's school or play group and organize some games and serve some sweets and exchange gifts, there is nothing in that to object to. If you add something useful such as reading some stories from the time of the and his companions, if that is suitable to the age group of your child, then that is commendable. You can easily

find something to add which would enhance the children's knowledge of Islam. If you do, your marking of your child's birthday would be a highly profitable occasion.

A wedding anniversary is a special occasion for a married couple. Marking it in a way that does not involve any un-Islamic practice is permissible, provided that you are doing it with the intention of giving your wife something pleasant and thanking God for a happy marriage. If you start your marking of the day with a prayer to God to grant both of you more happiness in your married life, then you do well. The fact that anniversaries and birthdays are marked in non-Muslim countries in a way that is unacceptable to Islam does not mean that we should follow their practice. We can mark our occasions in our own way, which should always be within the limits God has set.

Islamic Society: Coeducation — Islamic View On

What is the Islamic view on Coeducation?

There is a well-known principle in Islamic law, which may be rendered in translation as "prevention of means." This applies to any situation or condition, which may be permissible in the first instance, but is calculated to lead to something forbidden. If it is generally deemed that there is a direct relationship between the original, permissible situation and the resulting forbidden one, then the original situation is pronounced as forbidden.

That is prohibition of something, which is acknowledged to be permissible in the first instance, because of the results it produces. In other words, should the circumstances change and the situation in question is deemed not to lead to the forbidden act, then it can no longer be pronounced as forbidden.

Coeducation is one such matter. In the first instance, there is no harm in a group of people, men and women, or boys and girls, to be present in a classroom where a teacher is giving a lesson, provided that everyone behaves properly, abiding by Islamic standards of propriety. But when we put together a group of young boys and girls, close to the period of adolescence, and during adolescence, in the relaxed environment of a school where they meet and play, then it is asking too much of such young people to observe Islamic standards of morality. The results may be very serious indeed. Therefore, we say that coeducation is unacceptable to Islam, because of what it leads to, not because of the process of teaching or of the meeting of the two sexes in a classroom.

Islamic Society: Coeducation & Seminars On Reproduction

My wife, a Muslim woman, is doing a university degree that includes conducting seminars on topics such as reproduction and the function of the different parts of the body involved in reproduction, etc. There are men students and lecturers taking part in such seminars. Normally, she skips such topics, but that involves losing marks. Please advise.

The degree that your wife is doing is certainly needed in the community and when she is qualified she should be able to help many women in your community. Most of these women will be more at ease discussing their cases and situations with a woman like your wife than if they had to discuss these with a man who has the same qualifications. This means that there is social need for ladies to have that degree. It is not only a social need, but a religious one as well.

When the Muslim community needs personnel who are qualified in certain areas, then meeting that need is a collective duty of the community. If there is only one

person who can acquire the necessary education to meet that need, then doing it becomes obligatory to that person.

There is certainly no harm in discussing the process of reproduction and the functions of each part of the reproductive system in a university classroom, even though there is a mixed company in that classroom. If the university finds it feasible to make such classes separate for men and women, then it should do so. If Muslim women students are in a minority and the only way to acquire that qualification is by attending such mixed classes, then they should do so.

It is wrong of a Muslim woman student to deliberately miss certain classes, not only because she loses certain marks, but also because her education will not be as good as of her male or non-Muslim colleagues. She should try to acquire the best standard possible, in line with other students.

Islamic Society: Commemorating Death Anniversaries & the Like

1. Some people celebrate certain anniversaries, such as the birthday of a child or death of a relative. What I would like to know is whether such celebrations are acceptable or not from Islamic point of view. I may add that when death anniversaries are marked they often include certain activities such as a gathering to read the Qur'an and providing food to those who are present. Some religious people suggest that such food may only be given to poor or needy people or to orphan children. Please comment.

2. Is it proper to commemorate death anniversaries of one's forefathers by conducting feasts or giving charity and reciting parts of the Qur'an with the help of other people, including professional reciters of the Qur'an, as it is customary in certain parts of the Muslim world?

1. It is important to know a basic rule in Islam that everything begins as permissible unless something is introduced so as to make it forbidden. This may be a clear verdict of prohibition stated in the Qur'an or in a Hadith or it may be a particular aspect of that thing which takes it out of the realm of what is permissible in order to make it forbidden. Moreover, the authority to prohibit anything belongs to God alone. No one may slam a verdict of prohibition on any matter without supporting his view with clear evidence from the Qur'an or the Prophet's statements or practices. If we take the two practices that you have mentioned and say that either or both of them are forbidden we need to support our verdict. If we cannot produce such evidence whatever we say is without foundation.

Let us begin with birthdays. We have nothing in the Qur'an or the Sunnah to say that the marking of the birthday of children is forbidden. Therefore, we have to look at the action itself in order to find out whether it includes anything contrary to Islamic teaching or principles.

If it does, then it will be forbidden on the basis of what it includes, not on the basis of what it is. Bearing this in mind, we can say that if parents celebrate the birthday of their children to imitate non-Muslims, feeling that the practices of such non-Muslims are better than those Islam encourages, then such a celebration is forbidden. Similarly, if adults mark their own birthday by organizing a function in which un-Islamic practices are condoned, then that is also forbidden. However, if parents organize a birthday party for their young child when children gather to have some games, sing and have some food and enjoy themselves generally, then there is nothing wrong with that.

Commemorating the death anniversary of any person is not acceptable because it is borrowed from the practices of other religions. While it is permissible, and indeed encouraged to pray God to have mercy on those of our relatives who are dead and that He may forgive them all their sins, and also to read the Qur'an and pray God to credit the reward of our recitation to the deceased, what is done in some communities where death anniversaries are common practice does not win Islamic approval. To start with, the practices themselves are worship practices, but they were not practiced or approved by the Prophet, peace be upon him. Hence, they are innovations. That is sufficient to make them unacceptable.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "Whosoever introduces into this matter of ours [meaning Islam] something that does not belong to it shall have it rejected." Secondly, the provision of food into these functions is done in a way that Islam rejects. While giving food to poor people or orphans is highly commendable, the way it is done in these functions makes it totally different. To start with, the food is placed at a certain place and the rituals are then made in a way so as to suggest that this food is special. Besides, the notion that the poor may only eat this food is alien to Islamic thinking.

We may recall here that when a pilgrim slaughters a sheep in pilgrimage or when the Eid sacrifice is slaughtered, we are expressly advised to "eat of it and feed the needy poor." It is only when the sacrifice is offered in compensation for a missed duty that we are not allowed to eat of it.

In this case it is a penalty for an omission. If the person offering it were to eat of it, the purpose of the sacrifice will be missed and the offender will be rewarded rather than penalized. All innovations in matters of religion are unacceptable which means they are forbidden.

2. Let us ask ourselves why should we commemorate the death of any person? Is it to remember them and renew our sorrow for their departure? Or is it to organize some sort of occasion which we assume to generate some reward from Allah and hope that this reward will go to the deceased person? If it is for the first purpose, then such commemorations are unnecessary. If the deceased person is dear enough to us, we will always remember him or her. Every time we do, we can pray for the deceased and supplicate to Allah to forgive him or her. If it is for the second purpose, then we have to examine it in the light of Islamic teachings.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, states very clearly that when a human being dies, "all his actions come to an absolute end, except in one of three ways: a continuous act of charity, a useful contribution to knowledge or a dutiful child who prays Allah for him." The first two are matters that the deceased would have done during his life. A person may decide to make a continuing act of charity, such as by allocating certain capital and ensuring that the proceeds of that investment or capital goes to charity. If, for example, a person decides that certain orchards that he owns should go to charity, he should make it clear that the orchard itself should not be sold. It is kept but the fruits that are produced are either given to the poor directly or sold and the price is given to the poor. Every time this is done, his reward from Allah increases.

The third of these possibilities is prayer by a dutiful child. Now this should not be confined to annual anniversaries of death, but a dutiful child will continue to pray for his deceased parents every day of his life.

If he recites the Qur'an, or passages from it, and prays Allah to give the reward of his recitation to his deceased parents, then it is hoped that this is acceptable to Allah. But it is only in such ways that a human being can do something good to a deceased

person. Hiring professional reciter of the Qur'an is certainly not one of them. It is a practice that cannot be sanctioned by Islam.

Islamic Society: Commemorating the Great In An Islamic Manner

Is it not an expression of a people's loyalty to the memory of its heroes, whose great deeds are recorded in the annals of history, to erect statues in their honor as a reminder to future generations of their achievements and greatness? People's memories are short, and the passage of time will make them forget the past.

Islam abhors excessive glorification of people; no matter how "great" they may be, whether they are living or dead. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Do not glorify me in the same manner as the Christians glorify Jesus, son of Mary, but say, He is a slave of Allah and His Messenger." When his companions wanted to stand up to greet him out of respect, he forbade them, saying: "Do not stand up as the Persians do, some people honoring the others." [Reported by Abu Dawood and Ibn Majah]. The Prophet, peace be upon him, warned his followers against praising him excessively after his death, saying: "Do not make of my grave a site for festivals," [Related by Abu Dawood] and he prayed to his Lord "O my Lord, do not let my grave be made into an idol to be worshipped."

The believers aspire only to that true immortality which can be bestowed by Allah alone, Who knows the secret and the hidden, Who neither misleads nor forgets. In His register of immortality, there is the name of many a person whose greatness has remained unrecognized by the people. Indeed, the Most High loves those God-fearing and religious souls who remember Him in the secrecy of their hearts and minds by speaking about their good deeds, ideas and achievements. The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, the caliphs, the leaders, and imams of Islam were never immortalized in figure or statues.

I quote here part of a lecture entitled "Toward a New Understanding of Islam," by Professor Muhammad al-Mubarak, Dean of the College of Sharee'ah, University of Damascus, delivered at al-Azhar University. The section quoted here contains an incisive analysis of the whole question of how to perpetuate the memory of the great. Quote:

"We are faced with the situation that many new modes, systems and habits which are inconsistent with our correct beliefs and established moral principles have found their way into our social life. Among these is the manner in which Europeans and Americans commemorate their heroes by erecting statues for them. If we examine this matter with an open mind, free of subservience to whatever comes from the West, and reflect our ways of commemorating the lofty achievements of the great, we find the Arabs, in particular, memorialized nothing of their great personages except their noble deeds and good qualities such as fidelity, generosity, and courage. Their manner of perpetuating their memories was to recount tales of their heroes, passing them down from one generation to another, and to compose and recite eulogies in the form of poetry. In this manner, the generosity of Hatim and the bravery of Antarah became proverbial in the days before Islam.

When Islam came, it emphasized the meaning underlying this method. It declared that the best of Allah's creation and the last of His Messengers, peace be upon him, was but a mortal man:

"Say: Indeed, I am a mortal like you; my Lord inspires me." [the Cave — "Al-Kahf" 18: 110]

It emphasized that the worth of human beings lies in their deeds and not in their physical forms; it made the Messenger, peace be upon him, an example for all mankind to follow; and it forbade such sanctions and exaggerated respect for men which resembles adoration and which, by implication, signifies the denigration of the rest of mankind.

When the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, passed away to meet his Lord, the first caliph drew people's attention to this fact, saying,

"If anyone worshipped Muhammad, then [know that] Muhammad is dead, but if anyone worshipped Allah, then Allah is living and does not die." He then recited the words of Allah Ta'ala: "Muhammad is but a messenger; messengers [the like of whom] have passed away before him. If, then, he dies or is killed, will you turn back on your heel?" [the Family Of Imran — "Aale Imran" 3:144]

Islam immortalizes the memories of people because of their good and beneficent deeds; the remembrance of them remains in the hearts of Muslims. Thus, the literate and the illiterate, the young and the old, know about the justice of Omar, the firmness and wisdom of Abu Bakr, and the piety and courage of Ali. No statue made of stone was needed to commemorate any of them because their deeds and qualities are inscribed in peoples' hearts.

Commemoration by means of erecting statues is in reality a regression to the remote past, a descent from a higher plane; it was the method of the Greeks and Romans, which was adopted by Europeans...

With respect to their concept of the nature of man and his true worth, they are far inferior to the Muslims, even to the pre-Islamic Arabs, since because of their inability to grasp the true stature of man and his potentialities, they are able only to conceive of great men as gods, and their gods as men incarnate. What we are pointing out is that it does not befit us to imitate this alien practice which is inferior to our own, and we must not deviate from the ruling from the Sharee'ah that making statues is Haram and is harmful to human psychology and morals."

In Islam, when people recognize the greatness of some noble soul, its perpetuation for coming generations is not achieved by erecting statues for them. The correct Islamic method of commemoration is to keep their memory alive in the hearts and minds by speaking about their good deeds, ideas and achievements.

Islamic Society: Correspondence Before Engagement

Is it forbidden to correspond with one's future wife before the engagement, or even to see her, so that both can become acquainted with each other?

What is intriguing in the way you have phrased your question is your usage of the expression "future wife," in reference to your woman correspondent, even before you are engaged. How can you justify such a description? Be that as it may, the answer to your question depends on your answer to a number of questions, which you have to put to yourself. How serious are both of you about going ahead with the marriage? Do her parents know of your correspondence? And do you write with the thought that your letters may be read by them? If so, are they good Muslims who abide by the teachings of Islam? If you are writing to the lady whom you call your "future wife" in secret, and if both of you fear that your letters may fall into the hands of her parents because they will be very angry with both of you and probably take measures to stop this correspondence, then there is something essentially wrong with this relationship, and it is forbidden.

In principle, there is no objection to a man getting to know his prospective wife's character and to find out whether her manners, education, temperament, characteristics and other qualities are to his liking. A man needs to be sure that his marriage stands a good chance of success. When writing, however, Islamic standards of morality must be observed. Their must not be love letters of the type poets and film-makers try to glorify. The purpose should be clear, and once the person concerned has determined that the other party will be a good marriage partner or the reverse, he should take practical steps accordingly, either severing the relationship or regulating it into an engagement and marriage.

As for seeing her, a Muslim woman has to observe the Islamic standards of propriety and decorum. A man who wants to marry a certain woman may see her in the presence of one or both of her parents, or her adult brother in order to determine whether to go ahead with his proposal and marriage. To see a woman in secret, without the knowledge of her family is not allowed.

Islamic Society: Crescent As An Islamic Symbol

What is the basis of the crescent being an Islamic symbol placed on minarets and in mosques? Is there some religious idea behind it, or is it merely a cultural concept? If so, how come it is so widespread in the Muslim world?

From the Islamic point of view, we have the Qur'anic verse which speaks of the new moons. It says:

“They ask you about the new moons. Say: They are signs for people to mark fixed periods of time, and for the pilgrimage.” [the Cow — “Al-Baqarah” 2: 189]

It does not give any direct answer on the nature of the new moon, or why the moon is born in this particular way. It refers to the usefulness of the moon and its different stages as an indication of the passage of time. To Muslims, the crescent as a symbol of the moon remained such until the time of the Crusades when Muslims made the crescent a symbol they put on their flags to counter the cross symbol which the Crusaders placed on their flags, shields and clothes. Later, the Ottoman government made it a symbol and placed it on its flag. Later the practice was extended and placed on minarets.

But it does not signify anything religious, and it is not associated with any religious concept. It is all an administrative matter. To suggest otherwise is to invent something that has no basis. A mosque that shows no crescent on its minaret or its wall is as good a place for prayer and worship as one with such symbols.

Islamic Society: Dancing — Is It Permissible?

Is dancing permissible? If not, why?

There is no rigid ruling concerning dancing, just like many other activities. Decent dancing which does not aim at arousing unacceptable emotions, and does not make of the women's body an object of exciting desires, and does not involve holding or pulling close to oneself a member of the opposite sex, is permissible. Many communities have folk dancing, which is acceptable from the Islamic point of view. The dancers would be respectably dressed and the dance may involve elaborate movements, but it remains decent. It involves no exciting of desire to do anything forbidden. When men perform such dances, or when women perform them in presence of women audience only, these are permissible.

When the delegation from Abyssinia visited the Prophet, they performed some of their folk dancing in the mosque. The Prophet, peace be upon him, watched them and he also lowered his shoulders so that Lady Ayesha, his wife, could watch. Had every type of dancing been forbidden, the Prophet, peace be upon him, would not have done so. He would have made the ruling clear to all present.

Islamic Society: Decorative Figurines

I collect rabbit figurines as a hobby. Some of these are more stylized and abstract while others are more realistic. Some people object to them, but they are not more than charming decorations. What is the proper view?

Such figurines are not statues. They are not thought of as idols by anyone. There is no harm in using them as house decorations.

Islamic Society: Dress Code Affecting Non-Muslim Expatriates

I arrived in Riyadh three months ago, where I am working as a nurse. As an American Christian, I would like to ask where do traditions take over and whether a foreigner is supposed to abide by them? I am a law-abiding citizen and I do not have any intention to break any law of the country in which I happen to be working. Is dress a matter of law or tradition? Where is a woman like me to stand in relation to it? May I also ask the same question in relation to dealing with men? How far is friendship between a boy and a girl accepted?

The first thing I would like to say to you is that, as you see, I have no hesitation to publish your letter that you have a genuine query and I will attempt to answer you. Your friends who said that we will never publish your letter might have detected something that could be easily misunderstood and taken as veiled criticism, but I realize that it is not meant so. Besides even if it was, every one is entitled to his or her own opinion. We do not impose on anyone our beliefs or values, because these must come through conviction.

It may be difficult for an American like yourself, or a citizen of any secular country for that matter, to appreciate that Saudi society is unique in that here the law and religion are intertwined. This is because the Islamic faith provides a complete code of living and we have adopted Islam as our constitution and the basis of our legal system.

Therefore, what Islam approves is lawful and what it censures is illegal. In matters of social norms, practice and traditions, we look to Islam and adopt what it approves. This does not need to be written down in any legal code. If it is well known, then it is part of our law and anyone will abide by it.

I acknowledge that this could represent considerable difficulty for aliens who happen to live among us. But then Islam is a tolerant religion and once it is established that there is no deliberate attempt to make a public breach of Islamic values and principles, a foreigner is taught that certain types of behavior are unacceptable and that he should be careful so that he does not inadvertently break the law of the land.

When you speak of Islamic dress, it is well known that Islam requires women to cover all their bodies and reveal nothing other than their faces and the lower part of their hands up to their wrists. This is a requirement of the Islamic faith, so it is part of the Saudi law. You cannot describe this as a religious habit only. It is much more than that. Hence, when the government issued a decree regulating this aspect, the decree required Saudi women to abide by the teachings of Islamic faith when they go out, and require foreigners living or visiting the country to respect Saudi values and

traditions. Hence you cannot compare this requirement to wearing a sari when you visit India, or wearing a gallabiya when you are in Egypt. It is not as if women visitors to Europe or America are told to wear skirts and blouses. The case here is one, which has the force of law, not habit or tradition.

Nevertheless, we tend to take a lenient view of foreigners who are loath to do what is required. In large cities, like Jeddah and Riyadh, the authorities are quite understanding in most cases. Occasionally, you could find some you think are over-enthusiastic, but this is quite normal. If you want to avoid the likelihood of running into one, then you should maintain proper appearance and be careful not to violate the law of the land in public.

In Islam the only acceptable relationship between men and women who are not related is that of marriage. We are talking here about relationships, rather than people getting to know each other in work or in the normal transactions that take place within any community or group of people. Your question is detailed to the extent you want me to suggest to you how close you may stand to a colleague you meet in a shopping mall. I am not the one to tell you at what distance you need to stand when you speak to a man.

These are easily recognizable standards of decorum and you should abide by them. Lack of knowledge in this area is not a particularly useful excuse, because these standards are based on common sense in societies which attach due importance to virtue and chastity, allowing nothing of the promiscuity that has become normal practice in the west.

If you truly do not wish to have any trouble with the law of the country, you only need to try to enlighten yourself about its values and social norms. When you do that, you will find that they have a very sound basis that respects human nature and promotes every good aspect in it.

Islamic Society: Falling In Love

What is the Islamic view concerning falling in love?

If we are speaking about the emotion which we call love, then we are simply speaking of a feeling. What we feel toward a particular person is not of great importance, until our feeling is expressed in a particular action. Now if that action is permissible, then well and good. If it is forbidden, then we have incurred something that Allah does not approve of.

If it is love between a man and a woman, the emotion itself is not the subject of questioning on the Day of Judgement. If you feel you love someone, then you cannot control your feeling. If that love prompts you to try to see that woman in secret and to give expression to your feelings in actions permissible only within the bond of marriage then what you are doing is forbidden.

Islamic Society: Fundamentalists — By Definition Every Muslim Is

The basic tenets of Islam are clearly defined and they must be adopted and implemented by every Muslim. However, we often hear the adjective 'fundamentalist' attached to certain groups of Muslims whose activities are described as 'Islamic fundamentalism'. Others who do not seem to fall in the same category are called 'moderates'. Could you please throw some light on these terms?

The words 'fundamentalist' and 'fundamentalism' have only recently come to be used in association with Islamic advocacy. These words made their appearance in the

Western media early in the 1970s [when we had Bhutto's regime in Pakistan], when they were highly ambiguous. Only few people had any real sense of what they meant and why these terms were floated. With hindsight, we can probably trace the usage of these terms and find out why these were invented and their present significance.

In the late sixties and early seventies, Western media seemed unsure of how to describe the trend of Islamic revival and its advocates in the Muslim world. The Western media, however, was keenly aware that Islam revivalism could gather strong momentum and have a great influence on the course of events in Arab countries and in the Muslim world at large. The Arabs had just emerged from a very bitter defeat, which they suffered at the hands of Israelis in the 1967 war. I recall reading a main feature published in one of the main Sunday newspapers in England by Watt Montgomery, a prominent Orientalist, analyzing the situation in the Middle East and clearly pointing out that in their defeat the Arabs could easily turn to Islam and start an Islamic revival. Such early warnings highlighted the need for the Western world to choose how to deal with the forthcoming trend.

It is beyond the scope of this column to analyze the relationship between the West and Islam or to outline its historical background, but there is no disputing the fact that the West is highly interested in maintaining its supremacy throughout the world and a weak and divided Muslim world. Let us be clear on one thing: Some of us appear to do much worse than any colonial power in deepening divisions in the Muslim world. In the final analysis, however, we find that these belong to one of the three groups:

- [1] Simple and naive people who do not realize what causes they are serving;
- [2] Non-believers who pretend to be Muslims; and
- [3] Agents who have sold themselves to forces hostile to Islam.

Many reasons can be given why those who wield the greatest power on world stage are interested in maintaining the status quo but we do not need to go into that in detail. What we are saying is that after the 1967 war, the Western media realized that there was need for a change of emphasis in its approach to Islamic questions.

Up to the mid-sixties, even the serious and quality papers in the West did not hesitate to describe Islamic revivalist movements in very harsh terms. This was part of the residue of the colonial past. In one Muslim area after another, the fight for liberation and independence was started by leaders who were keen to preserve the Islamic identity of their communities. While patriotic elements were ready to join the fight, it was the advocates of Islam who took the leading role, mobilized the people, marshaled the forces and provided most of the fighters and the martyrs. It was in the nature of things that the imperial power should paint a very unattractive picture of the Islamic revivalist movement, which sought to oust them from their colonies.

By the mid-sixties all that had changed. There were only a very few areas still in imperialist hands. The newly independent Muslim countries were now under nationalist governments. But the specter of Islamic revival continued to scare the old and the new imperialist powers. Their age-long prejudice against Islam was not expected to disappear only because they have been kicked out of their old colonies.

The prejudice was still very much in the minds of Western writers, intellectuals and journalists. Some of them tried to consciously suppress it because they realized that it was contrary to their ideals of freedom. Some wanted simply to appear to be objective when they discussed the Islamic matters, though, they were not free from prejudices. To them, Islam represented a hostile force and they were not ashamed to appear to be hostile to Islam and its advocates. It is against this background that the

term fundamentalism was first floated as a description of the Islamic revivalist movement.

At first, it was not met with much enthusiasm. But frequent use and strong hammering meant that in a few years, every one was using it, mostly disapprovingly, in reference to Islamic advocacy. Many writers felt uneasy about the term itself because of its historical Christian associations. Nevertheless, the term stuck and it is now in vogue. Let us now have a brief look at the meaning of this word. The Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines fundamentalism as "Strict adherence to traditional orthodox tenets held to be fundamental to the Christian faith". It gives as an example of these tenets, "the concept of the verbal inerrancy of the Scriptures". The dictionary also states that fundamentalism is opposed to 'liberalism' and 'modernism'.

Thus, to a Western Christian mind, the term 'fundamentalist' refers to a person who rigidly believes that every word in the Bible is strictly correct and must be unhesitatingly followed. This is contrary to the belief of most Christians, including churchmen, throughout the West. Thus, the main thrust of the word is rigidity and rejection of any compromise.

Historically speaking, there has always been a strong conflict between those who advocated a rigid and strict understanding and application of the Scripture and those who favored a more liberal one. Except for very brief periods in European history, rigidity was mostly on the losing side. In our present age, Christian fundamentalism is often viewed as being in marked contrast to the sensible liberalism of modern civilization.

When the word was used in reference to Islam and Muslims, it carried all those unfavorable connotations and combined them with others derived from the Western prejudice against Islam and the West's lack of understanding of the motives and ideals of the Islamic revivalist movements. Today, however, the word is used in a much wider sense. It includes all those who believe that it is the duty of Muslims to implement Islam in their lives at the individual and the community levels. What is even worse is that it blames all the mistakes of different Islamic movements and groupings that are active in politics on Islamic fundamentalism.

Unfortunately, the media in the Muslim world are now using an equivalent of fundamentalism in reference to Islamic revival. Thus they paint the call for the revival of Islam in unfavorable colors. This is a logical result of our continued look at the West as superiors to us. We borrow anything from the West, even its prejudices against us!

In Islam, the whole concept of fundamentalism is totally irrelevant. Every Muslim believes that the Qur'an is the word of Allah and that it has been preserved intact as it was revealed to the Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, over 1400 years ago.

By definition, then, every Muslim must be a fundamentalist. I have not touched upon the question of extremism, which is associated with the Islamic movement nowadays. This is a totally different question, but I can say in brief that Islam does not approve of extremism. It describes the Muslim community as a 'middle' community. Extremism is indeed alien to proper Islamic outlook.

Islamic Society: Help To Non-Muslims Who Are Not Hostile To Islam

A Christian fellow countryman of mine has died recently. A number of our compatriots have contributed to a fund to help his family. Is it permissible for me also to contribute to it?

It is certainly permissible to help a poor Christian family, unless one knows that they are actively hostile to Islam.

It is reported that Omar ibn Al-Khattab saw an elderly Christian man begging. He asked about his situation and when he was told that the man was a Christian, he ordered that he should be given help from the treasury of the Muslim state.

His reasons were that the man paid the tax imposed on non-Muslims when he was able to earn. Therefore, he was entitled to help when he lost that source of his income.

Islamic Society: Hijri Calendar — Unification Of

It is observed that Muslim countries differ in their Hijri calendars, leading to differences in observing Islamic occasions. Why cannot they make an effort to unify the Hijri calendar so that all Muslims observe these occasions at the same time?

There were some efforts in this connection, with experts meetings and research papers done. However, nothing tangible has taken place because of differences among scholars, leading to political authorities refraining from taking the lead. From the Islamic point of view, there is nothing wrong with relying on astronomical data to determine religious occasions in advance, or the beginning of lunar months.

Indeed, this is preferable and more accurate, even though some scholars are either reluctant or opposed to such a step. It is such determination that is at the core of the problem. With such differences and reluctance by political authorities to take the lead, the problem will unfortunately stay with us.

Islamic Society: Holier Than Thou Attitude

Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

Islam teaches us to be modest about what we do or achieve. If you read the works of great Islamic scholars, you always find a sense of modesty running through their writings. Great scholars like the founders of the four major schools of thought have advised their students and followers to always examine what they read and to discard the opinions of those very scholars if they find them to be in conflict with an authentic Hadith. One of them is quoted to have said: "If you determine that a particular Hadith is authentic and you find my view in conflict with it, then throw my opinion out of the window." Others have said: "If you determine that a particular Hadith is authentic, then the Hadith is the view I hold."

Later scholars, who have enriched their respective schools of thought, have laid down the scholarly principle, which Islam advocates, saying "Our view is correct, but it is liable to be mistaken. The views which are in conflict with it are wrong, but they may be proved right." You see in all these a profound sense of modesty, which recognizes that no matter how well read a scholar is, he is liable to make mistakes.

There is nothing surprising in this attitude since the Prophet, peace be upon him, himself has been our first teacher of modesty. Although he was the only example of human perfection for all generations, he lived as an ordinary member of his community. He was always prepared to listen to advice, particularly in matters, which related to the Islamic state and the conduct of its affairs.

When the Muslim army encamped at a particular place in the open space of Badr, in preparation for the first major encounter between the newly established Muslim state and the polytheists of Quraish, one of his companions questioned him about

encamping there. He asked whether the encampment ordered by the Prophet, peace be upon him, was based on inspiration by Allah and the Muslims were not allowed to depart from that place, or it was simply the Prophet's own personal opinion. When the Prophet, peace be upon him, answered that it was his own personal view, the man suggested that the army should take its position further ahead, at a more strategic position, enabling the Muslim army to deprive the enemy of access to water. The Prophet, peace be upon him, immediately acted on that advice and ordered the army to move on.

Moreover, the Prophet, peace be upon him, always used to include in his supplication a prayer for his own forgiveness. We know that Allah has forgiven him all his sins, if any. When his wife, Ayesha once asked him why he exerted himself so much in prayer and supplication when his forgiveness was assured, he answered: "Should I not, then, be a thankful servant of Allah?"

The foregoing demarcates for us the attitude of a good Muslim with regard to how he personally views his position within his community. It is a position of modesty knowing that he is not free of sin, and seeking Allah's forgiveness by trying to do every good action he can. Moreover, a Muslim always tries to enhance goodness in others. He recognizes their good points, praises them and encourages them to be better servants of Allah, without ever suggesting to them that his example is one to be followed. If he speaks to others who do not practice Islam about what they are missing, he certainly can state that he has actually experienced the benefits of following the Islamic way of life, but a good Muslim will always say that this has been a manifestation of Allah's grace bestowed on him. It is nothing that he has earned by his own work, but Allah's compassion and grace have been bestowed because of Allah's generosity. An attitude claiming that anything a person enjoys of Allah's grace has been earned is alien to Islamic behavior.

A truly good Muslim does not say to others: Look at me; I have reached a high standard of obedience to Allah and He has given me so and so as a reward. This is not the attitude of a true Muslim since it is highly presumptuous. Instead he says: My efforts fall far short of what I must do in order to thank Allah for His grace. [This should not be simply a statement but a deep-rooted belief expressed in words. Both the belief and the pronouncement are necessary.] Everything that he has bestowed upon me I have not earned. It is His generosity and grace that has given me this position of honor which I do not deserve. Moreover, a good Muslim feels that others are better than him and he never tries to highlight his good deeds, pressing that whatever good he does constitutes nothing to boast about.

The attitude of the person who is a faultfinder, who is ready to stress to others that he is better than them, is a "holier-than-thou" attitude; which is totally unacceptable in Islam. A Muslim does not try to find fault with others. Nor does he speak to a third person about the fault of someone else. He certainly counsels them to always obey the instructions of Islam and encourages them to do so, but he does not set himself as an example. The example to be followed is that of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and his companions. Such people may even have read a great deal but such reading may have been of all sorts of books, some of, which may give views, which, are not approved by Islam. This may lead to confusion. Islamic readings should follow a set pattern in the same way, as reading in any field of study must have a correct approach. You do not pick up a collection of books on medicine or on law or mechanical engineering and read them through in order to claim that you have become a doctor or a lawyer or an engineer. You have to follow a systematic approach to any type of study. The same applies to Islamic studies.

It is also not up to a person to describe other people as believers or non-believers, Muslims or non-Muslims. A person is a Muslim if he declares that he believes that there is no deity save Allah and that Muhammad, peace be upon him, is Allah's

messenger. No one can deprive any person of the fact of being a Muslim unless that person goes back on his declaration of belief. Judging others as non-believers is not up to anyone of us. It is Allah who judges them.

Islamic Society: Humanitarian Duties

We Muslims seem to take lightly our duties toward other people. Hence, our humanitarian feelings are very low. Is this because our education system tends to mix up our list of priorities? Some of the responsibility should be placed on our parents. Many of us seem to be forgetting that to be compassionate and humanitarian is part of worship. Please comment.

You have pointed out a problem, which has become highly relevant in the life of Muslim communities of today. Duties toward God are over emphasized while duties toward fellow human beings are given a low position on the list of priorities, both at the individual and community levels. Yet, a good balance is the main characteristic of Islam and its code of living. Hence, a Muslim's responsibilities toward other human beings are indeed given a very strong emphasis in Islam.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, states that a Muslim has a "sanctity" which means that he must always be respected, well treated and immune from assault on his person, property and integrity. Hence, the Prophet, peace be upon him, defines the relationship of brotherhood between Muslims, and what it entails in practical life. He says that a Muslim is a brother to every Muslim: the one never treats the other unjustly, nor lets him down, nor tries to humiliate him." He also tells us that the "sanctity" of a believer is "in God's view, greater than the sanctity of the Ka'abah."

I hasten to state that the word "sanctity" is inadequate to give all the connotations of the Arabic term the Prophet, peace be upon him, has used. Suffice it to say that the Hadith implies that all rights, minor or major, that belong to a Muslim must be always respected. A person at the receiving end of injustice is sure to have God's help. The Prophet, peace be upon him, tells that "supplication by a person treated unjustly goes directly to God without any hindrance." This very statement should be sufficient to make anyone who exercises any degree of power to be on his guard lest he should treat anyone unjustly. Moreover, mutual help between members of a Muslim community is highly emphasized. Try to help anyone with something of importance to him or her, and you are certain to receive God's help in accomplishing what you need.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "Whoever helps his brother with a certain need shall have God helping him in accomplishing his own purpose." The Prophet, peace be upon him, himself was the best example of extending a helping hand to all and sundry. Even the weakest member of the community could draw on an inexhaustible source of help from the Prophet, peace be upon him. The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, who was also the head of the Muslim state, would let even a slave make any demand on his time and service. We should not forget that the Arabian society in the pre-Islamic days was so unjust to both women and slaves. The Prophet, peace be upon him, was also the best of neighbors and he emphasized that neighbors have a claim on our kindness. He tells us "The Angel Gabriel has reminded me so often of the rights of a neighbor until I began to think that a neighbor may have a claim to inheritance." This means that the status of a neighbor should be viewed as comparable to that of a family member.

According to Muslim scholars, [being] a neighbor is not [limited to] only the person living next door. The persons living forty houses away in every direction are also your neighbors. On the other hand, when the Prophet, peace be upon him, heard one of his companions say to Bilal during an argument, "You son of a black woman", he was very angry indeed. He said to that man: "You insult him on account of his mother?"

You certainly have not purged yourself from the values of an ignorant society." All that gives us just an idea of the sort of emphasis Islam attaches to the rights of individuals, particularly those who are vulnerable in society. We must not forget that the Prophet's conduct serves as an example, which we are required to follow. It is important to realize here what sort of example the Prophet, peace be upon him, sets in respect of family life.

As for the treatment of women, the Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "The best among you are those who treat their wives best. I am indeed the best of you in the way I treat my wives." We must look at this Hadith from the right angle. The first part of the Hadith lays down a principle, which we must implement in our lives, because it is part of the Prophet's guidance. The second tells us of his practical example, which we must follow. Therefore, there is a double emphasis here on the importance of treating wives well. When we compare this with the notion that prevails among the overwhelming majority of men in the Muslim world, we conclude that what we do is at variance with the Prophet's instructions.

The letters that I receive from readers asking what they should do because their wives do not obey their instructions are too numerous for comfort. Little do they remember that the kind treatment of wives which the Prophet, peace be upon him, has encouraged by word and deed is the best way for them to win their wives' respect and a peaceful family life. The Prophet's wives have told us everything about his behavior in the privacy of his own home. There is not a single report that the Prophet, peace be upon him, ever rebuked any of his wives for any act of commission or omission.

Even with his servants the Prophet, peace be upon him, was the kindest man. Anas ibn Malik reports: "I served the Prophet, peace be upon him, for ten years and he never said to me: Why did you do this, or why did you omit that." Visiting delegations to Madinah often thought that Anas and his mother belonged to the Prophet's own family, when they were only in his service. Moreover, we are told in an authentic Hadith that when the Prophet, peace be upon him, was at home, "he was in the service of his family."

We tend to overlook all this and give little importance to the high-priority objective of Islam, namely, the eliminating of all injustice. People treat their wives unjustly, and they are unjust to people in their employment. Yet voices which speak against that remain faint, particularly of Muslim scholars.

It is a fact of life that contemporary scholars have not addressed this question adequately. On the other hand, we have so much said and written about matters that cannot be described as being of equal importance. Look at the emphasis given to issues like the permissibility or otherwise of music, singing, photography, wearing a long robe that covers a man's ankles, etc. Look at the volume of spoken and written reminders on these and similar issues such as the length of a man's beard, the covering of a woman's face, the joining of people's feet in congregational prayer, etc. Some of these matters have their importance no doubt, but all of them are controversial in the sense that scholars have always had different views concerning each one of them. Moreover, they are far less serious than being unjust to one's wife, servant, employee, neighbor, or indeed fellow human being.

We should always remember that God may forgive us all sins that relate to our duties toward Him, but He will not forgive us anything that is due to a human being until that person is ready to forgive it. Hence, balance between these two must be restored before we can truly claim to lead an Islamic life.

Islamic Society: Hunger For Food & Sex

God has implanted in human beings two types of hunger: the first and stronger is that which is satisfied with food, and the other is the hunger for sex. It is most difficult to avoid these physical needs and natural tendencies. In any circumstances, living creatures will find a way to fulfill both needs. Please comment.

May I ask: Who is responsible for what? It is true that God has given us both these natural desires, but each of them has a definite purpose. The first gives us the nourishment to sustain us. Thus it makes our survival possible. The other, namely sex, helps us procreate and ensures our continued existence. This means that the desire for food satisfies the instinct of self-preservation, while sex answers the need for preservation of the human kind. God has allowed us to seek fulfillment of both desires, but he has placed certain restrictions, which ensure that we go about their fulfillment in a legitimate way. Thus, we work in order to earn money to buy food and preserve ourselves. We get married which gives us companionship and a family to contribute to the preservation of the human species. Each of these methods is legitimate for the fulfillment of our desires.

But if we go about their fulfillment in a forbidden way, such as stealing, bribery or looting other people's property, then we certainly are responsible for these crimes. Similarly, we are accountable for any act, which seeks to give us an illegitimate way of satisfying our sexual desire. If He has facilitated marriage and made it the proper frame for a legitimate fulfillment of our sexual desires, then why do human beings go beyond that limit and commit fornication and adultery? It is not God who has told us to go about its fulfillment in such an illegitimate way. It is man's choice. Therefore, man is accountable.

To sum up, there is a legitimate way to satisfy every human desire. If we seek such fulfillment in a legitimate way, we are rewarded. As the Prophet, peace be upon him, has mentioned, even when a person satisfies his sexual urge with his wife, he will be rewarded for seeking this fulfillment legitimately. Similarly, if he goes about its fulfillment in a forbidden method, he is to be punished, if God determines so, because of his choice.

Islamic Society: Music — Conflicting Views On Its Permissibility

1. According to a Hadith in Al-Bukhari, when Abu Bakr rebuked his daughter Ayesha for the singing and music he heard, the Prophet, peace be upon him, stopped him saying that it was the Eid. Yet we often hear that musical instruments are forbidden in Islam.

2. Please give us a clear ruling on singing and music.

1. The Hadith you refer to is reported by Ayesha who says: "The Prophet, peace be upon him, entered my home when I had two maidens singing some of Bu'ath songs. He reclined on the bed and turned his face away. Abu Bakr came in and rebuked me, saying: 'What! Satan's horn at the Prophet's' The Prophet, peace be upon him, turned to him and told him to leave them alone. When he slept I signaled them to leave."

The Hadith does not speak of musical instruments, but of the two maids singing. Abu Bakr used the word 'horn', which in Arabic refers to a wooden instrument like the oboe, but this may be figurative. Anyway, the Hadith is cited by scholars as evidence for the permissibility of singing, and some scholars cite it also in argument that musical instruments are allowed in Islam, except where the music is used for a purpose contrary to Islamic values and principles.

There is certainly no clear-cut, definitive statement by the Prophet, peace be upon him, that musical instruments are forbidden. Hence, the issue is controversial, with many scholars arguing for and against prohibition. I personally feel that the evidence of permissibility is stronger. But I value the opposite view supported by a number of highly respectable scholars.

2. On the question of singing, there is little difference, with the majority view making singing permissible unless it includes some obscenity or something clearly contrary to Islamic teachings. What more evidence do we need in support of its permissibility than the Hadith that mentions the presence of two maids singing in the Prophet's home on a day of Eid? When Abu Bakr tried to stop them, the Prophet, peace be upon him, told him to leave them alone for the day was an Eid day.

Music, on the other hand, has always been subject to sharp controversy, with distinguished scholars supporting both views of permissibility and prohibition. The fact that such controversy has lingered for so long tells us that we do not have a definitive statement clearly pointing in either direction. Had there been one, the controversy would have ended long time ago. What we can say is that music, which encourages un-Islamic practices, is forbidden for that reason. Music that is relaxing and has a healthy effect on the listener is permissible.

Islamic Society: Music — Not Liking Was An Incidence Or A Ruling

Is there a Hadith that the Prophet put his fingers in his ears when he heard music? Could this mean that music is forbidden?

Yes there is a Hadith, which says that. The was walking with his companion, Abdullah ibn Omar, when he heard some singing. He placed his fingers in his ears. A short while later, he asked his companion if he could still hear the singing, and Abdullah confirmed that he did. They walked on with the still putting his fingers in his ears. Again he asked his companion if he could still hear, and the answer was the same. They walked on before the asked the same question the third time. Abdullah said that he could not hear. The took his fingers out of his ears. Some people cite this Hadith as indicating a prohibition of singing or music, but it does not signify that. Had it been so, the would have told his companion to follow his example. The could not delay explaining a ruling at all. The fact that he let his companion continue to hear indicates that what he heard was not forbidden. It is only a case of hearing what he disliked.

Islamic Society: Music — Prohibition Of Musical Instruments?

Could you please explain the Hadith that quotes the Prophet as saying: "There will be in my community people who will treat as lawful: fornication, the wearing of silk, wine and ma'azif, or musical instruments." Does this mean that the use of musical instruments is equal to the other prohibitions mentioned in this Hadith?

The first point to make about this Hadith is that we need to know the exact wording of a Hadith in order to understand it. We also need to know the meaning of the words in Arabic, and how they were used during the Prophet's time.

We tend today to equate the Arabic word ma'azif with musical instruments, but when we look it up in a reliable Arabic dictionary, we find that it does not have this meaning. The whole entry of the root azafa, from which the word is derived, speaks of something else, which means "to turn away from something, abandon, become distracted, etc." This was certainly the primary meaning for which the word was used at the time of the Prophet, peace be upon him. Hence, ma'azif, as used in this

Hadith, means “things that distract a person away from what is good or from his duties.”

A point that should be raised here is how the word has come to be associated with musical instruments. One very secondary meaning of the root that we find in large Arabic dictionaries is given as follows: “the *azf* of something is its sound.” In recent times, when radio became the main means of broadcasting, and music was one of the major items in radio programs, the word *azf* became associated with music and musical instruments.

Thus, radio programs may include: “solo *azf* of guitar, violin or piano,” while a tune that is not accompanied by singing is called *ma'zoofah*. At the beginning, such words were always accompanied by the adjective “musical”, which indicates that the Arabs did not automatically associate them with music. With frequent usage, however, the adjective was dropped as always happens in human language, where word economy is always an important consideration.

This shows that the Hadith has nothing to do with musical instruments, or music in general, unless we consider music to be part of the distractions to which the Prophet, peace be upon him, is referring.

The other point the reader raises is whether these four items are equal in their degree of prohibition. The answer is definitely not. No one has ever equated the wearing of a silk garment with such cardinal sins as fornication and wine drinking. Wearing silk is perfectly permissible to half of the Muslim community, namely women. In certain cases it is also permissible for men who have a reason for exemption. It is permissible to use a strip of silk to strengthen a garment at the point where it can easily be torn. How can we, then, put it on a par with wine drinking or fornication? The same applies to distractions. Each is considered on its own.

The final point is that this Hadith does not signify prohibition. The way it is phrased makes it informative. The Prophet, peace be upon him, is simply telling us that such people will exist who see nothing in such matters and consider them permissible. A prohibition must be phrased in a clear way, free from ambiguity. This is not the case here. The Hadith is clear in its import, which tells us about such people whose action of approving such things is certainly reprehensible, but it may not be taken as evidence of prohibition.

Islamic Society: Muslim Community — Classes Within

In my country, people are classified as either Sayyid or Sheikh or Pathan. There are restrictions on intermarriages between these groups, which would prevent, for example, the marriage of a Sayyid girl to a Pathan man. It is also said that Sayyids are not allowed to receive Zakah. Could you please comment on these classifications?

In all societies, you find sections of people claiming privileges for themselves. They may base this on wealth, birth, race, etc. If the community is willing to concede such privileges to them, they will try to consolidate their position and claim more privileges. What happened in Europe before the French Revolution was the clearest example of what evils may spread in a society or class as a result. This, however, was not limited to Europe. We have only to remember the caste system in India, which made the minority of the people subservient to the elite. The best society is that which refuses altogether the notion of classifying people into masters and slaves, aristocracy and masses, feudal lords and peasants, etc. It was not long ago that democratic societies tried to establish the principle of equality of all people in practice after it had been preached in theory for a long time. Nevertheless, the wealthy and the powerful continue to exercise influence, which is disproportionate to

their number. Under communism on the other hand, the party members enjoyed great privileges and made themselves into a class of their own.

What does Islam say to all that? In the Qur'an we read:

"Mankind, we have created you out of one male and one female and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may get to know each other. The most noble among you in Allah's view is the most God-fearing." [Private Apartments — "Al-Hujurat" 49: 13]

This verse establishes the basic Islamic principle that all human beings are equal, since they descend from the same man and woman. Over the centuries, they have formed different nations and numerous tribes. When they get to know each other, they stand to enrich human life. The only recognized field of excellence in which it is possible to distinguish any one person or group of them over the rest is fearing Allah, a quality that does not fail to bring out the best in every human being.

The division you have mentioned in your country is alien to the basic principles of Islam. You speak of an automatic blockage of the marriage of a man from one group with a woman from another. How could this be justified when Allah says in the Qur'an: ***"Believers are but brothers"*** [[Private Apartments — "Al-Hujurat" 49: 10] The possibility of objecting to a marriage is limited to such a situation as when a woman feels that marrying a particular person will not give her the sort of life to which she is used to. In other words, the marriage will mean a downgrading of her. Otherwise, the guiding principle in sanctioning a marriage is the Hadith, which tells all Muslim parents and guardians: "If a man whose strength of faith and honesty are of acceptable standard, comes to you with a proposal of marriage, then accept his proposal. If you do not, you will cause friction and a great deal of corruption in the land."

Let us look briefly at the class known as 'Sayyid'. A 'Sayyid' has come to refer in many parts of the Islamic world to a person who claims to be a descendant of the Prophet, peace be upon him. I can tell you that many who claim to be 'Sayyid' cannot substantiate their claims. However, even if the claim is correct, it does not confer any particular status to the person concerned. He is still required to do his Islamic duties as everyone else. He will be rewarded in the same manner and his sins will be taken against him in the same way. He will either be forgiven or punished by Allah as He, in his sole discretion, determines. His descent does not give him any immunity. Nor does it give him any special status in society. Let us remember what the Prophet, peace be upon him, said to his own daughter: "Fatimah, work for your future life because I shall avail you nothing [if Allah is not pleased with you]." This is a clear instruction by the Prophet, peace be upon him, to his own daughter that her own actions are the only factor which determine her standing in the life to come. If this applies to Fatimah, who can say that his [being] descendent gives him any privileges whatsoever.

It is true that the Prophet, peace be upon him, has made it clear that Zakah is not to be paid to him, his household and descendants. They have, however, different sources of income from the Islamic state, such as a share of what the Muslim state may gain in the fighting. However, many scholars are of the view that it is permissible to give Zakah to descendants of the Prophet, peace be upon him, if they are poor, particularly because the other sources from which they would have benefited are largely unavailable.

Islamic Society: Muslims In Banks & Insurance Companies

Should Muslims employed in banks or insurance companies be asked to give up their jobs? Will it not lead to further unemployment among

Muslims who are already economically backward, especially in non-Muslim countries? What should be the right strategy in this case?

I have written at length about life insurance and shown that it is permissible. Therefore, a person who works in life insurance is engaged in a legitimate job. As for people working in banking, they should look at the actual job they do. If it does not have anything to do with usury, then they may continue in their job since they are legitimate ones. On the other hand, if a Muslim works in a bank and his job requires him to be involved in transactions, which are of usurious nature, then he should start looking for another job. He does not have to quit his job immediately. He is only required to make an earnest attempt, which does not involve any breach of Islamic teachings. We must not forget that the Prophet, peace be upon him, has cursed the person who devours usury, the one who pays it and the one who writes the contract between the two and the witnesses to this contract.

In such matters Islam takes a very practical view. It does not require a Muslim to quit his job immediately, particularly if he has a family to look after. It advises him to try to find a new job and when he has found one, he can quit his job at the bank.

Islamic Society: Nationalism & Islamic Brotherhood

To what extent has the concept of Islamic brotherhood been challenged by the rise of tribalism, nationalism and racism among Muslims? Could you highlight how this led to creating division in the Muslim world and the role of the colonial powers in aggravating such divisions?

It is difficult to assign a time when tribal, national or racist movement started. In fact such trends are age-old in human history. This arises from the fact that a human being is unable to look after all his needs by himself. Man needs to live in a family, and the family needs to be in society. Hence, human society was organized first on blood relationships, which led to the recognition of tribes. Nationalism adds geographical and racial factors to that of tribalism. However, one of the most important factors for the rise of such trends is the social and human need of security. This is also at the core of racism. When a human group feels its interests threatened by competition, it tries to reduce that competition by narrowing the bonds, so as to exclude certain sub-groups. Thus a society may not welcome a group of immigrants or a group of a different ethnic origin or color, etc.

At the heart of all this are selfish concerns, greed and competition over resources. People have shown a great ability to draw distinction between themselves and others, always branding the other group as bad, filthy, strange, etc. Sometimes, these prejudices are drawn between people separated by a river, a mountain, or even a street. The recent wars in Kosovo and Bosnia Herzegovina show how divisive such prejudice can be.

There is no doubt that nationalistic calls were instrumental in the break up of the Ottoman Empire, which was the main Muslim State for over 400 years. It was started by the advocacy of Turkish nationalism, and then a similar call of Arab nationalism was advocated. It is no coincidence that non-Muslims started such advocacy in both cases. The advocacy of such nationalism created division in the ranks of the population drawing one people against another, after a long period during which all ethnic groupings were treated on equal basis. It is wrong to say, however, that the rise of nationalism was the cause of the collapse of the Ottoman Islamic State.

The Empire was suffering from a number of weakening factors. Indeed these weaknesses contributed to the rise of nationalism and other debilitating factors. In turn, nationalism added further weaknesses and the final result was internal strife culminating in war that is glorified as a major revolution. Colonial powers added a

great deal to the division in Islamic countries. Their golden rule was, “Divide and rule.” Thus they nurtured tribal divisions within the same country or colony, and they also promoted a sense of nationhood, which was later to divide countries and even cause them to be in war against each other.

Islam disapproves of all segregational and discriminatory ideas, whatever their standpoints. Islam considers all mankind equal, as they descend from one soul and its mate, as it is clear in the opening verse of Surah 4. While Islam maintains and strengthens bonds of kinship, it disapproves of making such bonds a criterion to discriminate between people. Such bonds are utilized to make society more cohesive, with people benefiting by the talents and abilities of one another.

Anyone who discriminates between people on the basis of any such criterion is guilty of a sort of fanaticism that is condemned by Islam. God says in the Qur'an:

“Mankind! We have created you out of a male and a female so that you may get to know one another. The most honorable among you in God’s sight are the most God-fearing.”

Speaking of tribal and national prejudices, the Prophet, peace be upon him, says: “Abandon that, for it stinks.” He also says: “Anyone who advocates a form of national prejudice or fanaticism does not belong to us.” There can be no clearer condemnation than that.

Islamic Society: Non-Believers As Household Employees

Could you please explain the Islamic view of employing non-believers as household workers?

The first thing to say here is that when we employ someone to do any kind of work, we should do so on the basis of well defined criteria. The Qur'an mentions two of these which are most important, namely, ability and honesty. If you consider these, you are bound to find that they are essential in all types of work, whether at home, in an office, or in the marketplace. Moreover, neither of these is sufficient on its own. If a person is highly able and qualified to do a particular type of work, but is dishonest, the latter quality makes his ability of little use, because his dishonesty may undermine everything that he is able to do. On the other hand, if we are to choose an employee on the basis of his honesty only, he may not be able to do the work assigned to him.

Neither of these two qualities is exclusive to Muslims. There are people of both qualities, which follow all religions, or may be without religion at all. What we have to consider is whether the fact that the person's beliefs will affect his work, or will produce any negative effect on the work to be undertaken or on those who come in contact with him. If not, then we can employ that person.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, employed a non-believer as a guide to show him an unfamiliar way to Madinah at the time when Quraish, his opponents, were trying to assassinate him. His guide was one of the best available to travel with him and his companion, Abu Bakr, across the desert following uncharted routes. Had his guide been dishonest, he could have informed Quraish of their route and the Prophet, peace be upon him, might have encountered great difficulties. The man's honesty was of paramount importance.

If you are employing an unbeliever at home, you have to consider the duties you are assigning to her. If her beliefs will have little effect on anyone around, as in the case when she is responsible only for housework, then there is no problem with

appointing her. If she is look after the [upbringing and] education of your children, you have to consider matters differently.

Islamic Society: Oppression As the Most Hateful Practice

Oppression is, indeed, the most hateful practice a human being may follow. It is degrading to the one who commits it and to the one at the receiving end of it. It is for this reason that Islam stresses in a variety of methods the importance of justice.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, lists seven groups of people who will have Allah's shelter on the Day of Judgement. The first of these is a 'just ruler'. With such emphasis, it is not surprising that Islamic history has known a long chain of fair-minded rulers.

Islamic Society: Peacemaking As Compared To Worship

Could you please comment on the Hadith that says that peacemaking is superior in degree to fasting, prayer and alms giving.

The Hadith to which you refer may be translated as follows: "The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: 'Shall I tell you of a degree that is higher than prayer, fasting and charity?' His companions said: 'Yes, please.' The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: 'Setting internal relations right.' Then he said: 'Letting internal relations go wrong is the eraser.'" (Related by Al-Bukhari in Al-Adab Al-Mufrad). In another version an addition explaining the meaning of "the eraser" quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: "Letting internal relations go wrong is the eraser. I do not say that it removes hair, but it erases faith."

It is clear that the Hadith lays strong emphasis on keeping relations within the Muslim community at the best and highest level. This is something also stressed in the Qur'an where we read:

"Have fear of God and set to right your internal relations. Obey God and His Messenger, if you are true believers." (Spoils Of War — "Al-Anfa'al" 8: 1)

It should be noted that the expression used in the Hadith and the Qur'anic verse is the same. It means more than just making peace. It aims to achieve stronger and better relations within the Muslim community, which is characterized by the Qur'anic description: ***"All believers are but brothers."*** (Private Apartments — "Al-Hujurat" 49: 9)

Brotherly relations are much closer and more intimate than the mere absence of conflict. Such relations mean mutual love and care throughout the Muslim community, where every individual is important, and every complaint should be addressed. Setting internal relations right means the absence of any injustice, ensuring that everyone's rights are respected, and everyone is looked after. A community may not have quarrels and disputes, but the element of care for one another may be absent. This is not the way Islam wants its community to be. It wants that everyone care for everyone else, trying to remove their distress and to bring them happiness. This is the sort of things that the Prophet, peace be upon him, refers to when he describes it as a degree higher than prayer, fasting and charity. This does not mean that we should stop these acts of worship and concentrate on social relations. In fact only when we practice our worship properly can we attend to other duties, particularly at the social level.

Islamic Society: Prostitution — Eradication Of

What is the Islamic answer to prostitution? How can it be eradicated?

As you realize, Islam has a very serious moral code. It does not approve of any sexual practices, outside marriage. Islamic legislation includes very severe punishments for adultery. To go to a prostitute earns the man the same severe punishment.

When we want to know the answer Islam provides to a social problem, and prostitution is one, we have to consider Islamic society as a whole. In a Muslim society, no woman needs to work in order to earn her living. Many prostitutes are first drawn into this horrid practice by their poverty. Some girls find themselves having to earn the living of other people in their families, such as a sickly mother or young children. They are unable to find any proper work. Some of them may fall in the trap of a person who runs a brothel and they are dragged into a vice net. In a Muslim society, such a girl need only go to the authorities and explain her position. She will either be given a job or provided with an income to look after herself or her family. I realize that this is not the case in many Muslim countries, simply because many of them have abandoned Islamic values and principles, and they do not implement Islam as a whole. Once they move towards Islam, such problems will start to be solved in the easiest of manners.

I will give you the example of Sudan when, a few years ago, the former president Numeiri decided to put the country on a course that would regain its Islamic character. One of the problems addressed was that of prostitution. Women who were engaged in this practice were dealt with on individual basis. The circumstances of each one of them were considered separately. If it was possible to find any one of them a husband, she got married. If not, she was helped to find a proper job. Some were helped by the state to run a small shop. Moreover, they were put under supervision. They were clearly informed that if they reverted back to prostitution, they would be locked up. Most of them were very happy with the new arrangement because it saved them of a practice, which they abhorred. I suppose that if any Muslim country decided today to implement Islam in full, it will deal with this problem on the same lines.

Islamic Society: Public Contravention Of Islamic Principles

In some Muslim countries, we see mosques and Islamic centers functioning freely, while at the same time, places with un-Islamic character, such as drinking and gambling places, discos, etc. enjoy freedom of operation. When officials are asked how can such operations be permitted in a Muslim society, they reply that law permits all types of activity and people may choose where to go. Please comment.

The attitude the reader describes is like that of a father who places a packet of cigarettes before his young son, and shows him how to smoke and leaves him to try it. When the son picks up the habit of smoking, people blame the father and he protests that he never suggested to his son that he should smoke.

A father who does this is certainly one to be censured by any moral and health standard. By placing the packet of cigarettes in front of his son, he gives him a message that smoking is an acceptable behavior, when it is both seriously injurious to health and forbidden in Islam.

Similarly a government in a Muslim country, which allows the public contravention of Islamic principles and gives licenses to places such as bars and gambling clubs to function in full view of the Muslim society contravenes Islamic law, which it is supposed to uphold. The argument that people may choose what they want does not carry any weight in Islamic standards. It is the responsibility of a Muslim government to help people to remain within the limits of what God has permitted and to steer away from what He has forbidden. By allowing such places to function, a government fails in the fulfillment of this responsibility.

Here we are treating the public as young children, as in our example of the father and the young son, but we make only this analogy in order to show that failing to do one's duty may lead others to suffer immense harm. The father in our example failed in his duty to protect his son against harmful substances. In the question asked by the reader, the officials failed in their duty to help the population to maintain the path acceptable to Islam.

Some people may wonder how this affects the principle of freedom of choice. Islam certainly upholds this principle in the very basic question of believing in God or rejecting the faith. God says in the Qur'an: "**No compulsion is admissible in matters of faith.**" [the Cow — "Al-Baqarah" 2: 256] Hence, Islam does not compel anyone to follow its teachings. People do so in complete freedom. But what we are speaking about here is the public contravention of Islamic teachings. This is not allowed in a Muslim society.

Islamic Society: Singing For Charitable Purposes

I intend to study medicine in a European or American university, but I also have a strong desire to become a heavy metal singer or a pop singer. As I am a Muslim, I will not sing in clubs or discotheques. Nor will I drink or get involved in any of the practices, which are clearly forbidden in Islam. I will continue to observe my Islamic duties, and will make much of my singing for charitable purposes. Some people suggest that I will still be making a sin if I do so. Please comment.

Scholars differ with regard to how singing is viewed in Islam. Many say that it is permissible while others say that it is undesirable or discouraged, and still others view it as forbidden. People, who have a very strict view of singing, repeat some sayings, which speak of certain punishments to those who listen to singing. Such sayings, or those of them, which are attributed to the Prophet, lack in authenticity.

It is perhaps the weightier opinion that singing is permissible. It is the view of many scholars in the Hanbali school of thought.

To start with, singing is a natural tendency of human beings. People like a melodious voice and a pleasant tune. When the words which are sung have a beautiful and decent meaning, it is enchanting to listen to them. When we add this to the fact there is no clear statement by the Prophet, peace be upon him, which can be construed to forbid singing, we are bound to conclude that the view which permits singing is weightier.

Having said that, I must add that Islam does not encourage that singing becomes institutionalized in the sense that there are places which people may frequent in order to listen to songs, as happens in clubs and discotheques. Frequenting such places is strongly discouraged.

I commend your attitude in seeking to know the Islamic view of what you have in mind before actually doing it. This is the proper attitude of a Muslim, especially when he is embarking on something on which the Islamic view may not be immediately clear to him. I also recommend your resolution to abide by Islamic teachings and not to commit any of such practices which Islam forbids. But I still have a number of points to make in connection with what you intend to do.

I should perhaps start with explaining a principal Islamic legislation that has a far-reaching effect. This concerns lawful matters, where the verdict is changed, when the practice of such lawful matter leads to something unlawful. When there is a strong likelihood that a person gets involved in something which is in itself permissible, then we tell him that the permissible matter is no longer permitted to him because it

leads to doing what is forbidden. This principle may work at individual or community levels. The permissible practice may not generally lead to anything forbidden, except in individual cases. In such a situation we say that it is forbidden to those whom it leads to do what is sinful.

I have pointed this principle out in order to ask you to consider your position after you have become a famous singer. Will not there be a strong temptation for you to sing in parties or clubs or dancing places? Will you be able to resist the inevitably numerous attempts by agents, friends, and admirers who will try to get you to change your resolution, offering in return large amounts of money, or prestige, or both?

You have also to consider the effects of your singing on your audience. If you become a pop star and produce records that have a strong appeal to teenagers in a permissive Western society, do you not think that you also bear some responsibility of what may take place in their clubs and discotheques when they dance to your music? You may not be there singing to them, but your records will be played. Moreover, can you escape them when they hunt you at your house, in your hotels and wherever you go?

You may say that it is your firm intention not to have anything to do with all that. It may be so, but we have an important principle in Islam, which tells that it is always better to avoid any gray tea, which may lead to something forbidden. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says that

"What is permissible is clear and what is forbidden is also clear. In between, there are some matters, which are rather doubtful. He who avoids what is doubtful makes sure of staying within the bounds of his faith. He who falls in them will fall in sin. He is just like a shepherd who takes his sheep for grazing close to a restricted area: he is very likely to overstep its boundaries. Every king has a protected area of his own. Allah's protected area is that made up by what He has forbidden."

This Hadith gives you very clear guidance Do not go near what is forbidden lest you may fall in it.

If I have a son of your age and he expresses to me the same desire as you have expressed, I am clear in my mind what advice I will give him. I will say to him that he may take up singing as a hobby which he practices himself, at home, or with his closest friends. But I will strongly discourage from taking up singing as a career. The risks are too evident to be ignored.

Islamic Society: Supporting Family & Priorities In Obligations

I am the only child of my mother. A few years ago, my father married another woman by whom he had five daughters. My stepmother died in a car accident. My father is unable to work and he has little money of his own. I realize that I have to support him whether I am rich or poor. What I am asking about is my obligation toward his five daughters whom I have never seen. I have my wife and my own children to look after. I have asked my father whether some of my stepmother's relatives could look after one or two of his daughters, but he says that is not possible, because the girls' grandparents are already dead although they have uncles and aunts alive.

I certainly appreciate your problem, which can be seen to be very acute if your income is not sufficient to provide for such a large extended family. You seem to be the only breadwinner for both your own family and your father's new family. That can really be a real burden on anyone. In a truly Islamic state, help would be forthcoming either through the Zakah system or the social security system of which Zakah is the major component.

Your conflict is really between looking after your own children and looking after your half-sisters who are probably of the same age as your children. Some scholars hold it that your wife, father and your children have the first claim on you. Others do not put sisters in any secondary degree; they put them in the same grade with your wife, father and children. I am more inclined to this view which Imam Ibn Hazm summarizes in the following paragraph:

"It is obligatory on everyone, man or woman, grownup or young, that he begins with his own essentials which are absolutely necessary, such as food and clothing, according to his needs. After that, everyone may be compelled to support those who do not have money of their own and have no income to support themselves, be they their parents, grandparents or even higher, sons and daughters and their children and their grandchildren and brothers, sisters and wives. All these are considered equal in as far as he is obliged to support them. None of them can take precedence over another, even though this may mean that what he will leave behind [after] his death will be very little. They, however, need to help each other in reducing his burden. If he is left with nothing after securing his own basic needs, he is not obliged to support anyone of these whom we have mentioned. But if he supports them all, providing them with food and clothing, and he is left with something extra, he is compelled to support those of his close relatives and heirs who have nothing of their own and have no jobs to support themselves. These are paternal uncles and aunts, maternal uncles and aunts, even though they may be of a higher degree than his immediate ones as well as his nephews and nieces as far as they may go.

"What is meant by heirs are those of his relatives who have claim to a share of his inheritance which cannot be superseded by anyone else. If they are superseded by other heirs, and their shares are thus taken over by others, then he has no obligation to support them.

"If any of the above falls ill, he is also obliged to look after them and provide for their nursing. If any of these is able to earn a living, through whatever type of work, even though it may be menial, they forfeit their claim to be supported, with the exception of parents, grandparents and wives. A man is required to do what he can to spare these relatives the need to do any menial job."

This is what Imam Ibn Hazm says and it is well supported by firm evidence. Many scholars agree with most of what he has said, although some of them assign particular grading for these relatives.

Tariq ibn Abdullah Al-Muharibi reports: "We came into Madinah to find Allah's messenger, peace be upon him, standing on the pulpit addressing his companions and saying: The one who gives has the upper hand. Start with those whom you have to support; your mother and father, sister and brothers, then the nearest, then the nearer [of your relatives]." In another Hadith, related by Abu Dawood, the Prophet, peace be upon him, is quoted to have given this guidance with regard to whom one is obliged to support: "Your mother and father and sister and brother, then your relative who is near of kin; [this is] a binding duty and a relationship that is preserved."

Hind bint Utbah, Abu Sufian's wife, complained to the Prophet, peace be upon him, that her husband was stingy. She asked him whether she could take of his money without his knowledge. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Take what is reasonably sufficient for yourself and your children." This Hadith indicates that one's wife and children are treated at the same level.

In the Qur'an, we read this verse which may be rendered in translation as follows:

"Mothers may suckle their children for two whole years; [that is] for those who wish to complete the suckling. The father of the child is responsible to provide in a fair manner for their sustenance and clothing. No human being shall be burdened beyond what he can reasonably bear. Neither shall a mother be allowed to cause her child to suffer nor shall a father cause his child to suffer. The same is also the obligation of the heir." [the Cow — "Al-Baqarah" 2: 233]

You realize from this Qur'anic verse that the obligation of the heir is imposed by Allah. This obligation follows a general Islamic principle that attaches obligations to benefits. If someone stands to benefit by what may happen to another, then he is obliged to help him when he is in need of help. The principle states: "Benefit is related to obligation."

Applying this principle, I will give you this hypothetical example. Say, if 15 years hence, one of your half-sisters gets married to a rich man. Now suppose that after two or three months of her marriage, she is traveling with her husband in a car when they are involved in an accident. Her husband is killed instantly and she receives serious injuries, and is taken to a hospital. Suppose that two or three weeks later she dies. In this situation, she would inherit one quarter of her husband's wealth if he has no children by another marriage. The same amount in addition to whatever she owns will then be inherited by her father, if he is still alive, her four sisters and you. Your entitlement to a share of her inheritance is not affected by the degree of intimacy between you. You may be reared in the same house and see each other every day and every night, or you may be living in two different countries and you see each other once every few years. I hope you realize that this principle which attaches obligations to benefit is most fair. Since Islam has regulated the system of inheritance to its finest detail, it also has made obligations to look after poor relatives well defined. You are certainly in an unfortunate position in the sense that there is a big gap between yourself and your sisters and that you are the only son of your mother. This makes you the only supporter of two families. But if your income is sufficient to help you to look after both families, then you have to fulfill your obligation. Let me tell you that when you do this, Allah is certain to help you and your children. Even if you have to spend all that you earn in order to provide the minimum respectable living to all your dependents, you should not despair. May I remind you that none of us is sure how long we may live? Every one of us with children always wonder what may happen to them if we meet an early death. Let me tell you that the best one to whom we may trust our young ones is Allah, their Lord who created them. In your case, if you look well after your father and young sisters, you should not worry that you are not making any savings. If something should happen to you, you should trust Allah to look after your children. He will certainly send them someone to look after them as he has caused you to look after your helpless young half-sisters.

One last point; if your earnings are not enough to meet all your obligations and the maternal uncles of your half-sisters are reasonably well off, then they have an Islamic obligation to help. It is not necessary that any of them take one or more of your sisters to rear in his home, but to provide funds to your father to look after them. What is obligatory in this case is to provide them with reasonable food and clothing and medical care when needed. There is one proviso, however. You have not mentioned whether your father has any brothers. If he has, then your paternal uncles come first in this duty to help your father bring up his young daughters. In other words, what you cannot fulfill of this duty, falls to your paternal uncles. If you have none or if they are poor, then your stepsisters' maternal uncles should help. If they in turn are poor, then the community as a whole should look after your family.

Islamic Society: Swimming By A Young Girl

My husband insists that our daughter, aged five, should learn swimming, although the only available facility is in a co-education class of children in the age group 4-8. He also wants her to attend gymnastic classes. He believes that girls should learn these sports, especially as we are living in the United States, with little prospect of returning to our Muslim home country. I have tried to persuade him to change his mind without any success. Could you please explain whether it is permissible for my young girl to attend such classes? If so, until what age?

This is a question, which can be answered in a few sentences. However, I feel that it raises a number of points, which merit a more relaxed discussion.

The first is which religious duties are applicable to children. As you are well aware, the imposition of duties is closely related, from the Islamic point of view, to the concept of reckoning and reward in the hereafter. Obviously, the concept of reward or punishment being dependent on the fulfillment or negligence of duty presupposes not merely the availability of choice but also the ability to choose. This ability depends on the degree of maturity a person attains before he makes his choice. In Islam, religious duties do not apply, for example, to a person who is insane. Consequently, reward and punishment cannot be applicable to him. Similarly, children who have not yet attained the age of puberty are not answerable for the fulfillment of any Islamic duty.

A child remains a child, and his or her sense of duty is not mature enough until adolescence. Even the adolescents vary in their maturity and ability to judge and choose. However, there must always be a dividing line, which separates one stage from another. With regard to the applicability of religious duties, this dividing line is considered the attainment of puberty. What this means in effect is that no Muslim child is required to observe the duty of fasting in Ramadhan before he or she attains puberty. If he offers the pilgrimage, he is rewarded for it, but that does not fulfill the pilgrimage duty, which becomes applicable to him after he has attained puberty. This applies to all duties and prohibitions. If a child commits something forbidden, he is not punished for it in the same way as an adult. He may be reproached or even punished, [depending on the violation of which he is guilty], but the level of punishment is not the same as that of an adult who is guilty of the same violation.

Having said that, I should add that we must always strive to bring up our children in such a way that helps them fulfill their Islamic duties when these become applicable to them. It is for this reason that the Prophet, peace be upon him, teaches us that we must get our children to start offering prayer when they are seven. When they become ten, we may punish them for neglecting prayer. We should also train them to fast so that when fasting becomes required of them they do not find it too hard. This again applies to the wide spectrum of Islamic duties. We should inculcate in our children all proper Islamic values so that they develop a good Islamic sense which helps them to always choose the Islamic way.

A Muslim parent should always try to establish a good balance between these two considerations. While trying to inculcate in his children the love of Islamic values and duties, he should not impose on them a rigid attitude which may cause them to associate the fact that they are Muslims with being deprived of certain pleasures. The fact is that most social activities are permissible in Islam, although there may be certain restrictions on how they are used. For example, swimming is not merely permissible but also required to be taught to children. Yet, communal swimming when men and women use a beach or a swimming pool at the same time, wearing only swimming costumes, is forbidden. But when men and women use the

swimming pool separately and they observe Islamic values, there is nothing wrong with their swimming.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, describes this religion of Islam as "easy". Allah has not made it so in order that people do not find it too difficult to implement. He says: "This religion is made facile, therefore approach it gently. No one will try to pull this religion toward rigidity without being defeated." When you examine religious duties and requirements you are bound to conclude that ease is the very characteristic of this faith. Rigidity is alien to it. Nevertheless, people continue to impose too many restrictions on themselves and their families, oblivious of the fact that rigidity is more likely to be counter-productive.

I knew a very good person who was studying in Europe, and who had two young daughters, aged eight and six. Wherever they went, his daughters were wearing the full Islamic dress required of adult Muslim women. I spoke to him about this and suggested that the young girls may find their dress too much of a burden. He explained that he wanted them to get used to dress in Islamic way. My discussion with him was unproductive. I tried hard to persuade him that he exposed his family to the danger of his daughters becoming rebellious when they grow older, feeling that the rigidity to which they had been exposed in their childhood has deprived them of many childhood pleasures. Maintaining a balanced view, I do not think that there is anything wrong with your five-year-old learning swimming with a co-ed class of her age group. Attending a gymnastic class may be very useful as well. You should not forget that the Prophet, peace be upon him, has emphasized that swimming is an art we should teach to our children. There is nothing in the Hadith, which indicates that this is limited to boys. A girl may benefit much by learning swimming.

However, you should begin to make her gradually aware that a grown up woman must never wear a swimming costume in front of men. When she is closer to the age of puberty, you can make sure that she never swims except in a 'woman-only' surrounding.

Islamic Society: Tablighi Jama'at & Quitting Career To Join It

When my son was in the middle of his studies for his Master's degree, he decided to abandon it, and to devote all his time to preaching Islam. He has joined the Tabligh movement. I advise him to continue with his studies while doing for his religion what he wishes, but he does not listen to us. He has indeed caused us a great deal of pain with his attitude. May I ask whether it is right that he has given up his studies and devoted all his time to religion without paying any thought to earning his livelihood? Is it wrong that we advise him to trim his beard and wear a shirt and trousers, which are part of the job requirement in the country where he lives? Is it right of him to think that now he may not listen to his parents since he has more knowledge than them?

When people decide to change their attitude to life and give a higher priority to religion, devoting much of their time to it, they frequently forget a most important fact about the Islamic faith. That fact is that Islam has been revealed by God in order to be implemented in human life. Its implementation does not require that people abandon their careers or livelihood in order to devote themselves totally to serving Islam. When the Prophet, peace be upon him, was told of a man who spends all his time in the mosque, he asked who gives him food to eat. When he learned that the man's brother supported him, the Prophet, peace be upon him, commented that the brother was a better believer.

This fact was clearly understood and acted upon by the Prophet's companions and the early generations of Muslims. Indeed that is why Islam was able to build a great civilization in a very short period of time. People were keen to know enough about their religion so that they could fulfill their duties properly. At the same time they tried to excel in their respective fields so that the Islamic State could rely on its own people for all the services, scientific knowledge and technical expertise it needed. Moreover, vast areas of the [present day] Muslim world converted to Islam when they came in close contact with Muslim businessmen who conducted their business in accordance with Islamic values and had enough knowledge about Islam to explain it to people. At the same time these were keen to do their jobs and earn their living.

Among the Prophet's companions there were people who did all types of jobs. Many of the Ansar had their own farmland to look after. They attended to all the needs of the farms so that they could have good harvests and the Muslim community could have enough food and provisions. Had they not done so, their land would have become barren, and it would have been easy for the enemies of Islam to impose an economic boycott on the Islamic State in Madinah. Famous Ansari people like Sa'ad ibn Mu'ath and Sa'ad ibn Ubaidah and Abu Talha had their farms, while leading Mujahedeen figures like Abu Bakr, Osman and Abdurrahman ibn Auf were businessmen.

Even those who decided to devote much of their time to Islamic scholarship were keen to do their jobs properly so that they could earn a comfortable living. Imam Abu Hanifah, for example, was a merchant dealing in ready-made clothes. Those scholars who concentrated on learning and teaching the Qur'an had different careers. Thus we find the top Qur'an scholar and teacher in Makkah in the second century doing a very unusual job for a scholar. The man was Qunbul and he was the chief of the police force, while Hafs, the Qur'anic teacher whose method of recitation is the one in use today in all Muslim countries in Asia sold suits.

On the other hand Islam does not ask anyone to devote all his time to preaching its message. Indeed the idea of missionary work is alien to Islamic thinking. It has never been taught by the Prophet, peace be upon him, that anyone would earn greater acceptance by God if he abandoned everything and devoted his life entirely to propagating Islam. What Islam wants of its followers is to conduct their lives in the normal way and at the same time show how they can be much better people and much more successful as a result of following Islamic teachings.

You say that your son has joined the Tabligh movement, which is an organization that dedicates itself to the propagation of Islam. I have written in the past about this movement pointing out that its members do much beneficial work, and that the concept on which it is founded has its merits. I also criticized some aspects of what some of its member do in practice. This movement suffers from a number of shortcomings that have befallen contemporary Islamic organizations. Because of these shortcomings many of these organizations are responsible for conformity to an image that shows Islam to be rigid and narrow of vision. This is a totally wrong image, but unfortunately it is the one that is being often reflected today. Take the example of wearing a beard. Many well-meaning Islamic advocates make it sound as if shaving is a cardinal sin. Even when we take the view of these scholars who insist that wearing a beard is a duty which is by no means a unanimous view, omitting such a duty is no more than a minor offense. Moreover, they insist that a beard must not be trimmed which is totally mistaken.

What is worse, such people are often guilty of neglecting such duties that are of much importance. Let me take the case mentioned by this mother who is complaining of her son's behavior. If the same problem was put to her son himself by another person and he was told of a young man that he is giving his parents much pain by his behavior, he would criticize that behavior in a very clear term. He would

tell that person of the Hadith when a young man came to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and sought his permission to join a campaign of jihad. The Prophet, peace be upon him, asked him whether either of his parents was alive. When the man said that both were, the Prophet, peace be upon him, told him to go back and make dutifulness to them his jihad. That shows the importance the Prophet, peace be upon him, attached to dutifulness to parents. Yet many young advocates of Islam are, in their enthusiasm for the cause, prepared to upset their parents for telling them that they are wrong in this or that. How can they do that when God Himself makes it clear in the Qur'an that a Muslim must not use even the slightest expression of displeasure when talking to parents?

Again the question of dress is fraught with misconceptions. Islam does not make any special requirements of how people should dress, but it outlines certain values. Every Muslim should take care to cover the awrah which is the Islamic term denoting the part of the body which must not be exposed before other people. In the case of a man, this is only the genitals. The other value is that there must be no trace of conceit in the way a person dresses. Yet people try to implement these values in a very rigid manner, insisting on Arabian garments when there is nothing in the Prophet's teaching to show any preference for these. They also insist on certain length when the only consideration associated with that in the Hadith is the avoidance of showing conceit. It is all a question of understanding the statement that lies at its core. This is the work of scholars. In the period of Islamic vitality, scholars advanced a very proactive understanding. Hence implementation of Islamic teachings was very easy indeed. In our days of rigidity and narrowness, people make Islam appear highly impractical, when God wants it to be put into practice. By so doing, they do Islam a disservice.

In answer to your specific questions I say that your son would do much better if he takes up a career and attains a highly professional standard in it, trying at the same time to put his knowledge in the service of the Muslim community. He could at the same timework on his study of Islam trying to acquire a good understanding of it and explaining it to people. This will enable him to be useful to the Muslim community in more ways than one.

It is not wrong if he wears the normal clothes that people in the country where he lives wear. If these are of the Western style, then so be it. Nor is it wrong for him to trim his beard. Indeed he should do so, because the Prophet, peace be upon him, is quoted to have said that a person who has hair should take good care of it. That does not fit with the image some people try to advance suggesting that a beard should be left unkempt [wild] or disheveled.

Whatever your son does, he should always be dutiful to you and to his father. If he has attained a good standard of learning, he should remember that all credit goes to you for the way you brought him up and the education you gave him. If he shows disrespect to you, he exposes himself to God's displeasure, and all his good work would be in vain.

Islamic Society: Tablighi Jama'ats Are Sound In Theory, But —

Members of an organization called Tablighi Jama'at travel for varying periods, extending at times to four months, when they go around the country, and to foreign countries, to preach Islam. Their aim and objective is to invite their Muslim brothers to the mosque for prayers. They take leave from their work and leave their families in order to go on these missions, often living and sleeping in mosques. Please comment on this practice.

The propagation of Islam is the duty of all Muslims. The name Tabligh means conveying the message of Islam. Hence, the idea of this organization is sound. To go from one place to another in order to explain Islam to people and to call on Muslims to be more conscious in the fulfillment of their Islamic duties is commendable. However, to say such activity is done in practice by some people leaves much to be desired.

The system followed by the Tabligh organization is to ask its members to devote a certain portion of their time to the propagation of Islam. A member is expected to devote one hour a day, or one day a week, or one week every month or two, or one month a year, when he would go out and call on people to attend more conscientiously to their Islamic duties. At times, some missions spend four months with the sole purpose of conveying Allah's message. Members who go out on these missions are supposed to pay for their transport and their living expenses. Members who are well off can support those who are not, when the latter intend to go on a mission.

The strongest emphasis is based on prayers because the society believes that when a Muslim attends regularly to his prayers, he is set on the way to be a better Muslim and his prayers will have a positive effect on his behavior making him a better person.

All this is sound in theory, when people take an active part in the propagation of Islam, they feel that they themselves must be more diligent in observing their Islamic duties. It is true that some people may think, after completing a task in the service of Islam, that they have done their duty and may become a little lax in their observance of Islamic duties or in doing what they need to do in order to improve their own understanding of Islam and work better for it. What is important is to follow a successful mission with actions, which are calculated to enhance one's commitment to the cause of Islam, and to make the next mission even more successful. Furthermore, important as it is to remind Muslims that they must attend regularly to their prayers, it is not sufficient. People must learn what while prayer is the cornerstone of Islam, building an Islamic community requires much more than a cornerstone.

Going on extended mission of four months or so raises a few questions. It may be that the leaders of the society have made in clear it their guidelines that anyone who wants to go on such a mission must meet certain conditions, such as having acquired a minimum standard of understanding Islam, having provided well for his family during his absence, and not allowing equally or more important duties to be neglected during his absence. Take, for example, a man who has a young family, with two or three children still at school and a young wife. He may leave his wife enough money to look after the family for the whole period of his absence, and he may ask a close relative, such as a brother, to look after his family, but I do not think that such a prolonged absence in such case is justified, especially when we consider the fact that there is much to be done within the local Muslim community. The man will render a better service to Islam if he concentrates his efforts on bringing up his children as good Muslims and using his spare time to help his local Muslim community understand Islam better.

An example of misuse of this system is found in the fact that some people who live in Europe may take themselves out of work, get registered with the state as unemployed and draw social security benefits for their families to live on while they go abroad, or even travel within the same country, on their propagation work. Such an arrangement cannot be approved by Islam. I am certain that the leaders of the society of Tabligh would not approve of it either. Still it is done.

Islamic Society: Touching Parents' Feet

In India, it is a social tradition for sons to touch parents' feet when greeting them. Is this acceptable or forbidden in Islam? Please comment.

Any gesture that may be construed as something akin to worship is strictly forbidden, because no worship may be offered to anyone other than God. When you look carefully at this gesture, you are bound to conclude that it is one of extreme reverence that people do not do in every day situations.

I understand that this gesture is particularly done on important occasions, such as when greeting one's elders on the occasion of the Eid. As such, one could only conclude that it is at least reprehensible, if not forbidden, even when no thought of worship is intended.

Young people should explain to their elders that such a gesture is unacceptable from the Islamic point of view. Hence, they will express their respect in a different way. When such elders realize this, they will accept it without difficulty.

Islamic Society: Vigilante Group Formed To Enforce Islamic Laws

I have recently received a letter from my hometown where the community is multi-religious but the majority are unbelievers. The letter says that Muslims have formed a vigilante group, constraining all Muslims to attend the five daily prayers and refrain from drinking alcohol. If a person is caught drinking alcohol three times, he will be taken to the mosque where the prescribed Islamic punishment will be inflicted on him. If he continues to drink alcohol, despite the punishment, then the members of the Muslim community will boycott him, refraining from attending any functions at his home. His family will be discarded from the Muslim community. Could you please explain whether the prayers of a person who offers them in such circumstances, fearing social or community punishment, will be valid. Moreover, are such actions by the Muslim community acceptable from the Islamic point of view?

Noble indeed are the motives, which have caused this particular community to form such a vigilante group to ensure that its members fulfill their duties, which are distinctive of Muslims generally. Their action, however, raises a number of questions such as the one you have raised. The first question I would like to ask is whether the vigilante group will limit its activities to violation of Islamic rules on prayer and alcohol drinking? If so, the question is what distinguishes these rules? Why is it so important for a Muslim not to violate the prohibition on alcohol drinking when the observation of other Islamic prohibitions are not so important? If a group will try to implement all Islamic laws then they have to give an answer to the question: What are they going to do about someone who commits murder? Will they organize their own court and do their own investigations? If the suspect is proved guilty, will they enforce capital punishment? Suppose that the law of your country does not allow capital punishment, will they still execute the murderer? What if he has been tried by the government court and given a sentence, which is less than the capital punishment, or even set free, because the court determined that the evidence against him is not sufficient? Some people of the Muslim community may come forward and give further evidence, which may not be admissible in court, but is convincing enough to the vigilante group that the man is the murderer. In this case, the alternatives are limited to either executing the man and, by so doing, raising a huge problem with the civil authorities, or claiming that they cannot exercise authority over such matters and will leave them to the civil authority.

Neither alternative is satisfactory in view of the aims the group has set for itself. The second alternative will bring us back to the first question of the group observing the fulfillment of certain Islamic rules to the exclusion of others. This is not acceptable from the Islamic point of view because any authority, which can implement Islamic law, should implement it as a whole. The other alternative may lead to big problems. Indeed, the group may be rounded up by the civil authority and tried for murder.

It need not go as far as that for problems to arise. Suppose that they take someone to flog in the mosque for drinking alcohol and the man goes out to lodge a complaint against the leaders of the community or the imam of the mosque. The civil authority will feel that they must intervene and when they know the extent of the problem, they may feel it to be very serious as it signifies a duality of authority. No government approves such a situation. If the authorities happen to take an unfavorable attitude toward the Muslim community, the action of the vigilante group will give them justification to translate such an attitude to something much worse. In this way, the whole of the community may suffer for the actions of a few people.

Moreover, what about other Islamic duties such as the payment of Zakah? Will they administer the collection and distribution of Zakah? If they will not concern themselves with Zakah, then they are neglecting a duty, which ranks among the five pillars upon which the structure of Islam is built. If they say that they will collect Zakah and distribute it, what will they do about those who refuse payment? In the case of Zakah, cooperation is essential between the administrative authority and those who are liable to pay it. Otherwise, there can be a wide range of problems beginning with defiance on the part of some and extending to trying to get the government to intervene. Again, this may land the Muslim community as a whole in a multitude of problems. Other Islamic duties, which must be observed, will require various punishments for those who do not fulfill them. If the vigilante group enforces such punishments, then they are assuming an authority, which they cannot claim. If they do not, then they leave violation of Islamic laws unpunished. The dilemma is terrible.

Then, what about those additional punishments which the vigilante group seems to want to inflict? The example you have mentioned of someone continuing to drink after the first punishment. The group wants to enforce a total boycott of this man and his family. Why should his family be punished for his conduct? Maybe his wife and children are totally opposed to his drinking. Why should they be discarded from the Muslim community? Indeed, they are in need of help.

There is no doubt that a Muslim community is required to enforce Allah's laws when they are able to do so. This means that the Muslim community should have power in its area. In other words, it has to wield central authority. Otherwise, it cannot act on its own. Allah describes the community of believers as one, which will enforce Allah's laws when they are established in the land. This is taken to mean that they have real authority, not as pressure or vigilante group, but as a government. In a situation like that of your community, I feel that it is the wrong approach to form such a vigilante group to see that individual members are observing Islamic laws. If your community is large enough, you may be able to negotiate with the central government the exercise of certain powers within the community. This will require that you have your own leaders who are recognized by the government for the exercise of certain powers within the community. This will require that you have your own leaders who are recognized by the government of the land and indeed receive its backing when it comes to the enforcement of Islamic law. Short of that, the method you have described is bound to produce more harm than good.

As for the validity of the prayers offered in such circumstances, the answer is that we do not know. From the theoretical point of view, a person who offers prayers under any circumstances has discharged his duty. We do not know his intention or his

inner feelings. He may be going through the movements of prayer without putting his mind into it. In such case, his prayers are not valid. It is Allah alone who knows his intentions. He judges people as He knows best.

Islamic Society: Western Society & the Eastern Society

Is it correct to say that while Western society is bad in all respects, the Eastern society is good in every respect? If a person does in Western style something that is not prohibited in Islam, will his action constitute a sin?

It is not right to describe everything in Western society as bad and everything in Eastern society as good. What we can properly say is that in a proper Islamic society, things are all good, as long as they conform to Islamic teachings. That is due to the fact that Islam is the system designed by Allah for human life and Allah has included in it all good things. In Eastern societies today, however, there are many traditions, which are either borrowed from other communities or developed in isolation from the Islamic system. These must be judged objectively. We cannot say that they are all good. Besides, there are times when an Eastern community loses touch with the true Islamic system. It begins to drift away, either because of ignorance or because of different trends of influence. I will give an example. A century ago, education was totally neglected in many parts of the Muslim world, to the extent that you could hardly find anyone who could read and write in a whole village. The situation in cities was not much better. Could we say that at that time, illiteracy was good because it was a characteristic of Eastern society?

On the other hand, there are certainly good elements in Western civilization. Let us take the example of respecting the dignity and the rights of every individual. In many Western societies, every individual can get his or her rights without the need to fork out large sums of money in the form of fees to lawyer. You do not need a lawyer to get what the law assigns to you. This is certainly a good thing, which cannot be denied.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, was once asked who were the best people. When he established what his questioners meant by their question, he answered: "The best of people in pre-Islamic days are the best of them in Islam, provided that they acquire good knowledge of their faith." In the Prophet's reply, we note that he described some people as good and that these make up the best of people when they embrace Islam, provided that they get to understand it well.

Islamic State: Nature Of the Islamic System Of Government

Some of my non-Muslim friends question me about the nature of Islamic government and whether democracy can be accommodated in an Islamic system. Please clarify.

We can describe Islamic government as consultative by nature. There is no absolute authority vested in a person or an institution or even in a collective leadership. But when consultation over a certain issue has taken place and the Muslim community has had a chance to discuss that issue and make its feelings known, a decision may be taken by the ruler. When that decision has been taken, it is the duty of everyone in the Muslim community to facilitate its implementation.

We speak of consultative government, but Islam does not lay down any form for how the consultation is to be made. Every Muslim community may decide what institutions to establish in order to achieve the requirement of consultation. If it opts for a democratic system of the type which prevails in Europe, then that system can certainly be accommodated within an Islamic government. On the other hand, a Muslim community may find no need for having different political parties. It tries to determine the course it wants to follow on the basis of consensus. That is perfectly

acceptable. In a different set up, a Muslim country may decide to choose its overall leader by elections or by a referendum or by some other means, which ensures that the feelings of the Muslim community are determined. Any of these methods is acceptable.

What is most important to remember is that an Islamic government is an ideological government. It believes in the Islamic faith and it seeks to implement the laws of Islam, sparing no effort for the achievement of that goal.

Islamic State: Political Philosophy Of Islam

Could please explain the political system, which Islam approves? Does Islam admit democracy or secularism? Our non-Muslim friends always ask such questions, saying that Islam considers Muslims to be brothers, but what place does it give to non-Muslims? May I also put their other questions, wondering why Muslims are killing each other, as they do in Afghanistan? And why do they kill women and children when the Prophet, peace be upon him, has spoken strongly against such killings?

The Islamic system of government is based on consultation, freedom of expression, equality and serving the interest of the community. A government that does not try its best to serve and protect the interests of the community is not Islamic even if it professes to believe in Islam and its system and values. In fact the aim of all Islamic legislation is to serve the interests of the community and to protect every individual — his self, mind, offspring, property and religion, as these are the five essentials of a human being.

Islam does not lay down any model of Islamic government, leaving this to every Muslim community to determine within the guiding principles I have outlined. Islamic government is a consultative one, but the type of mechanism that consultation takes is left to individual communities to determine.

We cannot equate this process of consultation with any particular type of democracy, but we say at the same time that a democratic government could be An Islamic government if it resolves to implement Islamic law, because by definition a democratic government provides a process of consultation. If such consultation is genuine and the law to be implemented is Islamic. It must also guarantee freedom of expression and equality of all people before the law.

Secularism is incompatible with the Islamic system, because secularism allows no position for religion in the system of government. But if we take the aspect of equality of all people which secularism advocates, then this concept of secularism is compatible with Islam.

Why Muslims kill each other, and why do they kill women and children? If they do, then they raise a very big question mark about their claim to be Muslims. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "When two Muslims meet, sword in hand, fighting each other, then the killer and the killed would both be in hell." People wondered: "We understand that the killer would be in hell, but what about the one who is killed?" The Prophet, peace be upon him, answered: "Because he was just as keen to kill his fellow." Note how the Prophet, peace be upon him, describes the two as fellows, not opponents! That is because they both lay a claim to be Muslims and they both have the same desire to subdue the other and kill him. They are equal in their disobedience to God.

When they kill women and children, they are certainly committing a grave sin, because even in war, Muslims are not allowed to kill women and children. Islam

certainly does not approve of much that is committed under its name, but before we judge any group of individual, we must be certain of our facts.

Blame is frequently put on Islamic groups for much killing. Before we suggest they are guilty, we need to establish the facts. Just as we say that much is committed under the name of Islam, much is also falsely attributed to Islamic groups and many claim to fight for Islam when they do not even understand Islam.

Islamic State: What Makes A State Islamic?

What are the conditions, which make a certain country an Islamic state?

A country is Islamic if it declares that it wants to conduct its affairs in line with the code of living God revealed in the Qur'an and explained by Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. This means that any law or regulation a country adopts will be in line with the message of Islam. If it is found that there is a contradiction between any part of a law in force in that country and Islamic teachings, then that law will be considered null and void while Islamic teachings will be implemented.

Take, for example, a country, which declares itself Islamic, but the law in force permits usury. There may be a case in dispute, where a court in that country rules in favor of a particular defendant. Suppose the defendant claims that interest be paid on the money the other party owes to him. If the law permits the payment of such interest, the judge must not order its payment, because interest is forbidden in Islam.

Istikhara: Appropriate Time & Manner

I wish to marry a woman whom I had promised and she has waited for me for several years. Delays were inevitable owing to problems with my earnings. Things have improved and now I am in a position to marry. I am very keen on it to go through. However, my parents do not like this marriage option and I find it hard to displease them. I wish to do Istikhara by performing Umrah and then drawing slips — one with name of the woman and the other with parents. Please tell me if this is the right approach.

Reading through this long letter, I feel sorry for the woman, because she has been waiting for this man for several years while he has been getting his situation worse. Now he has started to get things right, clearing his business debts while having a steady job. But what I am worried about in the whole question is that the idea of Istikhara, which means seeking God's help in making the right choice, has only come to his mind at this late stage.

Resorting to Istikhara is an appropriate step, but it should be done at the right time. In his case, he should have resorted to it before giving the woman firm promises to marry her. He should remember that she has accepted his promises in good faith, and acted on their basis, rejecting most proposals and avoiding others. In other words, she considered his promise to be a firm engagement, and he has encouraged her in doing so. Yet now he wants to make a new choice, as if he has given no promise. That is unkind to the woman, and it is close to going back on a promise.

One characteristic of believers the Prophet, peace be upon him, has been keen on highlighting is honoring promises. This is a time-honored quality of believers. God describes Ismail, a Prophet, peace be upon him, and a messenger of God, as a man who is 'true to his promise'. If my reader values highly his being a believer in God, then he should not think of any action, which does not help him to honor his promise. Seeking God's help in making a choice should come before one takes any

steps or makes any commitments. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "Believers fulfill their commitments." The way he expresses this point makes the fulfillment of commitments in intrinsic quality of being a believer. If a person does not do it, then there is doubt about being a believer in the first place.

The other point I would like to mention is that Istikhara is done the way the Prophet, peace be upon him, has taught us. It begins with offering two voluntary Rak'ahs, before making a supplication seeking God's help in making the choice between the two options available. One prays God in this way: "My Lord! I seek Your help, based on Your knowledge, in making a choice and seek Your assistance based on Your power, for You are powerful and I am not. And You know all things while I do not know. My Lord, if You know this matter is beneficial to me in my faith and my living, and in my short term and long term affairs, then facilitate it for me and make it easy for me to have, and bless it for me. But if You know this matter is disadvantageous for me in my faith and my living, and in my short-term and long-term affairs, then keep it away from me and keep me away from it. Give me what is beneficial to me whatever it may be, and make me happy with it."

When one has done the Istikhara in this way, one should let things happen the easy way, trusting that God will give him what is good for him, or what repels a greater harm than would have happened had he not done the Istikhara. If the Istikhara is done after Tawaf or after the Umrah, that is fine, but it should be done as the Prophet, peace be upon him, has taught.

Istikhara: Can It Be Done Through Proxy?

Could you please tell me whether Istikhara can be done by proxy? Let me explain: in a case of a proposed marriage, the woman's mother offered the Istikhara prayer and went to sleep. In the morning she announced that the sign is negative, and the marriage proposal was rejected after everything had been agreed. Is this a correct method of seeking God's help in making a choice? Is it not true to say that only the parties concerned should do the Istikhara? Moreover, if things happen quickly, does not that indicate God's will in the matter?

Istikhara is the method the Prophet, peace be upon him, has taught us to seek God's help in any matter that we need help to make the right choice. It is done by offering two Rak'ahs of voluntary prayer, followed by a specific appeal to God to make the right choice for us.

When we have done that, we trust to God that whatever the outcome may be, it is the better choice for us. People often attach knowledge of the choice on what they may see in a dream. While this may be true if the dream is directly relevant, it need not be so. When we do the Istikhara, we trust that God's help in making a choice is at hand. We look at how things move, and when we see a course of action is easier, allowing things to move smoothly, we realize that it is God's choice.

A person I know embarked on a journey which would have changed his career, but he forgot to do the Istikhara until the last moment. He did it shortly before going to collect his tickets, which would have meant traveling the next morning. He immediately went to the travel agent, a trip that took him only 20 minutes, but he found the travel agency closed although it was still working time. He took that as indication and canceled his travel. Within a few days, all the difficulties that prompted him to travel started to be solved very easily.

It is possible for a close relative or a friend to do the Istikhara on our behalf. It is not always necessary that the person concerned should be the one to do the Istikhara. The only point in this case cited by the reader is the reliance on a dream. Such a

dream should be very clear in order to be taken as an indication. [However, we find nothing to warrant such a request by us to a friend or a relative when the option is open and available to all of us directly.]

Istikhara: Seeking Guidance From God Who Knows What Is Good

1. A few years back I proposed to marry a young lady whom I had known for sometime, and her parents were agreeable to the marriage, but they preferred to wait until I had finished my studies and got a job abroad. However, I started to invest in business concerns while I was studying, but unfortunately both made heavy losses, and I failed in my final examination. I was in no position to get married and I told her family of the facts. Now I have cleared much of my debts and I am thinking again of marrying her, as we are very much in love. She is prepared to wait for me. The problem is that my parents have spoken about my marriage with a relative of mine whom I do not fancy as my wife. I am in a dilemma and I would be grateful for your advice. Is it appropriate to do the Istikhara, offering two rak'ah of voluntary prayer and writing two options and drawing one of them?

2. After praying Istikhara, we have been swinging from one end to the other in negotiations concerning a proposed marriage. One moment we seem close to finalization, and the next moment the whole matter seems about to fall apart. How are we to interpret God's guidance in this case?

3. Most people in our country say that the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, used to do the Istikhara in order to know God's will before every task he used to perform. Many people do the same particularly in serious matters such as accepting a marriage proposal, etc. Some people object to this. People also say that if one has done the prayer of Istikhara, he should sleep after it. Whatever he dreams after that should indicate for him the way to follow. I find it difficult to interpret my dreams. Could you please guide us how to know God's will for a critical problem we are facing?

1. My clear advice to you is to marry that girl as soon as you can. She has been waiting for you for eight years and she has sacrificed much for your sake. You do not pay her back by abandoning her after she must have missed many chances of good marriage in order to be married to you. Besides, you have promised her that you would do so when she put to you the question in very clear terms. Muslims do not go back on their promises. You have to honor that promise.

The fact that your parents are planning your marriage with a relative of yours should not be allowed to stand in your way. You have to inform your parents that you do not wish to marry that relative of yours. Do this now, when the question of your actual marriage is being discussed. If necessary, write to that relative of yours and tell her that you do not see a chance of the two of you getting married, as you are committed to someone else.

Your parents cannot force you to be married to someone whom you do not wish to marry. You will not be disobedient or undutiful if you approach the situation in clear manner. You do not need to involve the girl you wish to marry at this stage. Keep her out of the discussion for the time being so that your parents realize that you are only objecting to marrying your relative because you do not like her to be your wife. Be kind to them when you tell them that.

I do not see a reason for doing the Istikhara now, as the case should be approached on its merits. Breaking a promise without a compelling reason is not permissible.

You do not seek God's help to do what He does not permit. Besides, the Istikhara is not done in the manner you have mentioned. Istikhara means to seek God's help in choosing between alternatives that are unclear, or that involve results that cannot be determined. You pray two voluntary rak'ahs and then say a supplication seeking God's help in making the right choice. You then let the matter resolve itself. If you find within you that you are happier with a particular choice, you take that. If you find that things are moving easily in one direction, you let them move and take what comes easily,

You do not draw one of two papers, because that is not Istikhara. That is drawing lots, which is permissible but has nothing to do with Istikhara.

2. [To the second reader] how is one to know what course to follow after Istikhara? There are different ways. Some people see in their dreams some indication, which makes it clear that a particular course of action is likely to bring good results, or to be attended with serious risks, etc. However, this is less likely sort of guidance. A more direct one is that a person feels within himself that a particular choice is more promising. He may consult someone and that person gives him a very good reason why he should choose that action and not its alternative.

A third way is that things would move easily in favor of a particular choice. He should let matters happen trusting that what comes without much effort is the choice God has made for him.

In your case, things were flowing and ebbing. How much of that flow is due to your own efforts? Had you left matters to move without impediment, would they have flowed more easily, or would they have ebbed more drastically? If you feel that without effort on your part the negotiations would have broken down long time ago, then God has given you guidance but you have been resisting it. If you feel that with a little more flexibility on your part things would have been brought to a clear conclusion, then again you should allow that flexibility and let the conclusion be reached.]

On the other hand, if the other side is putting one impediment after another, then the guidance is clear and you should abandon the whole proposal. [You must remember that through Istikhara you are seeking guidance of God and not His support for your particular choice only.] I hope I have given you a clear answer.

3. Whenever a person faces a difficult choice, he is strongly recommended to do the Istikhara. The aim of Istikhara is to make an appeal to God to guide us in choosing what is appropriate for us. It is not to know His will, because His will on future matters will not be known now. It is simply a request for guidance. The Prophet's companions have reported that the Prophet, peace be upon him, used to teach them to do the Istikhara before any serious matter.

The benefit we derive is the peace of mind, knowing that the matters, however they turn up, will be to our benefit. The choice has not been made by us but by God who knows what is good for us. Even when things turn out to be unpleasant, we should realize that by doing Istikhara we have actually chosen the better alternative. Had we not done it, matters would have been even worse.

The Istikhara may be done at any time, starting with two voluntary rak'ahs, followed by a supplication which goes as follows: "My Lord, I seek Your guidance according to Your knowledge and seek Your support according to Your ability; for You are able and I am not, and You know while I do not, and You certainly are the One Who knows all things. My Lord, if You know that this particular matter [here the thing in question should be specified in words] is good for me in this present life and helpful to my faith and useful for the present and the future, then facilitate it for me and guide me

to accept it, and make it blessed for me. My Lord, if You know that this matter [here it should be mentioned again] is bad for me in this life, unhelpful in my faith and of no use to my present and future, then take it away from me and turn me away from it, and facilitate what is good for me whatever it is and make me accept it willingly."

When one has done this prayer and supplication, one should stop worrying about what choice he should make. He has requested God to choose the better thing for him, so he should let things happen, rather than he should make them. Whatever God facilitates for him, then it is the right thing for him. If he prefers one alternative and finds it beset with problems, he should turn away from it. He should know, then, that God has not made it easy because it is the worse alternative. The better alternative is the one that comes to him easily. Some people suggest that one should see in his dream something to indicate an alternative. If he does, well and good. Yet most people do not have such a dream after offering special prayer, or they may have a dream that does not suggest any choice. If not, they should rely on what is facilitated rather than on the dream, which may not be forthcoming or may not be suggesting a definite course.

J

Jerusalem: Why Is It So Important For Muslims?

Could you please explain when did Israel occupy Bait Al-Muqaddis and why is it important for Muslims?

Bait Al-Muqaddis is the Islamic name of the sacred city of Jerusalem, which is also called in Arabic, Al-Quds. Both names derive from the root 'qadasa' which signifies sanctity or sacredness. There is no doubt that the city is sacred, because it has been associated with God's prophets and messengers ever since the time of Prophet Ibrahim. It was his grandson, Prophet Yaqoob, who first built the Aqsa Mosque in the city. Jerusalem was also the capital of the Jewish state which was at one period headed by Prophet Dawood or Yaqoob and later by his son, Prophet Sulaiman or Prophet Yousuf. Part of their history is recorded in the Qur'an. The city is also sacred to Christianity as they have there several holy shrines.

However, to Muslims it is a very sacred city, although it comes after Makkah and Madinah. For one thing, the Muslims are the heirs to the divine message preached by all prophets and messengers. The Muslims are indeed the heirs to the heritage of Ibrahim and his offspring of prophets, including Dawood and Sulaiman. This is because that divine message took its final form in the Qur'an. Moreover, Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, was taken on his famous night journey to Jerusalem where he met all past prophets and led them all in a prayer of devotion, which signified the unity of the message and all divine revelations.

Technically speaking, Jerusalem belongs to the Muslims ever since the keys of its gates were handed over to Omar ibn Al-Khattab, the second caliph in the seventh century of the Gregorian calendar, and in the year 15 of the Islamic calendar. Earlier this century, the League of Nations, the predecessor of the United Nations, sent a commission to Palestine, which established that even the Wailing Wall, the most sacred place to the Jews, also belongs to the Muslims.

Before we speak of the occupation of Jerusalem, we should remind ourselves that prior to May 15, 1948, there was no state called Israel. The land of Palestine, which was part of the Arab land that constituted part of the Ottoman Empire, was given to Britain under a mandate given by the League of Nations.

The Jews had their designs to establish a Jewish state here, and Britain had given them a promise of help in what is known as the Balfour Declaration of 1917. But this was a promise given by someone who had no authority to give something he did not own to someone who had no right to it. While holding its mandate Britain allowed Jewish emigration to swell the number of Jews in Palestine. The Jews launched a war against the Arab population and managed to drive many of them out by spreading the fear of more massacres like the ones they committed in Deir Yassin and other places where defenseless men, women and children were killed. Thus the State of Israel was established through bloodshed, broken pledges by the great powers and a great deal of pressure exercised by the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as Britain and France.

In 1967 there was a third war between the Arabs and Israel, which the Arabs approached in a highly theatrical manner. They lost much of their land, including Sinai of Egypt, the Golan Heights of Syria as well as the West Bank of the Gaza Strip, the last parts of the land of Palestine which were still in Arabs hands. Jerusalem was occupied along with the rest of the West Bank. Subsequently, peace agreements were signed between Israel and Egypt. Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organization which lead to the handing back of some Arab lands, but Jerusalem remains with the Jews. The negotiations have not tackled this issue which is the most difficult one. It seems unlikely that, in the present position of Arab weakness, Israel will be willing even to discuss the question of Jerusalem.

Jews: As Individuals & On A Community Level

The Qur'an mentions that the "strongest in enmity to the believers are the Jews", but another verse makes it clear that it is permissible for Muslim men to marry Jewish women. How do you reconcile the two?

There is no contradiction between the two. In marriage, the relation is between individuals, and certainly there are among the Jews people who are good in their conduct, and have good qualities. If a Muslim man meets a Jewish woman who is good and kind, there is no harm in marrying her.

On the other hand, the verse that speaks of hostility toward the Muslim community is referring to attitudes on a community or national level. As a community, or a religious grouping, the Jews have had a long history of hostility to Islam, but there are among them individuals who do not share this attitude.

We do not judge any individual on the basis of his people's attitude. We see this clearly today, with Israel nurturing Jewish hostility to Islam and Muslims at every level. Yet there are Jews who do not agree with this policy and dissociate themselves from Zionism and its oppressive policies.

Jews: Islamic Practices That Are Common To the Jews

Male circumcision was introduced long ago by Jews. Did the Jews also start the pilgrimage and fasting?

We cannot say of any religious practices that it was started by the Jews or some other religions. All Divine faiths were revealed by Allah. They have the same message to all mankind. The basic beliefs are the same. Islam is only the final, complete and preserved version of this faith. There are bound to be similarities between it and earlier religions preached by earlier prophets. The history of the children of Israel dates back much further than the revelation of the Torah to Prophet Moses, peace be upon him. As you are aware, they are called the Children of Israel after Prophet Jacob who is the grandson of Prophet Ibrahim whom Allah ordered to have himself circumcised. Prophet Ibrahim was the first to make the pilgrimage long before the Jewish religion came into existence. When Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, taught us the rituals of pilgrimage, it is believed by many scholars that he put those practices back to their original form, as they were done by Prophet Ibrahim. This speaks much for the unity of Divine faith.

Christianity and Judaism have their prayers, which are different from ours. We cannot say that the Jews started prayer. It was a requirement of them imposed by Allah in the same way as Muslims are required to offer five prayers everyday.

Jews: Rejection Of the Jews Or the Jewish

Someone told me that billiards is a Jewish game and Muslims should not play it. Please comment.

It is the first time I hear that billiards is a Jewish game. Even if it is, there is no harm in playing it. That applies to everything people may invent or make. Unless something is intended to undermine Islam, or ridicule it, or reflect badly on Muslims or their faith, and unless it is meant to glorify something that is contrary to Islamic teachings, there is no harm in making use of it. Nothing of this applies to the game of billiards. Perhaps you should reflect a little on your question.

You must not forget that Islam is a universal message, which addresses all mankind. As such, it has something to say to every human being. Therefore, it does not hold anyone in disregard unless that person chooses to take a hostile attitude to Islam. If you combine this with the fact that it is permissible for Muslims to marry Jewish women, you will appreciate that we do not reject anything simply for being Jewish. We do not take a hostile attitude towards any person, race or faith unless they begin by taking hostile attitude towards us or towards our faith. Perhaps I should add that to brand any activity as being Jewish is wrong in the first place.

Jihad: Aims To Establish God's Authority & To Remove Tyranny

"Believers, fight those of the non-believers who are near you and let them find you tough; and know that God is with those who are God-fearing."

[Repentance, "At-Tauba": 9: 123] Commentary by Sayyid Qutb —
Translated & Edited by Adil Salahi.

This verse outlines the plan and extent of jihad which were implemented by Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and his successors generally. The only exceptions were limited cases dictated by special circumstances. The jihad movement marched forth, confronting those who were near to the land of Islam, one stage after another. When practically the whole of Arabia adopted Islam, after Makkah itself fell to Islam, leaving only scattered individuals and groups who did not form any threat to the land of Islam, the Tabuk expedition took place, threatening the outer areas of the Byzantine Empire which were closest to the Muslim state.

This was followed by an open warfare with the Muslim armies moving far into the land of both the Byzantine and Persian Empires, leaving no pockets behind them. The areas that were now under Islam were united, having continuous borders. It was a vast land area with solid loyalty to one authority. Weakness only crept in after its divisions into different units, with artificial borders to allow government of certain ruling families of certain races and nationalities. This was the outcome of a plan that the enemies of Islam tried hard to bring to fruition, as they still do today. The different ethnic communities, which Islam united in a single nation, or community in the land of Islam, superseding the divisions of race, language and color, will continue to suffer from inherent weaknesses until they go back to their faith. Only when they are back following the guidance of God's messenger, Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and allowing only a single banner to unite them shall they recognize the implication of divine leadership which will once again bring them power and victory. When that happens, it will ensure that they are held in awe by other nations and powers.

Let us now reflect on this verse: ***"Believers, fight those of the non-believers who are near you and let them find you tough; and know that God is with those who are God-fearing."***

What we find here is an order to fight those non-believers who are near to the Muslim state, without specifying whether they have launched any aggression on the Muslims or their land. We understand that this is the final situation, which makes the need to carry Islam forward the basis of the principle of jihad. That will ensure that Islam is available to mankind. It does not have a defensive outlook, as was the case with the

provisional orders in the early days after the establishment of the Muslim state in Madinah.

Some of those who speak about the Islamic view of international relations or about the rulings that govern jihad, as well as those who write essays interpreting the Qur'anic verses speaking about jihad, try to show this verse which is the final one, limited by the earlier provisional rules. Hence they impose on it a restriction, limiting its application to cases of aggression being launched or expected against the Muslim community.

But this statement is general and has no restriction attached to it. What is more is that it is the final one. What we have learned is that when the Qur'an lays down legal provisions, it states them in a clear and precise style, without referring one situation to another. It resorts to precision of expressions, adding at the same point any exceptions, limitations or restrictions it wants the Muslim community to observe.

However, those speakers and writers find it incomprehensible that Islam lays down such an order which commands the believers to fight those non-believers who are near to them, and to continue to do so as long as there remain non-believers in their vicinity. Hence they try to find limits restricting this general statement, but they can only find these in the earlier statement, which were, by nature, provisional.

We understand why they find it so incomprehensible. They simply forget that jihad is meant to serve God's cause. It aims to establish God's authority and to remove tyranny. It liberates mankind from submission to any authority other than that of God.

"Fight against them until there is no more oppression, and all submission is to God alone." [8:39] Jihad does not aim to achieve the hegemony of one philosophy or system or nation over another. It wants the system laid down by God to replace the systems established by His creatures. It does not wish to establish a kingdom of anyone of God's servants, but to establish God's own kingdom. Hence it has to move forward throughout the earth in order to liberate the whole of mankind, without discrimination between those who are within the land of Islam and those outside it. The whole earth is populated by human beings that are being subjected to tyrannical authorities exercised by fellow human beings.

When they lose sight of this fact they find it odd that one system and one nation should move forward to remove all systems and dominate all communities. If things were such, that would be odd indeed. But the systems that exist today are all man-made. None of them has any right to say that it alone should dominate others.

The same does not apply to the divine system which sets out to overthrow all manmade systems in order to liberate all mankind from the humiliation of submission to other human beings so that they can submit to God alone and worship Him only without any partners. Moreover, they find it odd because they face a concentrated and wicked crusade, which tells them that the Islamic faith managed to spread only because it used the sword. Jihad, it claims, wanted to force other people to accept Islam depriving them of the freedom of belief.

Had things been so they would have been odd indeed. But the truth is totally different. Islam lays down a rule stating that ***"No compulsion is admissible in matters of belief. The right way now stands clearly distinguished from the wrong way."***

Why does Islam, then, move forward to fight, and why has God bought the believers' souls and property, so that "they fight for God's cause, kill and get killed"? The answer is that jihad has a reason which is totally different from compelling other people to accept Islam. Indeed jihad seeks to guarantee the freedom of belief.

As we have stated on several occasions, Islam is a declaration, which liberates mankind throughout the earth from submission to human beings. As such, Islam always faces tyrannical forces and systems, which seek to subjugate people and dominate their lives. These systems are backed by regimes and powers of different sorts, which deprive the people of the chance to listen to the Islamic message and to adopt it if they are convinced of its truth. Or they may force people, in one way or another, to turn away from the Islamic message. That is an ugly violation of the freedom of belief. For these reasons, Islam moves forward, equipped with suitable power, to overthrow these systems and destroy their forces.

What happens then? It leaves people entirely free to adopt the faith they like. If they wish to be Muslims, they will have all the rights and duties that apply to all Muslims. They will have a bond of real brotherhood with those who have been Muslims long before them.

On the other hand, if they wish to maintain their religions, they may do so. They only have to pay a tribute, i.e. Jizyah which has a clear purpose: to acknowledge the freedom of movement for Islam among them, to contribute to the treasury of the Muslim state which is required to protect them against any outside aggression, and to look after those of them who are ill, disabled and elderly in the same way as Muslims are looked after.

Never in the history did Islam compel a single human being to change his faith. That is alien to Islamic beliefs and practice. On the other hand, crusades were launched to kill, slaughter and eliminate entire communities, such as the people of Zanzibar in recent history, in order to compel them to adopt Christianity. Sometimes even that would not be accepted from them. They were killed only because they were Muslims, or because they followed a brand of Christianity, which was different from that of the dominating Church. For example, 12,000 Egyptian Christians were burned alive only because they differed with the Byzantine Church over matters of detail, such as whether the world originated with the Father alone, or with the Father and the Son together, or whether Christ had a single divine nature or a united divine and human nature.

These are basically the causes which make some writers about Islam find the general statement in this verse rather odd, and they try to explain it away by limiting the jihad movement in a defensive strategy only. [There is yet] another reason for such an apologetic attitude on the part of those writers.

The thought of moving forward to confront the non-believers who are near to the Muslim state sounds too awesome to those defeatists who look at the world around them today and find this requirement too hard to be practical. Are those who have Muslim names in communities that are weak, or subject to foreign domination, to move forth in the land, challenging all nations in open warfare, until there is no more oppression and all submission is declared to God alone? That is totally unrealistic. It cannot be imagined that God would give such an order.

All such people forget the timing and the circumstances leading to this order. It was given after Islam had established its state, and the whole of Arabia adopted the Islamic faith and started to organize its life on its basis. Prior to that a community was established which dedicated itself totally to its cause, with everyone in that community ready to sacrifice his life and property in order for Islam to triumph. This community was given victory in one battle after another, stage after stage. Today we are in a situation which is highly similar to that which prevailed at the time when Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, was sent to call on mankind to believe in God's Oneness and to declare that "There is no deity save God, and Muhammad is His messenger." Together with the small band who believed in him, the Prophet, peace be upon him, strove hard until he managed to establish the first Muslim state

in Madinah. The orders to fight the non-believers were modified state by stage, facing the prevailing situation at each stage, until it reached its final version.

The gulf that separates people today from the final version is such that they have to start with the declaration that "There is no deity save God, and Muhammad is His messenger." They will have to move forward on the basis of this declaration until they reach, in their own good time and with God's help, the final stage. At that time they will not be sort of powerless multitudes divided by a variety of creeds and desires, and declaring their affiliation to different races and nationalities, as they are today. They will be a united Muslim community that accepts no banner, or manmade creed or system. They will only move with God's blessings to serve His cause.

Encumbered with their pathetic weakness, people will not understand the rules of this religion. It is only those who strive in a movement dedicated to the establishment of God's sovereignty on earth, and the removal of false deities, that fully understand its rules. Understanding this religion in its true nature cannot be taken from those who deal only with books and papers. Academic study is not sufficient on its own to formulate any real understanding of Islam, unless it is coupled with striving in a movement. Finally, this verse, giving such a clear order, was revealed in circumstances that suggest that the first to be meant by it were the Byzantine, who belonged to an earlier religion, or, to use the Islamic term, People of the Book. The Surah, however, has already made it clear that they had distorted their faith and obeyed man-made laws and systems, so they were truly non-believers. We should reflect there on the line of action Islam takes toward communities of the People of the Book who have turned away from their faith and adopted man-made laws. This line of action applies to all such communities everywhere. God has commanded the believers to fight those non-believers who are near to them, and to be tough to them, but then commented on this order by saying: "God loves those who are God-fearing." This is a significant comment on the order preceding it. The type of fear of God, which He appreciates and loves those who have it, is that which shows toughness in fighting the non-believers. That means that there is no compromise "until there is no more oppression and all submission is to God alone."

Nevertheless, everyone should know that this toughness is directed against only those who fight, and it remains controlled by Islamic ethics. Before Muslims fight, they give a warning and offer the other party a choice between three alternatives: To adopt Islam, or to pay the tribute, i.e. Jizyah, or to fight. If there is a treaty between the Muslim state and another community and the Muslim state fears that there may be a treachery on the latter's part, then a notice terminating the treaty should be served on them. It is useful to mention here that treaties may be given only to communities, which are ready to be bound by a peace agreement and to pay the Jizyah. The only other situation where a treaty may be signed is that when the Muslim community is lacking in power. In this situation, some provisional rules are applicable to it.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, himself has set out the ethics of power with which the Muslim community may fight. Buraydah, a companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, reports: "When the Prophet, peace be upon him, appointed someone to command an army or an expedition, he would recommend him to be God-fearing in his public and private affairs, and to take good care of those who were under his command. Then he would tell them: March by God's name and to serve His cause. Fight those who deny God. March on but do not be unfair, and commit no treachery. Do not disfigure the bodies of those [enemy soldiers] who are killed. Never kill any children. When you meet your enemies, call upon them to choose one of three alternatives. If they choose one of them, accept it from them and do not fight them.

"Call on them first to accept Islam. If they agree, accept their pledges and do not fight them. Then ask them to move over to the land of the Muhajireen, and tell them that

they would then have the same duties and privileges as the Muhajireen. If they do not wish to move from their quarters, tell them that they would then be in the same position as the Bedouin Muslims. They will be subject to God's orders that are applied to all believers, but they will have no share in the booty that is gained through war or peaceful campaigns, unless they fight with the Muslims. If they refuse to accept Islam, then offer them the alternative of paying Jizyah, or tribute. If they agree, accept it from them and do not fight them. If they refuse, then seek God's help and fight them."

Such were the instructions given by the Prophet, peace be upon him, to his commanders in the early period of Islam.

Jihad: Basic Definition Of

Jihad could be a simple action, such as standing firm in defense of the cause of Islam. This may require speaking out in public, against ignoring Islamic principles, and writing articles or publishing books. It may also take the form of reminding people of their Islamic duties and motivating them to conduct their lives according to Islam. Its top and most noble form is to fight the enemies of Islam in battle in order to foil their attempts to smother the call of Islam.

Jihad: Conditions For Declaration Of Jihad & the Competent Authority

What is the technical definition of Jihad for Allah's cause (i.e. armed struggle in defense of Islam?) What are the conditions or pre-requisites of its valid declaration? In our modern times, who is authorized or qualified to declare Jihad, which is binding and obligatory upon all Muslims? When can we correctly say that struggle for independence of a Muslim minority in a non-Muslim country is Jihad?

Jihad is derived from the word Juhd, which means "effort". The verb Jahida means to be tried as a result of exerting an effort. As Muslims we are expected to exert sustained effort to serve the cause of Islam. That effort, whatever its future, falls within the meaning of the term "Jihad for the cause of God". Moreover, the term presupposes that such an effort will be made against resistance. Its aim is to preserve Islam, provide protection to Muslims and make sure that its message continues to be conveyed to people in its true form so that they may accept it freely. The term "Jihad" then has much wider significance than a military campaign and open warfare.

Over the years, Jihad has come to be thought by many people, as synonymous with a religious war, due to the fact that a war of Jihad is the ultimate and most demanding form it can take. It is for this reason that Jihad is often translated as "holy war". This is an erroneous translation, because we do not have in Islam two types of wars: one holy and another unholy. If a war is just for the Islamic point of view, it is a war of Jihad. Moreover, in Islam we do not use the term "holy" except in association with God, even the Prophet, or the Qur'an is not described as "holy" in Islamic terminology. Because of its broad implication, the term Jihad may be better translated as "struggle" for the cause of God. This struggle can take the form of war at times, while at other times it may be undertaken with only peaceful means.

I note that you have given the meaning of Jihad as "armed struggle in defense of Islam". What worries me in this definition is the use of the word "defense". It has been the practice of some scholars and writers about Islam in modern times to describe Jihad as a defensive war. This is again not correct. Islam does not wait for others to launch a war against it or against the Muslim nation before it resorts to arms. It takes a highly positive attitude towards every situation. At the same time, Islam does not impose itself on others. All it seeks to have is freedom of expression

so that it makes itself known to people in all societies, and therefore feel free to accept it if they wish. When impediments are put in its way, and people are prevented from listening to the message of Islam as it is presented to them, then it takes the necessary action to remove those impediments. It then uses the means necessary for their removal, not excluding at any time the option of resorting to arms. Yet it does not approve the use of arms when peaceful means are adequate to face a particular situation.

The aim of Jihad is that God's word should be supreme. That does not mean that it should be forced on people to accept it. Islam believes that faith cannot be accepted by force. Hence, it declares unequivocally:

“There is no compulsion in matters of faith.” [the Cow — “Al-Baqarah” 2: 256]

What this means is that Muslims should have the freedom to implement God's law in their land, and others should be free to accept the faith of Islam if they so wish. Whenever the struggle of Muslims, armed or unarmed, is directed towards these goals, that struggle is Jihad. If any other goal or objective is associated with this one, then their campaign is not one of Jihad. The Prophet, peace be upon him, was asked about people fighting because they are brave, or in honor of a certain loyalty, or to show-off: which of them fight for the cause of God? His answer was absolutely clear: “He who struggles so that God's word is supreme serves the cause of God.”

Jihad is an Islamic duty. Furthermore, it can be personal duty binding on every Muslim. This happens when the enemies of Islam attack a land of Muslims where they enjoy the supremacy. Such an attack can only be intended to undermine the authority of Muslims. Hence, to defend that authority becomes a personal duty binding on everyone. Even women should share in such a campaign to repel the enemy's aggression. When this happens, women need not to wait for anyone, not even their husbands in order to join the army of Jihad. In order to appreciate this, we have to remember that the Prophet, peace be upon him, has mentioned that women's Jihad does not normally include fighting. Their Jihad is only “Pilgrimage and Umrah”.

In other conditions and situations, Jihad is a collective duty. This means that if a section of the community undertakes it, the others are exempted from it. It is up to the ruler of the Muslim State to decide what section of the community takes part and to determine the strength of the army, which goes on any particular campaign of Jihad.

If the Muslims live in a country of their own, and they have their recognized leader who works for the implementation of Islam, it is he who calls on the Muslim community to launch a war within the terms of Jihad. When this happens, Jihad becomes obligatory within the meaning, which we have just explained. It is either obligatory on the individual or on the community as a whole. If they do not have such a ruler, but they have the necessary power to clearly indicate that they will have the upper hand in any Jihad campaign and someone from their numbers calls on them to launch such a campaign, then that person is deemed to act in place of the Imam or ruler. In such a situation, however, the position must be considered very carefully. They should know that person very well and be certain of his motives, intentions and sound judgement. Moreover, they should be certain of their own strength.

In modern times, where countries and states are divided on the basis of a variety of factors such as race, language or historical and geographical factors, Muslim communities in various places have made calls for Jihad. Sometimes, such a call may be rash and counter productive. What is important to remember is that every situation must be considered carefully, and the pros and cons of armed struggle must be evaluated and well considered. There may be a situation where a Muslim

country is being attacked by an un-Islamic power with the aim of imposing a certain type of rule, philosophy and government on the Muslim community. In such a situation Jihad is compulsory and binding. The Muslims must not allow this to happen and they must fight back with all the means available to them. [A case in mind may be the attack on Afghanistan by the Soviet Union].

In a situation where the Muslims are in a minority, Jihad may be confined, by necessity, to non-military means. We have to remember that the Prophet, peace be upon him, and the Muslim community with him lived for 13 years in Makkah when they were not allowed to fight back, although they were subjected to all sorts of persecution. This was due to several factors; most important of which was that they did not have enough power to ensure their victory. When a Muslim minority faces a non-Muslim majority, which is determined not to give way, armed struggle may result in highly damaging and far-reaching effects which could set the cause of Islam back for generations.

Some time back we heard of a certain government setting siege to a city, which was closely associated with a campaign of Jihad against a regime, which did not even try to hide its hostility to Islam. Half of that city was systematically leveled down and population was subjected to atrocities of the most horrible kind. Something like 30,000 of the population of that city was killed as a result of that operation, which was intended as a final showdown. When we consider that such an outcome may happen as a result of a rash decision to bring people in an open warfare against a well-entrenched authority, which would not hesitate to fight back, then we cannot overemphasize the need to caution before we suggest that Jihad becomes due on the Muslim population. It is only when we are certain of victory that Jihad may be undertaken.

Jihad: Delivering the Message Is Top Priority
Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

The Prophet, peace be upon him, was always fully aware that nothing could be more important than delivering his message and making it known to people. He wanted all people to realize that God has addressed His final message to every one of us. None is left out. Hence making it known to people and explaining its demands and requirements was his first preoccupation. Not only so, but he was keen to impress on his companions that this task should be the first to address in all situations. Even when war is imminent, calling on people to believe in God as the only Lord in the universe was a task never to be overlooked. We have seen that the Prophet, peace be upon him, would sit with anyone, explaining his message for as long as that person was prepared to listen. It did not matter whether he addressed a single person or a large group; he showed the same concern for all. He dearly loved that they should recognize God's guidance and believe in Him.

Indeed the Prophet, peace be upon him, often spelled this out, stating that for people to believe was dearer to him than any gain he could make. Abd Al-Rahman ibn A'idh, a companion of the Prophet, reports: "When God's Messenger sent an expedition he would say to them: 'Speak to people in a friendly way. Do not attack them before calling on them to believe. There is not a single household, Bedouin or urban, but I would love you to bring me its people as Muslims far more dearly than that you should bring their women and children [as prisoners] after you have killed their men.'" [Related by Al-Tirmithi and Al-Baghawi]

This Hadith lays down the priorities as felt by the Prophet, peace be upon him. It shows what Muslims should always prefer. In any war situation, the enemy is to be addressed with the message of Islam. If they accept it, all conflict with them will end. It is far more preferable that they should learn the message of Islam, and decide to

accept it without any coercion than a battle should be allowed to develop, even when it was certain to end in victory for Muslims, leading to the killing of the warriors and imprisonment of their women and children. The Prophet, peace be upon him, makes it clear that this applies to all, including desert people who represented no real threat.

But how were the Muslims to invite their enemies to embrace Islam at the time when war could break out between them? Would those enemies listen to such a call? Would they not dismiss what the Muslims say as mere trickery? Historical facts suggest that this was not the case. The Muslims gained wide reputation for maintaining a high standard of ethics in war. The Prophet, peace be upon him, made sure to instill this in them so that it would become a distinctive mark in their way of fighting. He always gave clear instructions to his commanders making clear that they were to observe Islamic values even when they dealt with an enemy. Buraydah, a companion of the Prophet, reports: "When God's Messenger appointed a commander of an expedition and sent out some force, he would instruct that commander to remain always conscious of God, even in the most private matters, and he would urge him to take care of his soldiers. He would then say to him: 'When you come face to face with an enemy force from among the unbelievers, offer them one of three options. Whichever one they choose, take it and stay your hand. Call on them first to accept Islam. If they agree, then you have no further conflict with them. Just ask them to leave their land and join the Muhajireen [i.e. the Muslims who migrated from Makkah to Madinah]. Tell them that if they do so, then they will have the same privileges and duties as the Muhajireen. If they refuse to move and prefer to stay in their own land, then tell them that they would have the same status as Bedouin Muslims. They will have to abide by God's rules that are applicable to all believers, but will have no share in any gain or booty we have unless they fight with the Muslims. If they refuse, then offer them the option of paying tribute. Should they accept this option, you also accept it and do not fight them. But if they refuse, then seek God's help and fight them. If you lay siege to a fort and then its people ask you to apply God's ruling to them, do not accept that, because you cannot tell what God will rule in their case. Offer them to accept your rule, and then make your ruling as you wish.'" [Related by Muslim, Abu Dawood, Al-Tirmithi and Ibn Majah]

It is clear that this Hadith dates back to the period prior to the surrender of Makkah to Islam, because after its surrender, the immigration to join the Muslim community in Madinah did not apply. Here the Hadith requires new Muslims to join the community in Madinah. Nevertheless, the general principles outlined here applied later. Thus, any enemy force would be offered the chance to accept Islam after learning what its message entailed. If they did and joined the Muslim community they would have the same status as the earliest of believers. But was that a sort of coercion intended to force people to accept Islam? Certainly not, because any enemy of the Muslim state could win peace, without having to change their religion, if they would only pay the standard tribute, which was a head tax that gave them a special status with well-defined privileges. Moreover, it ensured that the Muslims would protect them against any external threat.

It was only if an enemy force refused the first two options, which ensured that no hostilities could break out that fighting becomes inevitable. This is the result of the enemy being determined to have a showdown. Otherwise it would have accepted one of the two options that spared their lives and protected them against any outside force. Many communities accepted that from the Muslims and never regretted their decision. Muslims have rules, put in place by God and His Messenger, which they apply in all situations. These are meant to give a good impression of Islam so that people would come to look at it in an objective way. Once they do that, they will realize that it aims at achieving the best for all people, and ensuring their happiness. It is up to them then to decide whether to accept it as a faith. Needless to say, if they do their choice will continue to yield good results for them for the rest of their lives.

This is confirmed in several Hadiths, most of which speak of what the Prophet, peace be upon him, said to Ali ibn Abi Talib when he sent him as expedition commander. One of these Hadiths speaks of what the Prophet, peace be upon him, said to Ali at the Battle of Khaybar: "March forth at ease until you reach their vicinity. Then call on them to accept Islam and explain to them their duties to God should they accept it. By God, should you be the means by which one person accepts divine guidance is far better for you than all that the world contains." [Related by Al-Bukhari]

Jihad: Does the Qur'an Preach Violence?

I have been told that Islam is not a peaceful religion and that the Qur'an is a book filled with ranting and ravings from Muhammad, peace be upon him. So are there any verses in the Qur'an that would tell me that people of Islam do not want war and death?

Thank you for your message, which shows that you are a person who does not accept what is said without questioning its truth. This is the mark of an intelligent person. What you have been told about the Qur'an is certainly untrue.

It is the word of someone who either does not know what he is talking about, or someone whose grudge against Islam blinds him to the truth.

It is as the saying goes: The proof of the pudding is in the eating. You only need to open the Qur'an, and read to realize that what it calls for is peace, not war. Besides, the Qur'an is not Muhammad's book; it is God's book. A person who wants to know what the Qur'an says should start with an objective outlook and read it, seeking some help where he finds difficulty.

I suppose we would agree that if we have it on highly reliable authority that Beethoven stated that he did not write one of the best symphonies the world attribute to him, we need no further proof to strike it off the list of his musical works. Similarly, if we have a reliable statement by Shakespeare that he did not write Hamlet or King Lear, we can no longer attribute that play to him. Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, has always maintained that he did not write or compose the Qur'an, which is universally agreed to be a book of surpassing literary excellence. Yet Muhammad's own statements, which we know to be his, are also superb.

So, how can anyone attribute the Qur'an to Muhammad when he has repeatedly disclaimed any part in its authorship? Besides, the Qur'an provides numerous proofs that its only author is God Almighty.

These begin with its style, which is unlike any human writing, and include its subject matter and different statements.

The Qur'an certainly speaks about war and jihad. But when we take all statements in the Qur'an about war, and also take into consideration the circumstances prevailing at the time of the revelation of each, and relate this to the final statements, we are bound to have a firm conviction that war in Islam is a defensive one. But we have to add here that its being defensive does not mean that Muslims must wait until they are attacked before taking to arms. It means that they may take measures to remove the threat of aggression.

I do not wish to go into what the Bible say about war, but you undoubtedly realize that human beings often resort to war without justification.

You only need to look at what the US and UK has been doing over the last couple of years to realize this. Hence, a religion that provides a code of living, as Islam does

must address the possibility of war. The Qur'an certainly does so, and the code it provides is more civilized than any in the whole history of humanity, even in our modern times.

Jihad: Duty — Collective Or Individual

When a part of the Muslim land is occupied by enemy jihad becomes obligatory. May I ask whether it is an individual or collective duty?

When a part of the land of Muslims falls under enemy occupation, fighting becomes obligatory to all the people of that area and those who are in neighboring areas. It is an individual duty, i.e. "Fardh Ayn", applicable to men and women. The Hadith mentions that a woman, a youth or slave may go out to fight without waiting for permission by their husband, father or master, respectively.

[The war against the Taliban was not a case of 'a part of the land of Muslims falling under enemy occupation'.]

Jihad: Killing Of Unbelievers — Quoting the Qur'an Out Of Context

I have heard that a verse in the Qur'an gives an order to "kill unbelievers wherever we find them." On the other hand, I know that Islam forbids the killing of innocent people regardless of their faith. Please explain.

The Qur'anic verse you refer to is quoted wrongly and out of context. It is Verse 191 of Surah 2, but if we read it in context, we realize that it is totally different from what you have quoted.

Here is the translation of the verses from Surah Al-Baqarah 2: 190-193:

"Fight for the cause of God those who fight against you, but do not commit aggression. God does not love aggressors. Kill them wherever you may find them, and drive them away from wherever they drove you away; for oppression is even worse than killing. However, do not fight them near the Sacred Mosque unless they fight you first there. Should they fight you, then kill them. Thus shall the unbelievers be rewarded. But, if they desist, know that God is Much Forgiving, Merciful. Fight them until there is no more oppression and submission is made to God. If they desist, let there be no hostility except against the wrongdoers." [the Cow — "Al-Baqarah" 2: 190-193]

As you see, the verse is concerned only with those who are aggressors, fighting Muslims because they believe in Islam, and driving them away from their homes, or fighting us near the Sacred Mosque in Makkah. It is such people that we may kill wherever we find them. The verse is not concerned with all unbelievers, and certainly not with those who are willing to live with us in peace. It is as God says: "No hostility except against the wrongdoers."

Jihad: Liberation Movements — Illegitimate Tactics

A liberation movement was working in the Muslim areas of the Philippines trying to achieve autonomy. They had to go to war against the hostile government. Another movement was formed much later, declaring the same objectives, but working separately. Sometimes they kidnap a priest or a Christian civilian and demand money for his release. They use the money so obtained to buy arms and ammunition. Could you please tell me whether such tactics are permissible for such objectives? Is it right that a group of Muslims start another liberation movement when one such

movement is already working for that purpose? May I ask what is permissible and what is forbidden in jihad?

Such questions are very tricky indeed. People may give all sorts of reasons for their actions. Some reasons may be highly valid. If they put such reasons and justifications to a scholar, he will give a verdict, which supports their actions. What he will be doing is to give his ruling on the basis of the case they put to him. Whether that case is truly justified or not is something a scholar may not be able to tell. He is not to judge or prejudge intentions. That is something known to God alone.

An analogy may be taken from the Hadith in which the Prophet, peace be upon him, has warned his followers against justifying actions on the basis of verdicts he might have given them. He says: "I am only a human being, and you come to me with your disputes. Some of you may have a better argument to support his claim and I may make my judgment in his favor. Let everyone reflect: If I give one person something that belongs to his brother, I am only giving him a brand of fire. He may decide whether to take it or leave it." This Hadith shows the limitations of arbitration. A judge or a referee can only base his judgment on the evidence he may have in front of him. It is the claimant who really knows whether what he is claiming rightly belongs to him or not. So, when he is able to provide good evidence in support of his claim, he will get something that does not belong to him. It is that which the Prophet, peace be upon him, describes as a brand of fire. It will be fire in this life and a piece of hell fire in the life to come.

The same can be said about the questions my reader has put to me. Is it appropriate to start a new liberation movement with the same aims as the first? I cannot give an answer without looking at the credentials of both movements. What I can say is something tentative. Suppose that the founders of the new liberation movements have genuine doubts about the intentions and attitudes of the first movement. Suppose also that they suspect that its leaders are only using Islam as a cover in order to gain the support of the Muslim populations, and that should they assume power in the Muslim areas, they would adopt a secular attitude. If these fears are genuine, then they may be right to start their own movement, which aims at establishing the rule of Islam in the Muslim area.

On the other hand, if the leaders of the new liberation movement have no such doubts, but they simply want to have power for themselves in the areas, then their action may be strongly censured. That is because by splitting the Muslim ranks, they weaken their cause and give their enemy a chance to defeat the whole Muslim community.

How can a scholar tell in which instances the formation of a second Islamic liberation front is justifiable or not? He can only form his ruling on the basis of the evidence put to him, and that evidence can easily be manipulated [or lopsided]. So the answer lies with those who form the second movement.

They are the ones who know their reasons and objectives. They should know whether their aims are justified or not. They certainly bear responsibility for their own actions and for their followers. And they must be very careful, because God will judge them on the basis of His knowledge of their intentions. He does not accept that the Muslim community should be split up only because some people want to be its leaders.

You ask what is permissible and what is forbidden in a situation of jihad. The answer is that what is forbidden in peace remains forbidden in war, unless there is a valid basis for its permissibility. Killing a peaceful civilian who has not fought the Muslims or supported those who fight them remains forbidden in any situation. It is only when that civilian moves to the position of a person at war with the Muslim community that he is treated differently.

It is permissible to take ransom in return for freeing enemy people who are taken captives. The Prophet, peace be upon him, took ransom from those non-believers who were taken prisoners in the Battle of Badr. It is true that God censured that action at the time but that censure does not look at the principle of taking ransom, but at the wisdom of doing so in that particular instance. However, that is possible in open warfare. Whether it is right to kidnap a priest or a civilian for that purpose is a totally different matter. Again, it is important to know the attitude of that particular person to Islam and the Muslims, and also to the war that is going on between the Muslims and the repressive authority.

If he is an active advocate of the war and repressive policy, then he is an enemy soldier, even though he may not raise arms himself. But if he is only engaged in religious duties, and looking after their parish and its population, then what justification do we have to kidnap him or to use him as a bargaining card?

I cannot give you a simple answer in the negative or the affirmative to your question. I only say that we have to look at the merits of the case in hand. As a principle, however, I do not believe that Islam approves choosing easy targets from among civilians who may not have a high opinion of Islam, but do not take any active role in fighting it or suppressing its message, or in persecuting its followers.

Jihad: No Fighting Before Explaining Islam
Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

During the lifetime of the Prophet, peace be upon him, the Muslim community had to fight many battles, because there were several sources of danger and many opponents who were keen to suppress the rising voice of the Islamic message. The Prophet, peace be upon him, made sure that in none of these battles the Muslims would exceed the limits of what is lawful in Islam. The important point to remember is that Islam is a message of guidance for all mankind, which does not aim to achieve supremacy for any nation, community, or ethnic or religious group. All that it is concerned with is that people should be able to exercise their right to receive divine guidance and to decide whether to accept it or not. Free choice on the basis of informed conviction is an inalienable right of every human being. When the Muslim community had to fight these battles, the Prophet, peace be upon him, was keen to explain to his soldiers and their commanders that their task was only to fight when there is no other way to deal with enemies.

Never during the Prophet's time did the Muslim community plan to attack any group or to take them unawares. Only when the Prophet, peace be upon him, received intelligence that a particular tribe or grouping were planning to attack the Muslims did he take countermeasures to ensure that the danger they represented is forestalled. But even when he took such measures, he would not launch an attack without alerting the enemy and calling on them to accept Islam and live in peace with the Muslim state.

Evidence for this is plentiful. However, we will concentrate here on a particular situation involving one of the main army commanders during the Prophet's lifetime: Ali, his cousin and son-in-law. Let us consider first this report by Anas ibn Malik: "The Prophet, peace be upon him, sent Ali ibn Abi Talib to fight a certain people. He then dispatched someone after him. He told the man: 'Do not call out to him [i.e. to Ali] from his rear, and tell him not to fight them before he has called on them [to accept Islam].'" [Related by Al-Tabarani].

Another version of this incident related by Ibn Rahawehi mentions that the Prophet, peace be upon him, told a man to "catch up with Ali, but do not call out to him from the rear... Tell him not to fight any people until he has invited them to Islam."

A more authentic Hadith mentions that the Prophet, peace be upon him, ordered Ali to march toward the enemy during the Battle of Khaybar, giving them the following instructions: "March at a comfortable pace until you reach them. Then call on them to accept Islam and tell them what their obligations toward God would be if they accept it. By God, should He make you the means of only one person accepting God's guidance would be far better for you than all the riches of this world." [Related by Al-Bukhari and others.]

This is then the right approach and the only one that Islam accepts. The issues must be clear before engaging in any fight. The enemy must be made aware of Islam and what it calls for before the Muslims could fight them. Because Islam embodies divine guidance for all the worlds, and because its message is addressed to all mankind, it is imperative that Muslims should make it known to people. Unfortunately many Muslims today give a terribly distorted image of Islam, particularly those who think that it is lawful to indiscriminately kill non-Muslims. Such people are grossly mistaken, and leaders whose understanding of Islam is clearly suspect often mislead them. Here we see the Prophet, peace be upon him, instructing the army commander he has appointed to make the gist of the message of Islam known to the enemy before engaging them in open warfare. How could anyone justify attacks on non-Muslim civilians who most probably have a very blurred view of Islam and what it advocates?

What the Prophet, peace be upon him, said to Ali in these reports was not a special case. It was an Islamic rule that he maintained. Farwah ibn Musayk Al-Ghutayfi was a companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, from a major Arabian tribe descending from Saba'. He reports: "I went to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and said: 'Messenger of God! Can I fight with those of my people who have accepted Islam those others who have turned away?' He said: 'Yes.' But then I thought the matter over and said to him: 'Messenger of God! No, I cannot. They are the people of Saba' and they are well equipped and too powerful.' The gave me his instructions and permitted me to fight against Saba'. When I left him, and God revealed in the Qur'an what He has concerning the Saba' people, the inquired: 'What has Al-Ghutayfi been doing?' He sent someone to my home, but he found that I have already set out on my way. He sent after me instructing me to return. When I arrived, I found him sitting with a number of his companions. He said to me: 'Call on your people to accept Islam. Whoever gives you a positive response, accept it from him. But those who refuse, leave them until I receive something concerning them.' One person in the group asked the Prophet, peace be upon him: 'Messenger of God? What is Saba'? Is it the name of a land, or a woman?' The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: 'It is not a name of any land or woman. It is the name of a man who fathered ten Arab tribes. Six of them settled in Yemen, while the other four settled in Syria. The ones in Syria were Lakhm, Judham, Ghassan and Amilah, while the others who settled in Yemen were Al-Azd, Kindah, and Himyar, Al-Sh'aris, Al-Anmar and Madhhij.' He further asked: 'Which ones are the Al-Anmar?' The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: 'Those are the ones whose branches include Khath'am and Bajeelah.'" [Related by Ahmad, Abu Dawood and Al-Tirmithi].

On several occasions the Prophet, peace be upon him, gave some of his companions permission to do things in a certain way, but later he called them back to change his instructions. This means that the Prophet's initial permission was his own decision, but the change signifies that he subsequently received some revelation requiring the amendment. Thus, the change gives the proper order. In this case, the Prophet, peace be upon him, first permitted the man to group those of his people who were Muslims and line them up against those of his tribe who rejected Islam. The man was in two minds because he feared that the opposition was too strong, but the permission was given. Nevertheless, after he had already set on his way, the Prophet, peace be upon him, sent after him and gave him fresh instructions. These required him to continue his activity in advocating Islam, but stopped him from fighting the unbelievers among his people. This is the proper Islamic position. Islam does not

like that internal conflict should erupt among any people. If some of them reject Islam, we should let them be, and continue to explain to them what Islam stands for. In time, they may, God willing, see the true nature of this divine message and determine their attitude to it on the basis of true information.

Jihad: Priorities — Praying On Time, Kindness To Parents. & Jihad

It is stated that jihad, the holy war [Jihad], is one action which earns the highest reward from Allah. Please comment.

If we were to ask people where do they place jihad for Allah's cause in their list of virtuous actions, most of them will undoubtedly place it at the very top. Jihad requires a person to recognize the fact that Islam is the religion of the truth, accept it and hold firmly to it, and to convey it to others. In order to do this; a person may have to sacrifice his wealth and his life. Jihad means to accept these risks willingly. Although most people understand the term to mean fighting the enemies of Islam in order that Islam may achieve supremacy over all other philosophies and creeds, its significance is much wider than its erroneous translation as "holy war". Every action which serves the dual purpose of establishing Islam firm in its own land and conveying it to others, including an information campaign, is part of jihad.

Whether we take jihad in this widest sense or restrict it to the narrower sense of fighting the unbelievers in battle, it ranks with most people as the most important action, which earns reward from Allah. Since jihad requires a positive effort, which involves sacrifice of one's time, money or life, it tends to overshadow other virtuous actions, which bring us reward from Allah.

Companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him, were in the habit of asking him about everything which relates to religion. They realized that Islam is a complete way of life, which requires them to modify or amend, or totally change their practices, so that they are in line with what Allah requires of them. Hence, they went to the Prophet, peace be upon him, asking him about anything on which they did not have clear guidance. At times, they put their questions in general terms in order to establish a certain principle or a definite list of priorities. Abdullah ibn Massoud, a companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, who achieved great renown as one of the leading scholars among the companions of the Prophet, reports that he asked the Prophet, peace be upon him, once: "Which action is most pleasing to Allah?" He answered: "To pray on time." I asked: "What comes next?" He answered: "Then comes kindness to one's parents." I said: "What comes next?" He said: "Next comes jihad for Allah's cause." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim and others.]

We note that the Prophet, peace be upon him, mentions first a pure act of worship which falls in the area of personal relationship with Allah as the act most pleasing to Him. He follows that with an action, which falls in a very narrow section of social relations, i.e. family relations. He places both actions above the one, which has more to do with public life and with the common welfare of the Muslim community. Moreover, the two first actions require much less effort and sacrifice than the third one. This Hadith reveals that the Prophet, peace be upon him, had a keen insight into what motivates people to work and to sacrifice. We know that prayer is the most important duty imposed by Islam. It does not impose a very heavy burden on the individual. It is an easy and pleasant duty, which makes man constantly aware of what Allah requires of him and keeps him on his guard against falling in sin. It is only natural that the fulfillment of the top and most frequent duty should earn the greatest reward from Allah. What the Hadith tells us is that prayer must be offered on time in order to earn that great reward and be most pleasing to Allah. In other words, punctuality is of essence for prayers to be so highly rewarded.

Kindness to parents is placed second in importance. There is no doubt that our parents have the greatest claim on our love and kind treatment. Nothing that we may do for them in their old age, when they grow weaker and more dependent on us, compensates them for the kindness and love they show us when we were young and totally dependent on them. We need only look at any child being cared for by his mother in order to appreciate how great the sacrifice of the mother is and how little the child can offer in return. People may not argue about the claim of parents on their children's kindness, a duty that earns reward from Allah. Allah rewards us for our good actions although we may do them only by way of duty. But the emphasis placed by Islam on this kindness to parents is due to two different considerations.

First, it is easy for a child just reaching adulthood to be preoccupied with its own affairs, looking after its own interests, and to be proud of strength, tough position, etc. It is very easy for such a person to be negligent in his duty toward his parents. Some people find it very difficult to part with their money, even when they have to pay it to their own parents. They may have more than enough for their own needs, and their parents may be poor, but nevertheless they find it extremely difficult to help their parents financially. It is not uncommon to hear about cases of unkind treatment of parents. Hence, the reminder is needed and the Prophet, peace be upon him, reminds us in the most effective of ways.

Secondly, with such a great claim on their kindness and love, which our parents possess, if we do neglect our duty, we are bound to neglect other duties which our religion imposes on us. We will definitely be less inclined to be kind to others who are not related to us. We will be hesitant to extend our help and support to those who need it and have no immediate claim on us. Such an attitude is totally alien to Islamic behavior. Hence, the Prophet, peace be upon him, stresses this duty. He says in another Hadith reported by Al-Bukhari on the authority of Abdullah ibn Omar: "Allah's pleasure is dependent on the pleasure of parents, and His displeasure is caused by the displeasure of parents with their child." In this Hadith the Prophet, peace be upon him, shows that the surest way to earn Allah's pleasure is to be kind to one's parents. If one is unkind to them to the extent that their love is replaced by displeasure, anger or bitterness, then this is the surest way to earn Allah's displeasure. There can be no gloomier prospect than this.

Jihad: Resistance To Israeli Occupation & Killing Of the Jews

Some people say that the Muslims have the right to kill Jews because they have occupied Jerusalem, the third holy place, and they prevent Muslims from access to the holy sites.

No Muslim would say that they have such a right. There are Jews who are opposed to Zionism and Israeli methods. What we say is that Zionist and Israeli aggression have targeted the people of Palestine for over 70 years during which many massacres, atrocities and killings have taken place. Hence, it is perfectly legitimate to resist such occupation and to repel the aggressors.

If this means fighting, then we must fight. We cannot slam a blanket verdict affecting every Jew, wherever they live. God says in the Qur'an:

“As for such of the unbelievers who do not fight against you on account of your faith, and neither drive you forth from your homelands, God does not forbid you to show them kindness and to behave toward them with full equity. Indeed God loves those who act equitably. God only forbids you to turn in friendship toward such as fight against you because of your faith, and drive you forth from your homelands, or aid others in driving you forth. Those who turn toward them in friendship are truly wrongdoers.” [She That Is To Be Examined — “Al-Mumtahanah” 60: 8-9]

Needless to say, in the light of these verses, we should maintain friendly relations with all those who do not share in aggression against Muslims. As for Israel and Zionists, we cannot extend to them a hand of peace unless they stop their aggression against Muslims.

Since there is little chance that this should come about, all Muslims throughout the world should join hands in an effort to re-establish justice for Palestine and the Palestinian people.

Jihad: Reward For Mujahid, Ghazi Or Shaheed & the Reality Of Jihad

What is real jihad? Who is a real Mujahid and who is a real shaheed? What is the reward for Mujahid, shaheed or a Ghazi?

If we take the linguistic meaning of the word jihad we find that it relates to the exertion of efforts. The effort is intended to accomplish a specific purpose, but the term jihad also implies the presence of strong opposition or resistance. Thus, a pre-Islamic poet may use the word jihad to describe his efforts to get his passion under his control after the departure of his beloved with her tribe, leaving him alone without any hope of reunion. His passion would be the source of resistance to his effort to control himself and try to live a normal life.

In its Islamic sense, the term jihad does not differ greatly in implying the exertion of effort and the presence of resistance. However, the purpose of jihad is clearly defined as the furtherance of the cause of Allah. This means helping the message of Islam spread and helping it being implemented properly in an Islamic community. The sort of effort required in jihad differs according to circumstances and to the particular situation in which a Muslim finds himself. It could be a simple action, such as standing firm in defense of the cause of Islam. This may require speaking out in public, against ignoring Islamic principles, and writing articles or publishing books. It may also take the form of reminding people of their Islamic duties and motivating them to conduct their lives according to Islam. Its top and most noble form is to fight the enemies of Islam in battle in order to foil their attempts to smother the call of Islam.

It is this form of fighting which always springs to people's minds when the term jihad is mentioned. This is due to the fact that when a person fights, he demonstrates practically his willingness to sacrifice his life for the cause of Islam. His jihad no longer stops at making efforts, which are not likely to cause him any harm. Here he is exposing himself to risks of injury and death. Because this form has been deeply rooted in people's concept of jihad, the word is associated generally with exerting strenuous efforts, which could endanger a person's life. Hence, the term 'jihad' is often mistranslated as "holy war."

Perhaps it is appropriate to clarify at this point that there is nothing, which Islam describes as "holy war". The very description will suggest that Islam approves of two types of war: one holy and the other unholy. This is certainly untrue. If a war is fought for a just cause, such as lifting injustice or freeing people from persecution, then it is a war, which Islam approves of, hence, it is jihad. A war against imperialism can be described as jihad if its purpose is to free the Muslim community so that they may conduct their lives according to Islam. A purely patriotic war to achieve national independence cannot be described as jihad if its aim is to retain the secular system imposed by the imperialists, but will simply replace its administrators by nationals.

We see that the purpose is of utmost importance. This is perfectly in line with Islamic thinking, because Islam attaches the greatest importance to the intention behind every action. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "Actions are but

intentions." This means that the value of any action is determined by the intention behind it and the purpose for which it is done. The Prophet, peace be upon him, was asked about people fighting the same war with the same army, but one of them is fighting simply because he wants to be with his people against their enemy, another is fighting for personal pride, and one fights simply because he is brave, and yet another in order to maintain appearances: which of them can be described as fighting for Allah's cause. His answer was most revealing: "He who fights in order to make Allah's law supreme fights for Allah's cause."

What this Hadith tells us is that it is the propriety of purpose, which determined the act of an individual, a community or the state. In other words, the cause for which the war is being fought must be approved by Islam, and the intention of every single fighter must be the right one. In other words, it is possible that a campaign of jihad may be joined by people who cannot be described as Mujahid. As you realize, the term Mujahid means a person who makes the efforts to support Allah's cause. Some of those who would join a campaign of jihad may have other purposes for doing so. Therefore, they cannot earn the honor of being Mujahid simply because they have joined such a campaign. Let me give you a very clear example. The war of liberation that the Muslim people of Afghanistan fought for over a decade was a war, which Islam approves. Therefore, it was a war of jihad. The fighters called themselves Mujahideen, and rightly so. However, in their ranks, there may have been people who did not consider the establishment of Allah's law in a land of Islam as their prime purpose. Those were not Mujahideen despite the fact that they were fighting with the Mujahideen.

A shaheed, which means martyr, is a person who is killed as a result of the efforts he makes in support of Allah's cause. Whether he is felled by an enemy bullet or assassinated or taken prisoner and executed is immaterial. As long as the prime reason for killing him is the effort he is making in support of Islam, then his death is martyrdom. He is a shaheed and a shaheed is admitted into heaven without having to account for his sins. Allah forgives him all sins that he may have committed previously.

A shaheed, however, need not be a fighter in the sense that he is a soldier taking part in war. He is a Mujahid as he is making an effort for jihad to make the world of Islam triumphant. I will give you an example. The late Sayyid Qutb, one of the top contemporary Islamic scholars, never fought war and never fired a bullet. He, however, served and defended Islam in the way he knew best. He wrote books and articles making the principles of Islam absolutely clear to modern readers and wrote a commentary on the Qur'an which makes the meaning of its verses easy to grasp. As a result, many young men, all over the Arab world and beyond turned to Islam advocating its cause, after having been previously semi-ignorant of their faith. He used his powerful style to instill in people's minds the thought that unless a community conducts all its affairs according to Islamic law, it cannot be described as a Muslim community. This was a direct challenge to the authorities in Egypt where Sayyid Qutb lived. At that time, Egypt was writhing under a brutal dictatorship. Sayyid Qutb was arrested and imprisoned for ten years then released. One year later, he was imprisoned again and his interrogators asked him mainly about his latest book, entitled 'Milestone.' When he was put to trial, his writing of that book was a central issue. He was sentenced to death and executed in 1966. Sayyid Qutb was a Mujahid and a shaheed. I say so advisedly because the Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "The best form of jihad is a declaration of the truth in front of a despotic ruler." He also says: "The master of all martyrs is Hamzah ibn Abdul Muttalib [the Prophet's uncle]; and a man who stands up to a tyrant, ordering him to do what is right and to desist from doing what is wrong." That was exactly what Sayyid Qutb did and for which he had to sacrifice his life.

Nowadays, people tend to describe as shaheed or martyr a person who is killed for any cause. They describe such people in a variety of ways, saying he is a martyr of the fatherland, a martyr of independence, a martyr of revolution, and so on and so forth. In Islam, there is only one type of martyrs: those who lose their lives fighting for the cause of Allah. We have to read the word "fighting" here in its broadest sense. The term Ghazi means a person who joins an expedition of jihad. It is more or less synonymous with Mujahid but much less frequently used. Allah rewards very generously all those who join a campaign of jihad for His cause.

Jihad: War Against Nations, Peoples Or the Policies

As a 14-year old student, I am puzzled about events that take place under an Islamic banner, such as suicide bombings, the Sept. 11 attacks, Riyadh and Bali attacks and the Chechens' attack in the Moscow theater? Are these justified in Islam? If a suicide bombing attack is carried out against enemy soldiers in Israel, is it acceptable? Please clarify.

To start with, Islam permits war for a just cause, such as self-defense, or defending an oppressed group of people, who may not even be Muslims. But war in Islam also has to abide by certain ethics, such as not killing anyone who is not a combatant. The Prophet, peace be upon him, and his successors in ruling the Muslim state gave express orders to commanders of Muslim armies not to kill any woman, child, elderly person, or anyone not taking part in supporting the enemy's war effort.

Keeping this in mind, we can say that the bombings in Riyadh, Bali, Nairobi, or the attacks on the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001, are contrary to Islamic principles and values. Islam does not approve of indiscriminate killing even of enemy personnel. It is impossible, from the Islamic point of view, to justify hijacking a plane in order to fly it into a building, intending to kill its passengers and as many other civilians as possible. Those who committed such acts tried to justify them on grounds that the US and others are enemies of Islam who are bent on suppressing its message. Islam cannot be supported by actions that are contrary to its values and principles. Such indiscriminate killing of people who are not engaged in a war against Islam is unjustifiable.

Having said that, we must add that the US has been consistently pursuing a policy which is detrimental to Islam and Muslims, as we see clearly in its support of Israeli aggression against Palestine and other Muslim states, and in its occupation of Afghanistan and Iran. But resisting such US policies cannot be through the indiscriminate killing of American citizens. What we should do is to pursue an informative policy that makes the American people aware of our rights and the wrongs that US policies are doing to us and to other people. If we do that consistently and with clear aims, we can bring about a change in American policy that will serve the interests of our faith.

The case of the Chechens who occupied the theater in Moscow is different. The Russian government has been following a policy of brutal aggression against the Chechen people, resulting in much killing and devastation in Chechnya. The group, which occupied the theater, tried to force the government into stopping some aspects of its aggression, such as releasing prisoners, and stopping attacks. It was the Russian government, which used poisonous gas to enable its soldiers to storm the theater, killing 129 of its own citizens in addition to the 50 Chechen men and women who took part in the operation. The Russian government could have resorted to different tactics, which would not have resulted in such a large number of casualties, but they opted for this knowing that its action will result in many innocent people losing their lives. What is amazing is the fact that the world media which covered the incident always mentioned the Russian casualties, but not the Chechen ones, as though 50 Chechen lives were not worth mentioning.

In Palestine, the case is one of stark injustice, with aggression continuing over nearly a hundred years and enjoying support by the US and other Western governments. When Israeli forces blow up houses of Palestinian civilians or attack Palestinian banks and get away with all the cash that belongs to ordinary Palestinian citizens, this hardly deserves a mention in the world media. The Palestinians then find themselves lacking support even by their Muslim neighbors. How can they defend themselves when they are denied arms, a state, or a voice demanding the observation of basic human rights? They have found no way other than sending young people to blow themselves up.

All Muslims should support the Palestinians in their just cause, because they have been victims of serious injustice over a very long period of time. It is injustice that could lead to terrorism. If the US really cares about stopping terrorism, it should start thinking about bringing about some justice in its attitude toward Muslims, particularly the Palestinians. Without justice, the world will continue to suffer and the suffering is perpetrated primarily by the unjust, particularly the United States government.

Having said that, I should add that as Muslims we differentiate between ordinary people and government policies. A Muslim's attitude to others is that of love and care. We love others, including Americans, but we dislike the present American policy that is based on blatant support for all the injustice against Palestine and other Muslim states and peoples.

Jinns: A Reality But Do They Interfere With Our Lives?

1. What is the reality of the Jinn having an influence on our lives? There are people who claim to have contacts with the Jinn and the ability to redress any harm perpetrated by them. Do these people resort to black magic? Is it possible for a person to cast a spell on another to the extent that he would marry a woman whom he would not have married otherwise? Please explain.

2. On reading verses 200-201 of Surah 7, I am inclined to ask whether Satan can be in control of the nervous system of a human being. Moreover, are there two sources of evil thoughts: Satan and one's soul?

3. Since Prophet Ibrahim stoned Satan as he tried to dissuade him from sacrificing his son, he must have seen him. This means that the Jinn can take physical forms to harm human beings. Please comment.

4. What is the meaning of the word jinn and where are jinn to be found? In what ways are they different from us? Also please speak about the spirit, good and evil. Some people suggest that jinns sometimes attack the Muslims that turn their backs on their faith. Please comment.

1. As Muslims we believe in the existence of the Jinn, because God has told us that He has created them. From what is mentioned about them in the Qur'an, we know that they have been given freedom of choice, like ourselves. They are also required to believe in the message of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, in the same way as human beings are. They are held to account for their deeds as well, and will receive the same reward or punishment as we do. Like human beings, most of them do not believe in God and His Messenger. Moreover, we learn from the Qur'an that they have powers which have been denied to us, as such their ability, prior to Islam, to go up to heaven to eavesdrop on the angels. But this ability has been denied them since the approach of the Islamic message. This means that they have not been able to learn anything from the angels for over 1,400 years. We are also told in the Qur'an, that they see us, but we cannot see them.

How much do they influence our lives? The answer is that they have nothing to do with us, in the same way, as we have nothing to do with them. We live in two different worlds. Some people unfortunately exploit the little information we have about the Jinn in order to deceive others, leading them to believe that the Jinn can do us much harm and we need to be protected from them. Those who promote this idea describe themselves as being able to communicate with the Jinn and force them to do their bidding. But when you look at what they do, you realize that it is all a question of deceiving some gullible people in order to take their money.

I have been told by a reader that he went to a place where a man claimed to have contact with the Jinn and that he would be bringing one of them to answer questions and solve problems. Sure enough he went into some rituals before telling his attendance that a female Jinni was ready to come and speak to them. He asked them to keep their eyes closed, because if they were to look at the female Jinni they would go blind. The reason was that the Jinn, being created of fire, generate blinding light. They did as they were told and they heard a female voice telling them things, answering questions and suggesting solutions to their problems. Afterward, this female went round and collected money from them for her food and sustenance.

Anyone could see that the whole episode is a charade aimed at making those gullible people part with their money. I wonder how none of them could think that if the Jinni would blind them to look at, how could he hand her the money without feeling her heat, or without the money being burned in her hand. How could she buy the food without the shopkeeper going blind by her presence? None of them could ask himself what sort of food the Jinn eat, and whether it is available in human shops and supermarkets, when their very nature is so different from ours. If I were in that situation, I would certainly keep my eyes open and challenge that imposter who claims to control the Jinn. He could have no answer to my challenge.

These people attribute great power to the Jinn, but how do they know about their power? It may be that they are weaker than we are but the cheats who make these claims need to give them this aura of great power to deceive their clients out of their money.

Black magic is mentioned in the Qur'an, but from the Qur'anic references we have, we can conclude without hesitation that it is all a matter of illusion, without any real substance. Read if you will the story of Moosa and the sorcerers in Surahs 7 & 20. It is forbidden for a Muslim to learn black magic or practice it. It is also forbidden to go to a fortune-teller and seek his help. Therefore, the right way is to expel any such thoughts about magic and the Jinn from our minds, to seek only God's help and rely on Him only.

2. The verses to which the readers is referring may be rendered in translation as follows:

“Whenever any dark suggestion from Satan touches them, the God-fearing think of God, and they begin to see things clearly, even though their [godless] brethren would like to draw them into error.” [the Heights — “Al-A'araf” 7: 200-201]

There is no suggestion in these verses, or indeed anywhere else in the Qur'an, or the Sunnah that Satan may be in control of man's faculties. In fact, the reverse is true: these verses suggest that Satan fails to achieve his purpose with the God-fearing. How else would they remember God. It is through this remembrance that they reject the dark suggestion Satan makes to them. This includes thoughts of disobedience to God, image of falsehood, etc.

There are certainly two sources of evil thoughts in the human mind: Satan and one's own soul, or desires. To resist both is the mark of piety and God-fearing. It is done all the time by those who have a good perception of God, believe in Him, and are committed to obeying Him. [Recite, if you will, the last Surah An-Nas 114]

3. The Jinn cannot possess a human being or be in control of him or her. That Satan was allowed to appear to Prophet Ibrahim, peace be upon him, does not mean that he has a free reign to harm people. He could not do that with Ibrahim. Nor can the Jinn do it. When people say that a certain person is possessed, they simply try to explain a severe mental or psychological condition of a mental illness. Mental or psychological diseases can play in a variety of ways. Many such diseases are now treatable and curable. They may take time and a package of treatment but they must not be ignored. They cannot be attributed to the Jinn, in the same way as the Jinn are not responsible for our physical illness.

4. Allah tells us in the Qur'an that He has created a different type of creature from us whom we cannot see, in the same way as we cannot see the angels or sound waves or the electric current. We are required to believe in what Allah has mentioned about them in the Qur'an, such as the fact that they were created before us and that they were made out of fire. It does not follow that they remain in the shape of fire, because we ourselves have been created originally from clay. They do see us in this world. They will also face the reckoning on the Day of Judgement and will either be rewarded with heaven or punished in hell. They are required to believe in the message of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, as they are required to believe in the message of Prophet Moses. However, some of them do respond and believe while many do not.

The disbelievers among the jinn are the devils, or Shaitans. They are man's worst enemy because it was Shaitan who worked hard to cause man to be thrown out of heaven. Shaitan or Satan cannot do to man anything worse than trying to persuade him to abandon the path which draws him nearer to Allah and to indulge in sin.

Many people ask me about the spirit and I prefer not to answer any question on that because Allah instructs the in Qur'an to say: ***"Knowledge of the true nature of the spirit belongs to My Lord."***

If Muslims turn away from their faith, they incur Allah's anger and make themselves open to His punishment. This may take any shape or form Allah chooses. Allah can call on any of His creatures to carry out His orders. When He wants to punish any of His creatures, He may employ any agent for inflicting it. Allah may punish those who challenge His authority with floods, storms, volcanoes, catastrophes of every variety or He may allow any nation to subdue them. Whether He employs the jinn or not is a matter open to Him.

Having said that, I should add that in the normal situation, the jinn live their lives separate from human lives. If Allah wishes the two lives to interact, He can accomplish that. However, we have not heard of any community, which was attacked by jinn on a large scale.

Jinns: Difference Between Angels & Jinns

Could you please explain in detail what are the jinn, Shaytan, Iblis and what are the angels? How are they created and what sort of life span do they have? Some people mention that the angel of death is called Izrael. Is this true?

The Qur'an tells us of the existence of the angels. Therefore, we believe in them, because if a person denies anything that is mentioned in the Qur'an, he is a non-

believer. What we are told about the angels, in the Qur'an, is that they were created before the creation of human beings, and they always obey God and do his bidding. They glorify Him all the time and they pray that He forgive human beings that believe in Him. They may take a material form or even appear in the shape of human beings, as happened with the angels who appeared to Mary to give her the news of her forthcoming pregnancy and childbirth. We are also told in the Qur'an that the angels live in heaven and come down to earth when God instructs them to do so.

They have different grades and positions as well as different tasks. Their chief is Gabriel who is the angel who brings down Divine revelations to prophets and messengers. One of them is assigned the task of causing death, while another is in charge of blowing the Trumpet, which signals the end of life on earth and the beginning of the Day of Judgement. Some of them carry Allah's Throne, while others watch over human beings and record their deeds. Some have the task of bringing comfort and enjoyment to the dwellers of heaven, while others are in charge of tormenting those condemned to hell. When believers fight for Allah's cause, God sends angels to strengthen their resolve to fight the enemies of Allah.

Although most people believe that the angel of death is called Izraeel, there is no mention of that name anywhere in the Qur'an, or the Hadith. There is not even an authentic report recording his name. When the Prophet, peace be upon him, refers to him he invariably speaks of "the angel of death".

We learn from the Qur'an that God has created a different type of creatures known as the jinn whom we cannot see. We are required to believe in the existence of the Jinns and in what has been mentioned about them in the Qur'an. As the Qur'an tells us, the jinns have been created of fire, although they need to have, after their creation, the qualities of fire. They were created before man, and they can see us while we cannot see them. They are required to believe in God and His messenger in the same way as we are, and they will be accountable for their deeds just as we will be. In other words, they may deserve reward or may incur punishment.

God tells us that Hell will be full of the jinn and human beings as well. The message of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, has been conveyed to them, as was the message of the Prophet Moses. Some of them have been good believers while others have been disobedient to Allah. They have their own races and classes. Some of them have been made subservient to the Prophet Sulaiman when they had to do his bidding, making for him works of art. The knowledge is limited, because God has withheld certain things from them as He has kept these unknown to us.

When Sulaiman died, they continued to do the tasks he had appointed for them until they realized that he had died after worms and insects had eaten part of his stick on which he had inclined. Only when he fell down they realized that had they known better, they would not have continued in their hard labor. We also know that they used to climb into the sky to learn some information from angels. Qur'an tells us that they were prevented from that.

The Shaytan or Satan is the non-believers among the jinn. The first of these was Iblis. Some people imagine that Iblis was an angel and he was transformed into Satan after he had disobeyed Allah. This is totally untrue. Had he been an angel, he would not have disobeyed Allah. Angels simply do what God bids them and can never disobey Him. Moreover, God states clearly in the Qur'an that **"Iblis was one of the jinn and he disobeyed the order of his Lord."** The Qur'an also mentions that Iblis has been created out of fire, as were all the jinn.

From what is mentioned about Satans in the Qur'an we know that Satan is the first of most hardened enemy of mankind. Satans procreate and all their offspring are of the same devilish nature. Allah has given Satans a chance to try to seduce human

beings, but He has not given them the ability to benefit or harm human beings. Nor has He given Satan an irresistible power, but He has given them simply the ability to scheme. Their work is that of seduction, making evil things appear tempting. What we also know about Satan is that he lets down his followers and gives them no support even at the time when they badly need any type of help they could have.

We do not have any authentic information about the life span of angels or jinn. That is something that does not matter much to us. I hope I have given you the type of information you require.

Jinns: In the Form Of Snakes

One morning when I woke up I found a snake in my bedroom, and my husband says that he saw something similar two weeks earlier, but he was not sure because he did not have his glasses on. He killed the snake but people say that it will return, or that it is a Jinn, or that it is envy. This has left me scared. Could you please advise whether any of this is real.

Snakes are animals of God's creation. They are neither Jinns nor produced or controlled by any human feeling like envy. When an animal is killed, it cannot return. There is no question about this. However, the reader's worry is well warranted. Since a snake was found twice in her bedroom, it may well be that a snake hole is there inside the house or close to it. Her husband must try to find it, or at least determine the entrance point of the snake and close it. It should not be left like this, because it could represent a serious hazard.

Jinns: Sighting the Jinn

Could you please throw some light on the question of seeing the jinn, or being harmed by them. For example some people said they saw two of them in the form of children playing on a balcony. What does the Qur'an say about this? Is it possible to see the jinn in a dream?

The jinn is a different type of creation from us, yet, like us, they have been given freedom of choice in the question of faith and belief. Therefore, they are required to believe in Islam in the same way as human beings. Surah 72 of the Qur'an is entitled Al-Jinn and it speaks of some of them listening to the Qur'an and believing in it. The same incident is also mentioned in Surah 45, Al-Ahqaf. From both reports of the event we learn that they were also required to believe in the message of the Prophet Moses. They include some believers and some unbelievers, which are in majority. However, we cannot see them, but they see us as mentioned in the Qur'an:

“O children of Adam, let not Satan seduce you in the same way that he caused your first parents to be driven out of the Garden and stripped them of their garments in order to expose their shameful parts before each other.. He and his party see you from where you cannot see them. We have made these Satans the guardians of those who do not believe.” [Heights — “Al-A'araf” 7: 27].

So when people speak about seeing the jinn in any shape or form, it is all untrue, because we cannot see them. They are created from a totally different substance. While we are created from clay, they are created out of fire.

Can they harm us? We do not have anything in the Qur'an or the authentic Sunnah to suggest so. It is more accurate to say that they have their own world and we have ours. They cannot inflict harm on us. What people speak about describing someone as being possessed by the jinn cannot be substantiated. It is untrue.

Having said that, we have to draw a particular distinction. Satan belongs to the jinn. He and his offspring are among the unbelievers of the jinn. They try hard to persuade us to commit sins and acts of disobedience of God. But they are limited to prompting and trying to encourage us to disobey God. They have no power over us to force us into such actions. Anyone who is a good believer will be able to resist them easily.

K

Ka'abah: Background Of the Ka'abah

What is the background of the Ka'abah? Why was it built in the shape of a square? What is inside the building? People of the old say that it is the house of God. Is this true?

God tells us in the Qur'an, that the Ka'abah was the first House ever built for Mankind to be a temple for universal human worship. It was built by Ibrahim and his son Ismail, who were both Prophets, peace be upon them. God indicated to Ibrahim the place where to build this House and he built in this shape because it is simpler and makes it easy to distinguish one corner from another. When Ibrahim completed the building, God commanded him to declare to people that God has made it an obligation for them to visit this House for worship. This does not mean that there were no temples, or places of worship, built before the Ka'abah. What is meant is that the Ka'abah is the first place built for all mankind to worship at.

At first there was nothing inside the Ka'abah. When idol worshipping spread in Arabia at a later date, the polytheists put inside it certain pictures, including one of Ibrahim himself drawing lots. When the Muslims conquered Makkah at the time of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, he ordered these pictures to be removed. Since then, there has been nothing inside the Ka'abah except its supporting posts. There is no secret inside to be hidden. Its door is not open in order that people do not scramble over it and hurt each other while trying to enter it.

The Ka'abah is a house built for worship. It is God's House in that sense, i.e. that we worship Him at it. When we say that it is the House of God, we only mean that. Time or space does not limit Him. We cannot say of God that He is present in a certain place, meaning that He is absent in another. He encompasses the whole universe and we cannot imagine a place in the whole universe where God does not have full and absolute command.

When we turn toward the Ka'abah in our prayer we feel our unity as one nation grouping all Muslims, regardless of their geographical area, color or race. When we do the Tawaf around it, we glorify God. We do not worship the place itself. This is why we walk around it praising and glorifying Him. We know that the Ka'abah itself can cause us neither harm nor good. The same applies to the Black Stone, which is a mark for the beginning of Tawaf. We kiss it because the Prophet, peace be upon him, kissed it. Our attitude toward it is simple one of doing what the Prophet, peace be upon him, did. This is best explained by Omar who said, addressing the Black Stone: "I certainly know that you are a mere stone, which can neither bring any benefit or cause any harm. Had it not been for the fact that I have seen God's messenger kissing you I would not have kissed you myself."

The fact that we turn toward the Ka'abah in our prayer enhances our feeling of unity and brotherhood. When you consider that the followers of other religions face a certain direction in their prayer, you will find that they actually face the opposite direction. This is because what lies to my east when I am at a certain place is to the west of someone else at another place. We, Muslims, face a focal point wherever we

are. If we are to its south, we face northward. If we are to its north we face southward. You see people praying in the Grand Mosque, i.e. the Harm, forming a circle round the Ka'abah. You have only to stretch your imagination to realize that the circle grows bigger and bigger until it encompasses the whole world.

Ka'abah: Black Stone At the Ka'abah — Its Origin & Significance

1. Could you please tell us what is the Black Stone and its origins and significance?

2. Is it true that the Black Stone in the Ka'abah which marks the beginning of tawaf, was given to Adam on his fall from heaven, as mentioned in the Encyclopedia Britannica. Or has it fallen from heaven by some other means?

1. The **Black Stone** is an easily distinguished stone, placed a little below shoulder level at one corner of the Ka'abah. The act of worship which is particularly associated with the Ka'abah, and never stops except when congregational prayer is held, is tawaf, which means walking round the Ka'abah seven times in an anti-clockwise direction. Tawaf is one of the duties of the Hajj and Umrah [mini-pilgrimage]. It is also a recommended act of worship at all times. Moreover, it is the way to offer greeting to the Ka'abah.

It is said that when Ibrahim completed the building of the Ka'abah, with the help of his son, Ishmael, God commanded him to do the tawaf. He was not able to keep a correct count of the rounds he made. He felt that other worshipers would be similarly confused. He prayed God to give him a sign to be used for counting rounds. The Angel Gabriel brought him the Black Stone.

When one starts tawaf, and at the completion of each round, one should kiss the Black Stone or touch it with one's hand, if it is possible, or signal to it from a distance, if the place is too crowded. As one does so, one should repeat this declaration: "There is no deity save God, God is supreme."

The significance of this particular action is best expressed by Omar ibn Al-Khattab, the second greatest figure among the companions of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and his second successor as ruler of the Islamic state, and a distinguished scholar. He addressed the Black Stone in these words: "I know that you are a stone which can cause no harm or benefit. Had it not been for the fact that I saw God's Messenger, peace be upon him, kissing you, I would not have kissed you."

2. There is nothing in Islamic tradition to suggest the Black Stone was known to anyone on earth before Prophet Ibrahim, or before the building of the Ka'abah. This means that it was not given to Adam when he was sent down from the heaven. According to Islamic tradition, when Prophet Ibrahim and Ismail completed the building of the Ka'abah, Allah commanded them to do the tawaf. They could not count the rounds as they got confused with corners. Ibrahim prayed Allah to give him a mark to signal the beginning of each round. It is reported that Black Stone was given to Ibrahim by Archangel Gabriel. Obviously, Ibrahim could have used a mark of his own, but he wished that Allah would give a mark, which remained for all time, so that all those who do the tawaf have the same signal.

It should be clear to everyone that the Black Stone does not have any significance other than what I have just mentioned. It does not give any blessing to anyone. We simply kiss it at the beginning of tawaf because he kissed it when he did the tawaf. Our attitude to it is that of Omar ibn Al Khattab who said addressing the stone: "I do know that you are only a stone, which can cause no benefit or harm to anyone. Had it not been for the fact that I have seen the kissing you, I would not have kissed you."

Ka'abah: Feet Toward the Ka'abah

We are told by our elders not to sit with our feet facing the direction of the Qiblah wherever we happen to be.

It is when you are in the Haram with the Ka'abah at the center that you should not stretch your legs toward it. When you are outside, you may face the way you like, and stretch your legs in any direction. Only if a person turns toward the Ka'abah with a gesture intended as an insult to it that his action is forbidden. But if you are at home, and mean no disrespect to the Ka'abah, you sit or lie down in the position that is most comfortable to you.

Ka'abah: Rukn Al-Yamani

You have mentioned in the past that we kiss the Black Stone only because the Prophet, peace be upon him, kissed it. There is another place, Rukn Al-Yamani that some people kiss when they do the tawaf. Could you please explain the background for their doing so and what is the proper ruling concerning that. May I also ask what is the proper name of the semicircular place next to the Ka'abah where many people offer prayers? Is it true that one should not look at the Ka'abah directly during the tawaf?

You may realize that the Ka'abah was rebuilt by Quraish shortly before the beginning of Islamic revelations, after its foundation had weakened due to floods. The story is well known of how the Makkah chiefs disputed among themselves as to who of them had the right to replace the Black Stone. Eventually, they agreed to arbitration, appointing the first man to enter by a certain door to be the arbiter. It was Muhammad, peace be upon him, who had not yet received his revelations, who entered and they all agreed that he should arbitrate on their dispute. His ruling was pleasing to everyone. He called for a dress to be placed on the floor, and he placed the Black Stone on it, asking each tribe to appoint a representative. All these representatives lifted the dress with the Black Stone in it until they brought it very close to its position, when Muhammad, peace be upon him, took over and placed it in its correct position.

The Ka'abah was rebuilt several times, whenever its structure showed need for strengthening or rebuilding. Abdullah ibn Az-Zubair and Abdulmalik ibn Marwan, were two people, close to the time of the Prophet, who rebuilt it.

It is believed that the semicircle area next to the Ka'abah was originally part of it. It is reported that Abdullah ibn Az-Zubair, a companion of the Prophet, included that semicircle in the building of the Ka'abah, but then the semicircle was kept out of it and was rebuilt again by Abdulmalik who belonged to the generation of successors to the companions of the Prophet, peace be upon him. It is, indeed, because this semicircle was originally a part of the Ka'abah that we do tawaf outside it, rather than inside. However, the Ka'abah was originally of rectangular shape. The exact position of the two corners on the side of the semicircle is not known now for certain. However, we are absolutely certain that the other two corners are in the original place when Ibrahim built it.

As I have mentioned earlier, we kiss the Black Stone because he kissed it. We do not kiss Rukn Al-Yamani, because the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not kiss it. It is recommended, however, to touch it with one's hands and offer a supplication. The preferred supplication is: *"My Lord, forgive me and have mercy on me."* The semicircle area is best known by the name of Hijr Ismail. Another name of it is Al-Hateem. Both names are used in Arabic literature.

During tawaf, one should look in front of him, with his head a little low in a posture of submission to God. He should not be looking around, or looking at the Ka'abah. There is no harm in lifting one's head in order to walk properly in the crowd, so that one does not hit any one accidentally. Looking at the Ka'abah occasionally causes no harm, but the general attitude during tawaf is that of someone who is engaged in worship, not sight-seeing.

Ka'abah: Was Adam the First One To Build the Ka'abah?

I read in a book that the first one to build the Ka'abah was Prophet Adam, with the help of some angels. Is this true? Could you also explain the significance of the Black Stone and how it was brought from heaven?

It is not right to say that the Ka'abah was first built by Prophet Adam. We have no authority on which to rely when we say that. In fact the evidence is strongly against this. In the Qur'an God tells us that the first temple that was ever built for the worship of God was the Ka'abah and He tells us that it was Prophet Ibrahim and his son, Prophet Ismail who built it. He does not mention anything about its having been built originally by Adam or any one else. Nor does He say that it was built on the ruins of an older place. Some people who want to show that God's religion has been the same ever since the start of human life make this assumption. But that does not need a proof like the one they have invented about the building of the Ka'abah. It was built by Ibrahim and Ismail, as God tells us in the Qur'an.

It is said that when Ibrahim completed the building of the Ka'abah, God commanded him to do the *Tawaf*. He was not able to keep a correct count of the rounds he made. He felt that other worshippers would be similarly confused. He prayed God to give him a sign to be used for counting rounds. The angel Gabriel brought him the Black Stone.

When one starts *Tawaf*, and at the completion of each round, one should kiss the Black Stone or touch it with one's hand, if it is possible, or signal to it from a distance, if the place is too crowded. As one does so, one should repeat this declaration: "***There is no deity except God, God is supreme.***" The significance of this action is best expressed by Omar ibn Al-Khattab, the second greatest figure among the companions of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and his second successor as ruler of the Islamic state, and a distinguished scholar. He addressed the Black Stone in these words: "I know that you are a stone which can cause no harm or benefit. Had it not been for the fact that I saw God's messenger, peace be upon him, kissing you, I would not have kissed you."

Kinfolk: Brothers & Their Obligations To Sisters

What are the obligations of an elder married brother to his younger sisters, some of whom are unmarried but their parents have died? Is he required to tighten his belt so much in order to give his younger sisters good education? Is it right that he should waive his right to the property left by his parents so that his sisters may have it all for their own, claiming that this would provide for only a temporary life. A further reason he gives is that his father has the right to give the property to whomsoever he wanted because the father was the owner. If that elder brother's wife objects, she is told that she does not have any right to do so. Please comment and kindly point out whether it is right that a woman should work for her living rather than be a dependent on her brother.

From the way this question is phrased, I can guess that it reflects some long-standing contention between a man with a keen sense of responsibility toward his

family, particularly his sisters and an attitude of self-denial that extends before what can be reasonably expected of him in order to impose sacrifice on his own wife and children. Let me say first of all that I am full of admiration for such a person, although I feel he may need to take some highly necessary steps to ensure balance in his overall attitude.

The first thing to be said about this gentleman is that he prefers to ensure that his sisters have their full shares and receive good education, even though that might deprive him of something to which he is fairly entitled. This gentleman may expect to receive the right reward, which God preserves for those who look properly after their womenfolk. The Prophet, peace be upon him, is quoted to have said: "A person who looks well after two young girls until they come of age will be my companion in heaven." If a man understands this properly and works for this prize, always ready to sacrifice what belongs to him in order to ensure that his sisters or his daughters receive their fair share, or even more than their fair share, then he must not be blamed. He is like a person who has been promised a very rich prize and works hard to achieve it.

The man who is the subject of this question appears to have a good vision of what his sisters need. Therefore, he is sacrificing his comfort to have his sisters educated. It is their education that would ensure that they are well brought up.

Although the questioner does not give me the full details of the problem, I gather that this man's father had wanted his family home to be shared out between the daughters, and that this elder brother has approved this. What I have to say about this situation is that the father should not have done so. He should have maintained justice between his children. But if the son or the eldest son in this case, has approved what his father has done, then the matter is settled. The son's wife does not have the right to object, because this is a matter between members of her husband's family and they have to make an agreement together. If she accepts this situation and shows her husband that she fully appreciates his kindness to his sisters, she will get better than the lost share, which has raised her complaint. Her husband appears to be a very kind man. His kindness will not end with his sisters. She is bound to receive her fair share of it provided that she shows that she is keen to have peace in her family. Therefore, she should not always remind him that he is doing this and that for his sisters. She should tell him that she is proud to have such a kind man for a husband.

What worries me in this whole situation is that this man may be asking his wife and children to sacrifice their comfort for the sake of others. If his kindness to his sisters creates an imbalance, then he should reconsider some of his actions. He should ensure that his wife and children receive their fair share of his kindness. If he does, then no one can object to the kindness he may show to his sisters.

There is no reason to prevent a Muslim woman doing any honorable or respectable job to earn her living instead of being dependent on her family.

Kinfolk: Importance Of Fostering Ties Of Kinship
Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

In reply to a question by a Bedouin on what actions bring a man closer to heaven and take him away from hell, the Prophet, peace be upon him, listed four duties. "Worshiping God alone without associating partners with Him; attending to prayers regularly, the payment of Zakah and the fostering of ties of kinship." The Prophet, peace be upon him, then placed this last duty as next in importance only to the topmost duties of Islam required of every Muslim. Indeed, the Prophet, peace be upon him, has stressed the fostering of ties of kinship, on numerous occasions and

in a variety of ways. We have, for example, the following Hadith, which describes these ties as creature addressing God Himself.

Abu Hurairah quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying: “God has created all creatures. When He had finished, kinship stood up. God asked: “What was that?” She answered: “That I did as I sought refuge with you from being severed.” said, “Will you be contented if I bestow My grace on the one who fosters you and cut off the one who severs you?” She answered: “I will indeed, my Lord.” He said, “I grant you that.” [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim and An-Nasa’ie]

[Added: Narrated Abu Hurairah: The Prophet, peace be upon him, stated that God created His creation, and when He had furnished it, the womb got up and caught hold of God whereupon God said, “What is the matter?” On that it said, ‘I seek refuge with You from Al-Qatiah [those who sever the ties of kith and kin].’ On that God said, “Will you accept [be satisfied] if I bestow My Favors on him who keeps your ties, and withhold My Favors from him who severs your ties?” On that it said, “Yes, O my Lord!” Then God said, “That is for you.” [Abu Hurairah added] if you wish you could recite: **“Would you then, if you were given the authority, do mischief in the land and sever your ties with your kinship?”** [Muhammad 47: 22] — Bukhari 6: 354 O. B

The Prophet, peace be upon him, describes kinship here as a living creature. She can be nurtured and fostered, and on the other hand, she can be adversely affected when she is ignored and severed. She cannot motivate people into fostering her unless the motivation comes from Himself. She realizes her inability to persuade people to give her the right sort of treatment and she, therefore, appeals to God for help. God’s response is most gratifying to her. He promises to bestow His Grace on people who foster their ties of kinship and deprive those who sever their ties of His own Grace.

The description by the Prophet, peace be upon him, of kinship as a living creature is most effective. As we read it, the first thought in our mind is that it is a figurative description. The Prophet, peace be upon him, uses this metaphor to emphasize the importance of kinship and the honor gained by any person who fosters his ties with his relatives and deprivation which is sure to befall the one, who severs such ties. We can take this description, however, at its face value. Any abstract idea can, by God’s will, take shape and be embodied in physical forms. This presents no difficulty to God. It is not difficult for us to imagine that kinship was given a form in this particular instance and spoke to God directly. The Hadith in its Arabic form admits a third explanation. Angels may have stood up to speak for kinship. The answer would have been given to him in order to be conveyed by the Prophet, peace be upon him, to mankind. Whichever of three explanations we prefer, the message of the Hadith is clear. God is pleased with anyone who fosters his ties of kinship and bestows His grace on him.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, is reported to have emphasized this idea in several Hadiths. One related by Al-Bukhari on the authority of Ayesha, the wife of the Prophet, states: “Kinship is one aspect of God’s mercy. He who fosters it shall be rewarded by God and he who severs it shall be cut off by God.” The same Hadith in almost the same wording is transmitted by Al-Bukhari on the authority of Abdullah ibn Amr with the addition: “It will have a highly eloquent expressive tongue on the day of resurrection.” The addition means that the kinship will argue for or against people, according to what attitude they may take of it in this life. Her argument will be highly effective considering its great eloquence and power of expression, God would not have given it on the day of resurrection if He did not consider its case to be important. This Hadith, then, serves as a warning to people that the sort of relationship they choose to maintain with their kinfolk is bound to affect their destiny in the Hereafter. Their reward will be highly increased if they have fostered their ties of kinship in this life.

A question arises here about what is meant by one's relatives in this context. Is every relative entitled to the same sort of good treatment the Prophet, peace be upon him, is emphasizing in these Hadiths? This very question was put to the Prophet, peace be upon him, by Bakr ibn Al-Harith Al-Ansari. The Prophet, peace be upon him, answered: "Your mother and father, your sister and brothers and your relatives who come next in line. It is a binding duty that a kinship has to be fostered." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim, At-Tirmithi and Abu Dawood]

This Hadith provides us with a definite order for relatives who have the strongest claims on us. Commentators on the Sunnah point out here that although the Prophet, peace be upon him, uses here the conjunction "and" this signifies an order of priority. A mother's claim takes precedence over that of the father, which in turn comes ahead of the claims of sisters and brothers. We have already spoken at length about the claims of parents to receive the kindest of treatment by their children. It is only logical that they also would have the strongest claim from the point of view of fostering one's ties of kinship. None is closer to a person than his parents. This Hadith and others, which speak of the ties of kinship, make it clear that other relatives have also a strong claim on one's affection and material help. It is only to be expected that sisters and brothers will take precedence over other relatives. They are, therefore, specifically mentioned by the Prophet, peace be upon him, as having the next strongest claim. Other relatives come next according to their close relation.

We note here that the Prophet, peace be upon him, mentions the mother ahead of father and the sister ahead of the brother. This is in line with the Islamic view that women must be looked after by their relatives. In the normal state of affairs, a sister is likely to need help more than a brother. Moreover, she is less likely to be able to repay her brother's kindness. Hence, the Prophet, peace be upon him, gives sisters precedence over their brothers. This applies throughout this sort of relationship. Women relatives always take precedence over their male counterparts.

We have a specific Hadith, which explains the punishment in the Hereafter of a person who in this world severs his ties with his relatives. Jubair ibn Mul'im mentions that he heard the Prophet, peace be upon him, saying: "No one who severs his ties of kinship will enter Paradise." Related by Muslim, At-Tirmithi and Al-Bukhari]

When we remember that a Muslim strives throughout his life for the attainment of a simple goal, namely paradise, then all his striving and his efforts seem to be futile if he is negligent of his duty towards his relatives, treats them badly and severs his ties with them. This is certainly the punishment of a person who adopts an extremely hostile attitude towards his relatives. But it is a fitting punishment. He has deprived his relatives of his kindness, so God deprives him of His kindness. The person who adopts such an attitude merits punishment in this world also. Abu Bakr, quotes the Prophet, peace be upon him, as saying that no sinful action merits a swifter punishment by God in this world than the severing of ties of kinship and rebellion [against an Islamic ruler]. This is in addition to what He has in store for the wrongdoer in the Hereafter. [Related by Abu Dawood, At-Tirmithi, Ibn Majah, Ahmad & others] The two sinful actions mentioned here share in common the fact that they weaken the structure of Islamic society and undermine its very existence. The Hadith confirms definitely that punishment in this world will be forthcoming for severing ties of kinship, although it does not specify the form of that punishment.

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Legal Order: Accidental Killing — Blood Money For

I come from a Muslim country where the Islamic law is not implemented, although we have Islamic courts for personal and family matters. I had a car accident several years ago when my sister and some close friends were passengers in a car I was driving. One of my relatives was taken to hospital, but she later died due to internal bleeding resulting from the accident. Perhaps I should explain that the accident occurred because I was trying to avoid an oncoming truck overtaking another vehicle in the opposite direction. I had to swerve to the side of the road, and in doing so, my car skidded and overturned several times. Recently, I met a friend who told me that I was liable to pay money to the family of my relative who was killed in this accident. After consulting Muslim scholars, I fasted for two consecutive months. I then thought of contacting my relative's next of kin to agree on a sum of money in compensation. However, fearing an excessive demand, I consulted a scholar about the sum payable. He could not advise me because this part of Islamic law has never been in practice in our country. How should I go about this matter in order to fulfill my duty, without being made liable to meet unreasonably excessive demands?

I applaud your keenness to fulfill your Islamic obligations even when you are in a position where the law of the land does not place you under any particular obligation. You have shown an attitude, which is the mark of faith. When you learned of a particular responsibility on your part, you were keen to fulfill that responsibility, and consulted scholars with regard to how you should go about it.

Let me tell you at the outset that blood money, or 'Diya', as it is called in Islamic terminology, needs to be paid in accidental or semi-deliberate murder, when the circumstances of the case do not allow a death sentence to be passed on the killer. Allah states in the Qur'an:

"A believer may not kill another believer except accidentally; the killer must free from bondage a slave who is a believer and pay blood money to the family of the person killed, unless they forgo it. ..." [Women — "An-Nis'a" 4: 92

There are further detailed rules concerning each case and the particular circumstances, which may lead to accidental or semi-deliberate killing.

The amount of blood money to be paid in accidental killing has been determined by the Prophet, peace be upon him, as 100 camels. Scholars say that it can alternatively be 200 cows or 2,000 sheep or 1,000 Dinars [the gold currency of the Muslim state], or 12,000 Dirhams [the silver currency of the Muslim state]. An Islamic court decides the amount of blood money to be paid nowadays as it determines what is the equivalent to any of these guidelines in modern currency. However, it is evident that the blood money is very high and it is often the case that an individual cannot pay it.

Islam makes it clear that blood money is to be paid not only by the killer himself, but also by his immediate relatives on his father's side, including his cousins, nephews, uncles and so on. If anyone wonders why Islam makes it obligatory that people who had nothing to do with the killing should pay the compensation to the family of the person who is killed, the answer is that Islam makes it the responsibility of every community to make sure that its members refrain from doing anything which may lead to accidental killing. Moreover, this is a form of social and mutual security. It is true that this particular part of Islamic law has not been practiced in many Muslim countries for long or short periods. However, it is a rule given by Allah, which cannot be overlooked.

Fasting for two consecutive months can be offered in compensation for one's action, which results in an accidental killing, only if the killer has no means of paying blood money. Obviously, the freeing of a 'believer slave' is no longer operative since slavery has been abolished.

In your particular case, I am wondering how far you can hold yourself solely responsible for the death of your relative. What about the share of responsibility to be borne by the driver of the truck overtaking another vehicle? It seems to me that the apportioning of the blame cannot be determined by you personally. It has to be determined by a competent court of law. Before I say whether you should pay any compensation, I advise you to consult a learned scholar in this country [Kingdom of Saudi Arabia] who understands road safety and who, preferably, drives. You should fully explain how the accident took place and make sure that he also understands the circumstances before he gives his ruling. You should also explain to him that such blood money is not paid in your country and you have no hope of persuading your cousins and uncles to contribute. You may then follow his advice and seek Allah's forgiveness. [You could work out the amount as an equivalent of the value of 200 cows or 2,000 sheep in your country and] You pay it to the immediate relative of your killed passenger, without involving them with its legal aspect. You just tell them that you are helping them because you feel so sorry about the accident.

Legal Order: Accidental Killing — the Scope Of

Someone bought an electric immersion water heater, but plugged it wrongly when using it with a two-pin outlet. He mistakenly connected the earth wire to the neutral wire, instead of disconnecting it completely. This meant that when the heater was put in a bucket to heat the water, the current passed through the body of the heater. One day a new maid wanted to check whether the water was hot enough, but she got electrocuted and died. Does the ruling of accidental killing apply in this case? Her employer has paid compensation to her family at the time, but is he required to do anything else under the rules on accidental killing? Do these rules apply in the case of a man crossing the highway but is run over by a car driving at high speed?

The rules of accidental killing apply when a person does something that does not normally lead to death, but results in the killing of someone he had no intention to kill. Someone may push another person, and in the overwhelming majority of cases such a push does not cause more than a step or two backward and adjustment of one's balance. However, in this particular case, the person so pushed steps over a stone and loses balance completely. As he falls he hits his head against the hard pavement, or a lamppost and dies of the impact. When the first person pushes the other, he has no intention of killing him, but his action results in his death. That is accidental killing.

It requires atonement in the form of freeing a slave who is a believer, and paying blood money to the family of the deceased. If he cannot find a slave to release from bondage, either because he cannot afford to buy one or because of the non-availability of slaves, since slavery has been abolished by God's grace, then he must fast for two months without intermission.

In the case we are looking at, the man simply did the wiring wrongly which action resulted in the death of his maid. When he did so, he did not even know the maid, which was to die as a result of his action. That is accidental killing. He has to atone for his mistake, which came about by connecting a live electric wire the wrong way. The compensation is in two parts. The first is the payment of blood money. The man says that he paid compensation to the woman's family, but was that the full amount of blood money for accidental killing? If it was a small amount, which he decided, then he has to complete it to the full amount of blood money, unless her family is willing to forego part or all of that blood money. As she was a maid, then her people are probably poor and they may accept a lesser amount if they do not know what they are entitled to receive. He must not try to lessen his liability at their expense. He must give them the indemnity they deserve.

The other point is the freeing of a slave who is not available to anyone these days. Hence, the other option applies which is to fast for two consecutive months in a gesture of repentance. The word, "consecutive", is important. These must be completed without interruption, except through illness. If he fasts for 55 days, or even 57 days and then he interrupts his fasting for no valid reason, i.e. gets ill after having fasted for a number of days, he resumes his fasting as soon as he recovers and regains his strength.

These rules apply, as we have said, to all accidental killing, including traffic accidents. If a person crosses the highway at the wrong place and gets run over by a car, then that is accidental killing. If the pedestrian shoulders the blame, wholly or partly, then a judge will determine whether compensation is due or not, and its amount. However, the fasting part is necessary in practically all cases of accidental killing.

Legal Order: Adultery — Confession & Forgiveness

A woman admitted to her husband that she had an affair with a man, but she had already stopped. This troubles the husband, yet he does not want to divorce her because of their children. Can he keep her?

Adultery is a very serious offense, but God may forgive it if the person who committed it genuinely repents and seeks God's forgiveness. Repentance means true and genuine regret that one has committed the sin concerned and a firm resolve not to repeat it in future.

I understand that the woman in this case regrets what she had done. If her husband trusts that she is genuine in her desire to mend her ways and never to repeat what she had done, he can retain her as his wife. He is not required to divorce her. But if he is unsure of her future conduct, then it may be better for him and his children that they are divorced. This is a matter that only he and his wife can decide.

[Added: I might state that forgiveness should reflect in showing regard without ill will despite the offense.]

Legal Order: Adultery — Evidence Or the Lack Of Evidence

No Muslim Judge may award a sentence of stoning for adultery unless confession or evidence as required by Islam is available, which is two male

witnesses or twice that number of women witnesses. Can a Muslim judge pass a lesser sentence in such a case? With so much medical advancement it is possible to establish whether adultery has been committed or not. Can such evidence form the basis for punishment in lieu of personal evidence?

The punishment prescribed by Islam for adultery is stoning to death. Any country that implements Islamic law must abide by this legislation when the requirements of evidence are met. Once a crime for which a specific punishment is prescribed in Islam is proven, then no judge or ruler can waive the punishment, reduce it or pardon the guilty person. This is because God has prescribed punishment of such crimes. For anyone to claim the authority to change God's legislation is inadmissible. If anyone, be he a judge, a chief justice, or indeed a ruler or a king, claims such authority, his claim must be treated as a claim of divine authority. According to Islam this is a claim of Godhead.

This does not mean that Islamic courts sit to pass severe sentences in every case that comes before them. Indeed, Islam prefers that the need for such punishment does not arise. The Prophet, peace be upon him, has taught that if anyone slips and commits a sin he should try to keep it secret, pray for God's forgiveness and mend his ways. This is the proper attitude. When the violation of the law becomes well established, the Imam or the ruler must apply the prescribed punishment.

In the case of adultery, what is required to implement the prescribed punishment is clear and voluntary confession by the person concerned or four male witnesses who declare that they have seen with their own eyes the crime being committed. Anything short of that is not admissible as proper evidence. Before commenting on the two types of evidence, let me say here that it is not true that the evidence required is four women or two men. Indeed women's evidence is not acceptable in cases of adultery. Four male witnesses are required. This requirement is no reflection on the intelligence or ability of women. It is understandable in the type of society Islam aims to create.

As for confession, it must be voluntary. Indeed, the judge or the Imam must establish before passing sentence that the person concerned is of sound mind and knows what he is admitting and the punishment, which awaits him for such an admission. The confession may be withdrawn at any time prior to the infliction of the punishment and any such withdrawal is accepted without question. Moreover, if someone confesses to adultery and names his or her accomplice, only the one who has made the confession is punished unless the partner concerned also makes a voluntary confession.

In the case of witnesses, four honest men must testify to have seen the crime being committed. The judge must establish that there is no malice involved. He must also make sure, through cross-examination that they know very well what testifying to adultery means. If any of them fails to make absolutely clear evidences or hesitates in his testimony to the extent that makes the judge determine that he has not seen an actual crime of adultery, the testimony of all witnesses is rejected and the accused person is not punished. However, if fewer persons accuse any person of adultery and cannot complete their number to four witnesses they are punished for "accusation without proper evidence". This offence carries a penalty of 80 lashes and a rejection of their testimony in any legal case.

When we consider the evidence required we are bound to come to the conclusion that the prescribed punishment for adultery is indeed for a person whose guilt weighs so heavily on him that he makes a voluntary confession, knowing that the punishment which awaits him is stoning to death. He prefers to receive such a punishment than to be punished for his crime in the Hereafter. It must also be pointed out to him that

if he is not punished in this life and he sincerely repents of his crime, God may forgive him. It is useful to point out that the infliction of punishment means that the adulterer will not be questioned about his adultery in the Hereafter.

Legal Order: Adultery — Fornication & the Punishment

Could you please explain how serious is the offense of adultery from the Islamic point of view? Please state the punishment for adulterers who are married, and also if only one of them is married. Is it true that it is a sin for which God accepts no repentance?

Any sexual intercourse between a man and a woman when they are not married to each other is strictly forbidden in Islam. Adultery is the English word for unlawful sexual intercourse between a married man and a married woman who is not his lawful wife. If those who commit the offense are not married, then it is called fornication. It is important to make the distinction because the punishment is different.

No punishment is applicable for any offense before it is proven according to the criterion set by God for such a proof. In the case of both fornication and adultery, the proof required is 'a free confession' or 'four witnesses who testify to having seen the offense being committed'. Anyone who accuses a person of adultery or fornication without providing such a proof, i.e. four witnesses, is himself liable to be punished with 80 lashes for false accusation.

No one is encouraged to make a confession to adultery or fornication. On the contrary, a person who voluntarily offers a confession is advised to withdraw his or her confession.

The judge must try to persuade them to withdraw, and if they withdraw the confession, that is immediately accepted and the matter is closed. The point is that Islam does not like punishment to be implemented. It wants punishment to be primarily a deterrent. If the offense is proven, either through a repeated confession that will not be withdrawn, or the testimony of four witnesses, who must be cross-examined, then there is no option but to apply the punishment. This is stated by God, and no one can amend, modify or reduce what God legislates.

The punishment stated in the Qur'an is 100 lashes for each of the two parties. All scholars agree that this is the punishment for fornication and most scholars also agree that the punishment for adultery is stoning, which applies to both partners. If one of them is married and the other is not, then stoning is applied to the married partner, while the other receives the punishment of fornication.

A minority of scholars, many of them are highly eminent, say that the stoning punishment is not mandatory, i.e. Hadd, but discretionary, i.e. Ta'zeer. A mandatory punishment cannot be modified, but a discretionary one is open to change or modification either to reduce or increase it.

It is not true to say that no repentance of adultery can be accepted. God says in the Qur'an:

“God does not forgive that partners should be associated with Him, but He forgives any lesser sin to whomever He wills.” [Woman — “An-Nis'a” 4: 116]

Even in the case of associating partners with God, if the person who does it changes his position and declares his belief in God's oneness and in Muhammad, peace be upon him, as God's messenger, he is forgiven his past. This means that if a person is guilty of adultery, he or she may repent and seek God's forgiveness, which may be

forthcoming once the repentance is sincere and coupled with a resolve not to repeat the offense.

Legal Order: Adultery — Protection Against False Accusation

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Beneficent

“As for the adulteress and the adulterer, flog each of them with a hundred stripes, and let not compassion for them keep you from (carrying out) this law of God, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day; and let a number of believers witness their punishment. The adulterer couples with none other than an adulteress or an idolatress; and with the adulteress couples none other than an adulterer or an idolater. This is forbidden to the believers. As for those who accuse chaste women (of adultery), and cannot produce four witnesses, flog them with eighty stripes; and do not accept their testimony ever after; for they are indeed transgressors. Excepted are those who afterward repent and make amends, for God is much forgiving, merciful.”

[Light, “Al-Noor” 24: 2-5] Commentary by Sayyid Qutb — Translated & Edited by Adil Salahi

Islam prescribes a very heavy penalty for adultery. However, Islam does not legislate such a penalty without first putting in place sufficient legislation that protects people against falling in sin. It also ensures that the punishment is not enforced except in cases where there is certainty about the offence and its perpetrators. Islam is a complete code of living that is not based on punishment. Its basis is to provide all that promotes a clean and pure life. If some individuals then abandon such a clean and easy life in order to deliberately submerge themselves into filth, they incur such heavy penalty. In this Surah we have some examples of such numerous measures, which we will discuss in their appropriate contexts.

When a crime takes place in spite of all these measures, Islam prevents the infliction of the penalty wherever possible. The says: “Spare Muslims the infliction of mandatory punishments wherever possible. If there is any way out for the accused, let him go unpunished. It is better that the ruler errs on the side of pardon, rather than punishment.” [Related by Al-Tirmithi] In the case of adultery, Islam requires four witnesses to testify that they have seen the offence, or else, a clear and confirmed confession.

It may be suggested, then, that the punishment is unreal and unenforceable, which renders it ineffective as a deterrent. As we have said, punishment is not the basis of the Islamic approach; its basis is prevention, education and cultivating people’s finer feelings and consciences so that they refrain from even contemplating this offence. It only punishes those who are intent on committing the crime, paying little regard to society, so as to be seen by four witnesses. It also inflicts the punishment on those who wish to purify themselves of the effects of the offence after having committed it, confessing to their offence. This is what happened in the case of Ma’iz and his Ghamidi consort when they went to the Prophet, peace be upon him, requesting him to inflict the punishment so as to purify them of their sin. Both were insistent, in spite of the Prophet, peace be upon him, turning away from them time after time. In fact, they confessed four times each, which left no option for the Prophet, peace be upon him, but to inflict the punishment. The confession was no longer ‘suspect’. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: “Spare yourselves mandatory punishments; for when I have established that a sin carrying such a punishment has been committed, it must be done.” [Related by Abu Dawood]

Thus, when certainty is established and the matter has been put to the ruler, or judge, the mandatory punishment must be applied, with no compassion shown to

the offenders. Such compassion is misplaced, because it is in fact cruel to the community and human morality. God is much more compassionate to His creatures and He has chosen what He knows to serve their interests best. When God has made a choice in a particular case, no believer, whether man or woman may have a counter-choice. Nor is it right that anyone should speak out against such a punishment, describing it as hard or savage. It is indeed much more compassionate than what awaits a community that allows adultery to spread, corrupting nature and sinking into a cesspool of carnal desires.

Prescribing a very hard punishment for adultery is not sufficient, on its own, to protect the Muslim community and ensure the purity of its atmosphere. Therefore, a supplementary order is given to isolate the adulterers from the rest of the Muslim community. It goes further to remove the air of the offence from the Muslim community, prescribing a heavy punishment for those who accuse chaste women of adultery without providing firm evidence in support of their accusation:

“As for those who accuse chaste women [of adultery], and cannot produce four witnesses, flog them with eighty stripes; and do not accept their testimony ever after; for they are indeed transgressors. Excepted are those who afterward repent and make amends; for God is much-forgiving, merciful.” [Light — “An-Noor: 24: 4-5

Allowing people to accuse chaste women, whether married or not, without a clear proof means that people could always make such accusation, fearing no repercussion. This means that the Muslim community finds itself with a stained reputation. Every individual is threatened with false accusation. Every man suspects his wife, and every wife suspects her husband, and people doubt their legitimacy. In such an intolerable state of doubt and suspicion, every family is undermined. Moreover, when such accusations are frequently made, those who steer themselves away from adultery will begin to think that the crime is common in society. Thus, people begin to think about adultery in a different light, with its ghastly nature sounding less ghastly as a result of its frequent mention. Those who would not have contemplated it at all may begin to think of doing so, feeling that many others are doing it.

Thus, in order to protect people’s honor and their suffering from suspicion as a result of uncorroborated accusations, the Qur’an prescribes for false accusation a punishment that comes close to that of adultery. The punishment is flogging with 80 stripes, rejecting their testimony in any case or situation, and giving them the label of transgressors. The first part of the punishment is physical, while the second is moral. It is sufficient that the accuser is deprived of the right to testify, and considered unreliable. The third part is religious. The one guilty of false accusation is following a line that deviates from that of faith. The only way out is that the accuser should provide four witnesses who have seen the offence being committed or three alongside him if he himself has seen it. If the four give such testimony, the accusation is proved and the punishment of adultery is enforced on the perpetrator.

Legal Order: Adultery — Punishment & Blockage Of Marriage

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Beneficent

“A Surah which We have bestowed from on high and which We have ordained; and in it have We bestowed from on high clear revelations, so that you may keep them in mind. As for the adulteress and the adulterer, flog each of them with a hundred stripes, and let not compassion for them keep you from (carrying out) this law of God, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day; and let a number of believers witness their punishment. The adulterer couples with none other than an adulteress or an idolater; and with

the adulteress couples none other than an adulterer or an idolater. This is forbidden to the believers.

(Light, "Al-Noor" 24: 1-3) [Commentary by Sayyid Qutb — Translated & Edited by Adil Salahi]

The Surah has a unique opening that is not repeated anywhere else in the Qur'an. What is special here is the use of the clause "We have ordained" in reference to this Surah. We take this clause to imply an emphatic assertion that people must take everything that the Surah includes in the same way. Social manners and morality are ordained in the same way as mandatory punishments. We need to remember here that such manners and morality are deeply rooted in human nature, but people tend to overlook them because of deviant social pressures and easy temptation. Hence, the clear divine revelations God has bestowed from on high puts them back before people's eyes, explaining the clear logic of undistorted human nature.

This emphatic and clear opening is immediately followed with an explanation of the mandatory punishment for adultery, a ghastly crime that severs the ties between its perpetrator and the Muslim community.

"As for the adulteress and the adulterer, flog each of them with a hundred stripes, and let not compassion for them keep you from [carrying out] this law of God, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day; and let a number of believers witness their punishment. The adulterer couples with none other than an adulteress or an idolater; and with the adulteress couples none other than an adulterer or an idolater. This is forbidden to the believers."
[Light — "An-Noor" 24: 2-3]

In the early days of Islam, the punishment prescribed for adulterers was that outlined in Surah 4, Women, which says:

"As for those of your women who are guilty of gross immoral conduct, call upon four from among you to bear witness against them. If they so testify, then confine the guilty women to their houses until death takes them or God opens another way for them." [Woman — "An-Nis'a" 4: 15]

Thus the punishment for the guilty adulteress was confinement at home and verbal reprimand, while the adulterer was punished by verbal reprimand only. Sometime later, God revealed the new mandatory punishment in this Surah. This is then the "way" opened by God to which Surah 4 had alluded.

Flogging is the punishment of male and female adulterers who have not been empowered through marriage. This punishment is enforced on any Muslim who is sane, of age and a free person whose guilt is established. As for a person who has had sexual experience within a proper marriage and then commits adultery even though he is sane, of age and free, his punishment is stoning.

The stoning punishment is confirmed in the Sunnah, while the flogging punishment is established clearly in the Qur'an. Since the Qur'anic statement is phrased in general terms, and the Prophet, peace be upon him, inflicted the stoning punishment on a married man and a married woman who committed adultery, it is clear that the punishment of flogging applies only to adulterers who are unmarried.

The first point to note is the difference in the punishment incurred by adulterers, depending on their marital status. A Muslim who is of age, free and sane and who has already experienced sex within marriage is fully aware of the clean and proper way to satisfy the sexual desire. To abandon this and resort to adultery betrays a deviant and corrupt nature. Hence, punishment is increased in this case. A virgin on

the other hand may feel the temptation so strongly when he is inexperienced. There is another difference in the nature of the act itself. A married person is able to enjoy sex in a much better and refined way than a virgin. Hence, he deserves an increased punishment.

As has already been mentioned, the Surah mentions here the mandatory punishment for the unmarried adulterer only. It emphasizes the requirement of putting it into effect, with no compassion shown to the perpetrators:

“As for the adulteress and the adulterer, flog each of them with a hundred stripes, and let not compassion for them keep you from [carrying out] this law of God, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day; and let a number of believers witness their punishment.” [Light — “An-Noor” 24: 2]

The Muslim community is required to implement this punishment showing no sympathy with the offenders. The punishment should be administered in public where a number of believers should be present. This makes it harder for the offenders and increases the deterrent effect for the beholders.

The crime is shown to be increasingly heinous. Hence, all ties between the perpetrators and the Muslim community are cut off:

“The adulterer couples with none other than an adulteress or an idolater; and with the adulteress couples none other than an adulterer or an idolater. This is forbidden to the believers.” [Light — “An-Noor” 24: 3]

This means that those who commit adultery do not do so while they are believers. They only commit it when they are in a state that is far removed from faith and the feelings it generates in people’s hearts. A believer does not feel comfortable to enter into a marital relationship with someone who has abandoned faith through such a terrible offence. Indeed, Imam Ahmad is of the view that marriage is forbidden between an adulterer and a chaste woman, or between a chaste man and an adulteress.

A prerequisite for such a marriage to be valid is for such offenders to genuinely repent. At any rate, the Qur’anic verse makes it clear that by nature believing men and women feel that to be married to someone who commits adultery is strongly repugnant. Thus, it is very unlikely to happen, and this improbability is described here as a prohibition. Thus, ties between the Muslim community and individuals that commit adultery are nonexistent.

Legal Order: Apostasy — An Apostate Returning To Islam

Is it a condition that a non-Muslim should obtain the parent’s permission to convert to Islam? If a Muslim woman who had renounced her faith declares that she wishes to be Muslim again, together with her non-Muslim husband, how should she be treated by her family? What if the elders in her family decide to boycott the couple as punishment for the woman’s previous conduct, and to make of her an example to youngsters in the family? How can we stop Muslim women from eloping with non-Muslim men? How far are family elders answerable to God for such acts?

I have never thought I would be asked the first question in this letter. Is a parent’s permission necessary for a young person to declare his or her acceptance of Islam? Every Muslim knows that Ali was the first young person to embrace Islam in its very early days. At the time Ali was only 10 years old. His father Abu Talib, who was the Prophet’s uncle never embraced Islam as a faith despite his protection of the Prophet, peace be upon him, against his enemies.

Has anybody heard that the Prophet, peace be upon him, told him to consult his parents first? The whole idea is absurd. If one wants to believe in God, would he wait for anyone's permission? If the permission is not granted, would he continue to follow his old faith, whether it is pagan, polytheistic or whatever? The Qur'an denounces the non-believers in Arabia who declared that they would continue to follow the faith of their forefathers, putting to them the question: "**What if your fathers are devoid of knowledge and understanding?**" When a person declares his acceptance of Islam and states that he believes that "there is no deity except God, and Muhammad is God's messenger", that person is a Muslim no matter who objects and who is happy.

If a Muslim woman elopes with a non-Muslim and marries him according to the civil law in the country, that marriage is not valid from the Islamic point of view. If she declares herself to be a believer in that man's religion, then she is an apostate. She is no longer a Muslim, and her marriage is of no concern to Islam. However, if she decides to come back to Islam, her decision must be based on conviction that Islam is the true faith. When she declares herself to be a Muslim again, we take her word as true. If she persuades her husband to do likewise, we should accept both of them as new Muslims.

Every possible help should be extended to them to make their settlement in their new life as a Muslim couple smooth and easy. In fact, whatever may help them to establish a new Muslim home should be given to them. Their marriage needs no new solemnization, as the Prophet, peace be upon him, accepted all marriages of non-believers as valid when couple accepted Islam together. He did not order any couple to remarry each other, as it were. If the couple have decided to come back to Islam, the woman's family should accept her and her marriage, putting no impediment in their way. An authentic Hadith states that "embracing Islam wipes away what was done previously." This means that when the woman has returned to Islam, she is to be treated as new Muslim. Her past error should be forgiven. It is wrong of her family to try to punish her in any way.

Setting an example to others should never come in the form of a punishment to that woman. In fact the family elders would be committing a gross error if they take any action against the woman because they could be driving her and her family away from Islam again. If they wish to be answerable to God for them, that is their business. But I would tell them that God's reckoning would be too tough. If the elders are really interested in keeping the family honor and guarding against similar trouble, they should try to impart to all young people in the family, boys and girls, better Islamic education so that these young people will be able to judge the likely effects of their actions before they take them. It is only when young people are aware of the principles and values of Islam that they will adhere firmly to them. When the elders have done their duty by educating the young well, they are not answerable when a young person chooses nevertheless to disobey God.

Legal Order: Apostasy — Death Penalty & the Conditions To Be Met

I find it difficult to understand the punishment of apostasy, which in Islamic law is death. I cannot reconcile this with the Qur'anic statement that there is no compulsion in religion. Surely people are free to believe what they want. How can this be reconciled with inflicting the death penalty on a person simply because he left Islam to some other religion? Please explain.

Certain offenses carry mandatory punishments in Islamic law, which means that when any of them is proven according to Islamic legal requirements, the punishment has to be enforced, and the offender cannot be pardoned. Many scholars consider these offenses to be 7 in number, and such scholars include apostasy as one of

them. However, a number of highly reputable scholars have questioned this, and concluded that these offenses are only four. Apostasy is not among them. However, all scholars, past and contemporary, agree that no person is questioned about their faith, which means that a Muslim who converts to some other religion and keeps this to himself, or within his immediate contacts, no one will ever bother him. It is a person who publicizes the fact to encourage others to do likewise that commits a punishable offense. Here you should compare this action to someone who tries to undermine the constitution of the country he lives in. No country allows that. In fact, most countries prescribe very severe punishments for such offenders.

Besides, an apostate must be given a chance to reconsider his position. This is an important Islamic requirement agreed by all scholars, without exception. He is called upon to revert back to Islam, and his views are discussed, and his doubts cleared. If it is a question of beliefs only, this process may continue as long as necessary.

This means that the apostate should only keep his beliefs to himself in order not to incur any punishment. However, if he does not, the punishment is discretionary. What we know for certain is that neither the Prophet, peace be upon him, nor his two immediate successors inflicted the death punishment on any apostate, although there were cases under each one of them.

Legal Order: Contractual Obligations — Infringement Of

An employee has signed a contract which specifies that he would not work for any other company or firm, but he nevertheless does other work, such as giving private lessons, or working in a supermarket. Is he breaking any Islamic principle by doing so? What if his employer learns of this and does not question him on it?

The Prophet, peace be upon him, makes it clear that “Muslims abide by the conditions to which they commit themselves.” Hence when one has accepted a condition, one should fulfill it.

Having said that, I should explain that sometimes there are conditions added to contracts in order to satisfy certain general standards [to cater for certain eventualities.] In practice these may not apply in many cases. The employer may not even bother about it. In this case, all that the employee needs to do is to ascertain whether it is a substantive condition or not. Asking the employer and explaining the circumstances of his other work can do this. If there is no objection, he can go ahead and do the additional work. On the other hand, if the employer feels that the quality of his employees’ work would suffer [or if there is a conflict of interest] and that the employee must abide by that condition, then he should either ask for an exemption or take some other step to fulfill his commitments.

Legal Order: Copyrights & Wrongs

How far is it permissible to obtain unauthorized copies of written material on Islam including books, tapes, videos and computer programs? Should not the propaganda of Islam be made easy by the distribution of such material? For example, I have a set of cassette tapes of the Qur'an in Arabic, with translation in English which is also covered by copyright laws. Is it unacceptable if I copy these tapes to give to others who are either unable to purchase them or cannot afford the price?

Indeed the propaganda of Islam should be made easy. But then, this has to be within Islamic rules. Islam does not allow that the propaganda or the efforts of others be taken away from them or be exploited without their consent. In order to explain this problem we should first ask ourselves why do authors, tape producers and computer

program devisors resort to register their copyrights. The fact is that some unscrupulous people are always too ready to make pirate copies of these and sell them at a profit of which they give no share to the author. What someone has produced after putting a great deal of effort is thus used to bring financial gains to others who do not even bother to ask his permission. When you knowingly buy a pirate copy, then you are aiding such people whose piracy is certainly forbidden. To be an accessory to piracy is also censurable.

There is a difference, however, between someone who produces a pirate book or markets pirate tapes and programs and someone who gives his copy to another in the sort of circumstances which you have mentioned. When you buy a book, neither the seller nor the publisher nor the author makes it a condition of the deal that you are the only one to read that copy. Therefore, when you lend it to someone else to read, you are not depriving anyone of earning any profit. It could be said, that had you not lent your friend your book, he would have bought a copy himself. The likelihood is that he might just as well not have bothered.

Similarly, when you lend your cassette tape to your friend to copy it, knowing that he either would not have bought it or could not afford to buy it, then you are not violating the terms of your purchase. There is no restriction on how many people can use those tapes when you buy them.

However, if you know that your friend who has borrowed it from you will make so many copies of it and offer them for sale or make profit out of them, then you are helping him in producing pirate copies. Therefore, when you lend your copy to him, you have to be sure that he copies it for private use only.

Legal Order: Divine Law

The divine law is a single and complete whole, which cannot be split into separate parts. Its provisions, which concern the concept of faith or acts of worship, or permissions and prohibitions, or social regulations and international relations, are all of equal value. In their total sum they constitute the religion which Allah describes in the Qur'an as having been perfected. To reject any part of this code is to reject it all, and to reject religion or faith altogether.

The law of the particular time in which the Qur'an was revealed applies to all time because, according to Allah's own statement, it is the law of the religion revealed to mankind to be implemented by all communities for the rest of time. The detailed regulations and laws will remain the same, while the basic principles constitute the framework within which human life develops and progresses. ***“..... This day I have perfected your religion for you and bestowed on you the full measure of My blessings and chosen Islam as a religion for you.”*** [Table Spread — “Al-Ma'idah” 5: 3]

“..... This day I have perfected your religion for you and bestowed on you the full measure of My blessings and chosen Islam as a religion for you.” [Table Spread — “Al-Ma'idah” 5: 3]

Legal Order: Government Placing Restriction On What Is Permissible

If a government restricts the licensing of certain types of business, does violating the restrictions constitutes an illegal action from the Islamic point of view? For example, if a government says that only certain organizations can establish telecommunications business, and then a person establishes his own, paying the fine imposed by the government, does he commit something forbidden in Islam? Can we see here a parallel in a government outlawing marriage with more than one wife? If one lives in a country where polygamy is outlawed, and he nevertheless marries a

second wife, his marriage is valid from the Islamic point of view, even though the government of his country may consider it illegal. Please comment.

It is open to a Muslim ruler to restrict some permissible actions, provided that such restriction is lawful under Islamic law and undertaken in the interests of the community. To give a simple example, a government may impose speed limits that vary on the basis of the nature of the road. To start with, driving at any speed is permissible. When the government imposes speed limits and punishes those who violate such restrictions, for the sake of public safety, its action is perfectly lawful from the Islamic point of view and it must be obeyed. Hence, when a driver exceeds such speed limits, he does not only violate the law of the land, but also commits something forbidden in Islam.

This means that the nature and purpose of the restriction are vital in determining whether it must not be violated from the Islamic point of view. If a government restricts telecommunications to a public authority because it knows that such business generates good income, which is then used to provide services to the public, then such restriction is perfectly legitimate and it must be obeyed. On the other hand, if the restriction is such as to give certain people monopoly because they are related to the president or to some minister, then the restriction violates Islamic law. Those who impose this monopoly, depriving people of the chance of earning their livelihood will have to account to God for their injustice.

What should be our attitude in such a situation? The general rule is that stated by the Prophet: "A Muslim must obey and comply, in matters he likes or dislikes, unless he is commanded to do what constitutes disobedience to God." This applies when one lives under a Muslim government, or indeed under any government, because a Muslim does not unnecessarily defy orders. But when a government order requires him to disobey God, he does not comply.

This must not be confused with cases like the reader has cited, i.e. outlawing something lawful, or legalizing something forbidden. When a government does that, it exercises an authority, which belongs to God alone, namely the authority to prohibit anything. When God has made marriage with up to four wives permissible, it is not for any ruler or government to say that it is not. [However, if the government attaches certain conditions to regulate the exercise of some rights and curb misuse, then that cannot be construed as an act of prohibiting something lawful.]

Legal Order: Guardianship Of A Mother Called Into Question

I am writing about the case of a working mother who wanted to deposit an amount of money in the bank [in India] in the name of her young son, but the bank officer told her that she could not do so, because she could not be considered a guardian of her son. They produced a legal document outlining provisions of guardianship, which made it clear that a woman cannot be such a guardian according to Islamic law. She was dumbfounded, as she could never understand how she could not give some money to her son. She wonders whether in the case of the death of a father, the mother has no guardianship rights over her son. The legal documents produced by the bank states clearly that, for Muslims, in the case of the death of a minor's father, a guardian may be either the executor appointed by the father's will, or the father's father, or the executor appointed by the will of the father's father. I will be grateful for your advice.

The question of limits of a woman's rights is often a subject of controversy, with some people always trying to narrow that as far as possible. Law, particularly in countries

where Islamic law had to give way to different types of jurisdiction, such as colonial, national or secular laws sometimes imposes limitation. In countries where the Muslims are in minority, the law may or may not take the provisions of Islamic law in consideration. In certain cases, we find the national authorities in such countries taking a strict view impose limitations that meet the narrower Islamic view, particularly in matters that may lead to controversy. They hope that by doing so they avoid minority problems. But such an attitude may backfire, or may impose restrictions that are unnecessary and often work to the detriment of the individuals.

I feel that what happened here is a mistaken application of Islamic law by the authorities or by the bank. The limited guardianship in Islam applies to the right to manage or dispose of a minor's property. This guardianship belongs to the minor's father, or in the case of his death, to the executor appointed by him. If he has not appointed any executor, then the guardianship belongs to the ruler, the grandfather and the mother. The ruler may appoint an executor to look after the minor's property. The executor whether appointed by the father before his death or by the ruler, may be a man or a woman.

What has happened in this case is that the mother's action was equated with disposal of property, which it is not. Since the mother's action was really one, which served the interests of the child, the bank should have accepted the deposit. May be that the bank officials decided that they did not want to bear any responsibility and that it would be safer for them that any financial transaction should be done by the legal guardian. As far as Islamic law is concerned, a woman has full freedom and authority to enter into any financial contract or transaction on her own behalf. She may do so as a guardian if she is given that status over a minor, either by the will of the minor's father or by a decision of a ruler, who may delegate that task to a court or a judge.

Legal Order: Heresy — Death Penalty & the Conditions To Be Met

Is there any verse in the Qur'an which prescribes any punishment for any crime such as murder? I am told that the law in some Muslim countries demands the death penalty for heresy, even if it is suspected. What happens if someone is executed for heresy, but then discovered to have been innocent?

Read the following verses 33-34 from Surah Al-Ma'idah, which may be given in translation as follows:

“The punishment of those who make war against God and His messenger and spread corruption in the land shall be to put them to death or to have them crucified or to have their hands and feet cut off on alternate sides, or to banish them from the land. That shall bring them shame in this world and in the hereafter they shall be sternly punished, except those who repent before you overcome them. For you must know that God is forgiving and merciful.” [Table Spread — “Al-Ma'idah” 5: 33-34]

The Prophet, peace be upon him, has defined 3 crimes which are punished by the death penalty, even when they are committed by a Muslim. These are murder, adultery and apostasy when it is accompanied by seeking to split the Muslim community.

There are other offenses, which may be punished by death, if the judge or the ruler determined, in his discretion, that the circumstances of the crime call for the death penalty.

As for punishment for heresy, I will confine my discussion to the Saudi criminal law. This law which is Islamic law, requires very solid evidence to prove any offense

before it carries any punishment. No one is taken on suspicion. If one is accused of heresy, all he needs to do is to declare that he is no heretic.

If someone accuses him of heresy, he is brought before an Islamic court, which examines what he, says. If the court finds out that he holds heretic view, the court has to explain to him that these are heretical and explain where he errs. The true faith is explained to him, and he is called upon to renounce his views and accept the true faith. If he refuses, he is given time to consider his position. In the meantime he is given ample chance to reconsider.

If he insists on declaring his heresy and calls on others to follow his example, punishment becomes due. It is determined on the basis of what Islam considers to be appropriate in the circumstances. But all this is applicable if the man declares that he is Muslim and that his way of heretic thinking is Islamic. If he declares that he is not a Muslim, then this does not apply to him.

Legal Order: Islamic Constitution

Some people say that the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, did not complete the rules and regulations of Islam, so the four caliphs and five Imams completed the task. Even then many matters remained unresolved. Nevertheless, because of the last nine persons and their thoughts, we are divided into many sects. How can we unite now?

The first thing which I would like to tell you in reply to your question is that it was not the Prophet, peace be upon him, who enacted the rules and regulations of Islam, but it was God Himself who formulated Islamic law and outlined in detail the Islamic constitution. God Himself tell us that He has made our faith complete. In Verse 3 of Surah 5, entitled "the Repasts", or "Al-Ma'idah", we read this very clear statement:

"Today have I perfected your religion for you, and have bestowed upon you the full measure of My blessings, and willed that self-surrender to Me shall be your religion." [the Repast — "Al-Ma'idah" 5: 3]

Perhaps, I need not remind you that the first person pronoun in this statement refers to God Himself who revealed the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and spoke in this way to the believers in Islam.

It is highly instructive to quote the footnote given in Asad's translation of the Qur'an explaining the importance of this statement: "According to all available traditions based on the testimony of the Prophet's contemporaries, the above passage — which sets, as it were, a seal on the message of the Qur'an — was revealed at Arafat in the afternoon of Friday, the ninth of Thul-Hajjah, 10 H, 81 or 82 days before the death of the Prophet, peace be upon him. No legal injunction whatsoever was revealed after this verse and this explains the reference to God's having perfected the faith and bestowed the full measure of His blessings upon the believers. Man's self-surrender [Islam] to God is postulated as the basis, or the basic law of all true religion. This self-surrender is expressed itself not only in belief in Him but also in obedience to His commands: And this is the reason why the announcement of the completion of the Qur'anic message is placed within the context of a verse containing the last legal ordinances ever revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him.

With such a statement, no one can ever suggest that the message of Islam is incomplete, or that Islamic law does not respond to any clear human need. Scholars agree that whatever is outlined in the Qur'an or the Sunnah is part of the Islamic religion. If neither the Qur'an nor the Sunnah provides guidance on a particular matter, then whatever attitude we adopt toward that matter is permissible. We can

choose for ourselves; [the only consideration being that conscious efforts shall be made to remain, as far, as may be, within the laid down regulations].

What I would like to point out is that it was never intended that Islam should provide a particular model of life to be copied in all human societies, generation after generation. There is simply no attempt to create a uniform human society. What Islam wants to provide is a system, which can be adapted in a great variety of human societies, and by all human communities, in order to establish a way of life that brings out the best in human beings. This Islam has certainly done. It was possible for a wide variety of human societies, races and communities to live together and to establish together a human civilization that benefited by the contribution of all such groups.

None of the four caliphs or the five imams as you call them had ever added anything to the religion of Islam. None could suggest that an addition is needed. What they contributed was an interpretation of Islamic rules and method by their application in their communities. This is open to all of us, provided that interpretation has the right basis. People do not make their interpretations of Islamic law at will. They have to follow the proper procedure and to adopt a process of proper learning and careful analysis of a coherent set of rules of deduction.

It is not because of the caliphs and the imams that we are divided into sects. Each one of those imams and caliphs tried hard to maintain the unity of the Muslims. Sects came about as the result of misguided actions by people who do not have the interest of Islam at their hearts.

Legal Order: Islamic Law — Implementation Of

What are the exclusive characteristics of a state where Islamic law, i.e. Shariah, is implemented?

Many Muslim countries inscribe in their constitution that "Islam is the state religion." This imposes serious obligations on the government and the people. One very important obligation is that the government should see to it that none of the laws or regulations in the country is contrary in any way to Islamic principles or to the teaching of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him.

When a country decides to adopt Islam as a state religion, it is an Islamic country although it may in practice fall short of the expectations of the advocates of Islam. What we should realize is that the important thing is that God's law is given its proper place of importance.

Suppose that the law of the country permits some actions that people do while these are forbidden in Islam. A Muslim may bring a lawsuit requiring that these practices be outlawed. He need not have any basis for that except the fact that Islam disapproves of them in order to have a ruling in his favor. In such a case we have to consider that country to be Islamic, although it falls short of application and implementation in certain areas.

A couple of years ago [1993 or so], there was a court verdict in a certain Muslim country against a company which required it to pay a hefty fine with interest. The company brought a lawsuit claiming that the interest required was against the law because Islam forbids it. After a protracted hearing, the court determined that the payment of interest was against the constitution, which specified that Islam was the state religion. The ruling was binding and easy to implement. This example shows that the country was basically Islamic.

I happen to know that country very well and I would say that on the face of it, there is little in that country to suggest that it is Islamic. Should this line of action be followed by the advocates of Islam in the country, its government would soon find that there must be a change in the way it is run. This could easily become the key to a positive change toward Islamic life.

Thus basic characteristic of an Islamic country is that God's word must be given paramount importance. Whatever contradicts Islam must be left out even when it appears to serve the interests of the people in the short term. Whatever is in line with Islam should be encouraged and adopted.

Legal Order: Islamic Law — Laws Making

A religious teacher working in South Indian state of Tamil Nadu (having studied in the Islamic University of Madinah) has been stressing most emphatically that Muslims can only follow the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. There are no other guides or sources to follow. In scholarly books, however, consensus, or "Ijmaa" and analogy, or "Qiyas", are mentioned as sources for lawmaking. Many people have found the discrepancy most confusing. It will be most appreciated if you could clarify this apparent contradiction.

I will start by saying that there is no contradiction between the two opinions advanced by the teacher from the Islamic University of Madinah and the written work, which has mentioned the other two sources. This is due to the fact that both the other procedures of consensus and analogy can only operate within the framework of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, or Hadith. This places them within the criterion established by Islam which makes the Qur'an and the Sunnah the only acceptable lawmaking authority.

What your scholar has been saying is indisputable. To rely on the Qur'an and the Sunnah is the basic requirement of Islam. Indeed, it is the practical implementation of the declaration by which a person becomes Muslim. That declaration states: ***"I bear witness that there is no deity save Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is Allah's Messenger."*** As you realize, this declaration is made of two parts. The first stresses the Oneness of Allah as the only God and Lord in the universe. This means that He alone has the authority to legislate. Whatever legislation He enacts must be obeyed by all human beings. The second part makes it absolutely clear that it is only through Allah's Messenger, Muhammad, peace be upon him, that we receive Allah's commandments, instructions and legislation. There is no other way for those to be conveyed to us. Anyone who claims a role to communicate to us a legislation, other than the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is an impostor.

Allah has given us a detailed code to implement in our lives. However, no legal code which aims to be applicable to all communities in all periods of time can give in advance a ruling for every situation human life may present. As human life develops, certain things or practices are discarded while new ones are adopted. Changing situations require different rulings. This is the reason why the lawmaking authority in every country provides for the repeal of past laws and the enactment of new ones in their place. This cannot be done in Islam, because the authority to legislate belongs to Allah. No one can repeal Allah's law. How do we, then, deal with developing situations? To answer this, I have two Hadiths to quote:

The Prophet, peace be upon him, sent his companion, Moath ibn Jabal, to the Yemen as a governor. Before Moath left, the Prophet, peace be upon him, asked him, "How will you adjudicate in matters that will be put to you?" Moath answered, "According to Allah's Book [i.e. the Qur'an]." The Prophet, peace be upon him, then asked him,

"What if you find nothing to guide you?" Moath answered, "Then according to the Sunnah of Allah's Messenger." The Prophet, peace be upon him, repeated his question. "What if you find nothing to help you?" Moath said, "I will use my discretion, making every effort to arrive at the right decision." The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Praise be to Allah who has guided Allah's messenger to implement what pleases Allah and His Messenger."

The Prophet, peace be upon him, is quoted to have said: "My nation will never agree on something which is wrong."

These two Hadiths give us the basis on which analogy and consensus rely as legitimate sources of rulings. We note that in the first Hadith, the Prophet, peace be upon him, refers to the possibility that a ruler or a judge may find nothing in the Qur'an or the Sunnah to help him arrive at the right ruling in a certain case. The method of deduction explained by Moath is one of scholarly discretion. What this means is that he will consider what may be analogous to the case in hand of matters that have a clear judgment in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. This then is scholarly discretion. The Prophet, peace be upon him, was pleased with this method and stated that it was satisfactory to Allah and to himself. The second Hadith is clear. It does not mean that every single person in the Muslim community should agree to something for the consensus to take place. What it means is that the scholars in a particular time may unanimously arrive at a certain decision. If they do, then that decision cannot be wrong.

A clear case, which explains both matters, is the verdict on smoking. When the question whether tobacco smoking is permissible in Islam was put to scholars in the past, many of them did not object strongly to it, although some pointed out that it was reprehensible or discouraged, due to its smell and other factors. However, when more recently the question was put to a number of scholars together with the medical evidence about the damage tobacco can cause to health, a verdict of total prohibition was returned by an overwhelming majority of them. Obviously, there is no specific ruling in the Qur'an or the Sunnah to tell us that smoking tobacco, as such, is forbidden.

Scholars, however, relied on the general rules which apply to Islamic law, such as the one which states that: "No damage may be caused, whether to self or to others." Since smoking causes serious health damage, it is considered forbidden. Some scholars also added that a smoker should not go to the mosque because of the bad smell of tobacco. In this, they have drawn on the analogy with garlic and onion. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says that a person who has just eaten garlic or onion should not attend congregational prayer in order not to annoy other worshippers. All this is a ruling based on analogy.

However, the question was put to ten leading scholars of the University of Al Azhar and to Dar El-Ifta in Saudi Arabia. Altogether, answers were given by fourteen scholars, twelve of them returning a verdict that smoking is completely forbidden, the other two put their ruling only a shade less than forbidden, making it as "strongly reprehensible." However, more and more scholars, everywhere in the Muslim world, are giving an ever-clearer verdict of prohibition on smoking. Those who are still reluctant to make such a ruling are certainly less aware of damage tobacco causes to health. Hence, we see a case of consensus being progressively built.

If one day a large council of eminent scholars from all over the Muslim world is formed and it holds an annual meeting to consider cases and situations that are put to it, then the rulings passed by this council will enjoy a degree of consensus. Therefore, they will be binding on Muslims. However, if one or two scholars expressed a different view on a certain matter, each view is given its value, as long as it is based on a clear understanding of the question and a scholarly interpretation of

Qur'anic and Hadith statements. An example may be given from the rulings published by the Fiqh Council of the Muslim World League which may be considered as the nucleus of the council I would love to see formed. A few years ago, this council considered questions on insurance, and returned a verdict of prohibition on many types of insurance, allowing only the ones, which may be included under the general title of "cooperative insurance".

One eminent scholar, Sheikh Mustafa Al-Zarqa, took a different view, allowing most forms of insurance. In its published decision, the council referred to this disagreement and stated that the view of Sheikh Al-Zarqa must be given its due respect.

I hope I have made it clear that whether we arrive at the decision through consensus or through analogy, we are following the Sunnah of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and not deviating from the Qur'an and the Hadith.

Legal Order: Islamic Law — Marked Down As 'Unfair To Women'

During discussion with our non-Muslim friends and even within ourselves we come up with the conclusion that Islam 'punishes' the woman by its family legislation. It is always the man who can divorce his wife, while she can only obtain a divorce through a court, after forgoing some of her rights, or paying her husband some money. Moreover, in ordinary divorce, perpetrated by the husband, it is the wife who is crushed and who loses her future and rights. Her children are snatched away from her and she has to suffer in difficult circumstances. If reconciliation is made with her husband, she has to marry someone whom she dislikes and to have sexual relations with him as a necessary condition for returning to her former husband. May I venture to say that this practice is far from understandable? If anyone is to be punished for perpetrating divorce, it is the man, not the woman. On the other hand when she is married, her parents receive money or gold from the bridegroom, which seems to be the price of the bride. How can this be justified?

You have given yourself the position of "truth seeker". I have no doubt that you will arrive at the truth if you seek it with diligence and objectively. The fact that you have taken the trouble to write to me is a good step in your pursuit of truth. I can only throw some light on few points, which will indicate, to you the way for further efforts on your part to understand these questions fully. Your letter raises the whole question of the status of women in Islam. The way you have phrased your questions shows that there are misconceptions, which have taken root among your group. You do well to examine these misconceptions, guided by the Qur'an and the Sunnah and seeking help from learned scholars.

To start with, Islamic legislation must be viewed within the context of Islamic society. Moreover, when we evaluate a piece of Islamic legislation, we must make our evaluation on the basis of what is intended by that piece of legislation and whether it can achieve its purpose when properly implemented. Every law and regulation is open to abuse. We cannot abruptly dismiss a certain law as impractical because people abuse it. What we can do is to consider what is needed for the implementation of that law so that its purpose is achieved.

The overall purpose of all Islamic legislation is to serve the interests of people and to protect their lives, faith, property and children and to safeguard their physical and mental well being. Moreover, Islam views man as an "honored" creature to whom Allah has sent messengers and prophets, peace be upon them all, to convey messages which provide guidance for man in all areas where such guidance is

needed to serve the above purposes. That honor is given to both man and woman in equal measure. They are viewed by Islam as two parts of a single soul. The fourth Surah in the Qur'an which is the second longest, is primarily devoted to legislation concerning the family and provides details of which many people are unfortunately no longer aware. This Surah begins with a statement that Allah has created all mankind from a single soul, and that He has created the spouse of that single soul [i.e. woman] from within itself. Therefore, when Allah states that He has honored the children of Adam, i. e. mankind, that honor is applicable to both man and woman. It is not possible that Allah, the Most Just, honors man and punishes woman. How can this fit with His justice?

Islamic legislation makes it absolutely clear that men are required to look after their womenfolk. In the Islamic system, no woman is required to earn her living, whether she is married or unmarried. Even when she is richer than her husband, it is his responsibility to look after her and provide her with decent living, according to his means.

It is true that Islam gives the right to divorce to man. What we have to understand here is that Islam makes right commensurate with duty, privilege counterbalanced with obligation and gain offset by loss. In the family set-up, in Islamic society, it is the man who stands to lose as a result of divorce. When divorce takes place, a man is required to pay his wife whatever remains outstanding of her dowry, or "mahr", and he may not claim back any part of what he had paid of dowry in the first place. He pays his wife maintenance during her waiting period, and he suffers the breakup of his family, having to look after the children on his own. For this purpose, he may have to employ a housekeeper or seek the help of someone from his family, such as his mother or sister. If he wants to marry again, he has to go through the process of finding a wife, paying her a dowry and incurring the expenses of establishing a new home. In a proper Islamic system, the divorced wife moves from her husband's home to that of her father or her brother where she should be looked after and treated well. If she has no one to support her, she is entitled to receive maintenance from the Islamic government, which should be adequate for her life expenses. Even when the divorce is requested by the wife, the man has to meet all these expenses, with the exception of what is settled as a result of the wife's application of divorce. It is only proper, therefore, that the party who stands to lose more be given the right to initiate the process of divorce, considering that he would not do so except in circumstances which make the continuation of family life very difficult.

It is in order to deal with cases where the wife finds it extremely difficult to continue with her husband that Islam allows her to seek divorce through a court. As I have already said, her decision is bound to cause financial losses to her husband. Hence, it is permissible to arrive at a settlement between them with regard to that to which she is entitled. That is by no means an obligatory condition. If the court finds that she has been mistreated by her husband to the extent that makes life in the home impossible, the court may order the husband to pay the outstanding dowry as provided for in the marriage contract.

It is not true that a divorcee's children are snatched away from her. Islam does not approve that a mother be denied proper access to her children. She has the custody of her children in their early years, and the husband is required to pay their maintenance even when they are with her. Because the father is required to look after the upbringing and education of his children, they join him at a later stage and they maintain their relationship with their mother. That is the proper Islamic rule. If people abuse Islamic law and treat their former wives unjustly, that is their own doing. The blame cannot be laid on the doorstep of Islam. No God-fearing Muslim will deny his former wife access to her children.

You also go through the question of her going through a marriage with a second husband in order to make it possible for her to have reconciliation with her first husband and to be reunited with him in marriage. I realize that the way you have described it is what is practiced in certain parts of the Muslim world. I have discussed this particular problem on more than one occasion. That practice is not an Islamic one. I will explain.

Divorce takes place when a man pronounces the word of divorce, by saying to his wife: "I divorce you" once only. The marriage can be resumed without a new contract, if the resumption takes place during the divorced wife's waiting period or with a new marriage contract after the waiting period. When a married couple go through this whole process of marriage and divorce twice, and then a third divorce takes place, it all goes to show that there is something basically wrong with that marriage. Islam views marriage as a very serious institution and it does not accept that it should be abused in this way. By way of punishment to both husband and wife, Islam precludes their reunion in marriage for a third time, except in one situation.

That situation is a marriage in the full sense of the word, which takes place between the woman and another man. I must emphasize that it must be a proper marriage, not one of convenience. It cannot be arranged in such a way as to facilitate the return of that woman with her first husband. The marriage must be intended as permanent. If it is agreed between the two parties, or indeed the three, that it is only an arrangement for the purpose of making it possible for the woman and the first husband to be reunited together, then that marriage is not valid. Since it is not valid, a return to the first marriage remains precluded. It cannot be done. I emphasize once again that such an arranged marriage is one abhorred in Islam. The Prophet, peace be upon him, describes the man who is hired to go through the process of marrying the woman for one night and divorcing her the following morning as a "hired bull." He also curses him as well as the first husband and the wife who are also involved in this arrangement. Since such arrangement is forbidden, it cannot initiate a legitimate process. In other words, a forbidden marriage cannot be a means to legitimize a marriage, which would have otherwise remained precluded. You describe the arrangement with a second man as "rape." It may be so, and Islam certainly views it as highly abominable. It forbids it and accepts no validity of any subsequent arrangement on its basis.

Islam wants the marriage with the second husband to be absolutely normal. As I said, it should be intended as a permanent marriage. In other words, the new husband and the wife could live together all their lives. If however, it so happens, in the normal course of events, that the second husband dies or divorces that woman, then that divorce or the death of the second husband makes it possible for her to be reunited with her first husband [just as she could marry any other person.] That must come about normally, not by arrangement.

These rules are certainly abused in parts of the Muslim world. Their abuse, however, does not mean that they are not sound. You have to understand that these rules are given for a minority of cases where a marriage goes through frequent problems, ending in one divorce after another. Allah who has created man and knows what is best for him has decided in His wisdom that a married couple who have gone through the divorce process three times may have a chance to make their new marriage successful after having gone through the pains of being denied the chance to be reunited together permanently. When the wife is married to another man, and to all intents and purposes that marriage is permanent, but gets divorced or widowed after a while, this new experience is bound to have a great effect on both herself and her first husband. If they feel that they can make things work between them, then they are allowed a fresh start.

According to Islam, it is the man who pays his wife a dowry when he marries her. I know that the reverse is true in certain Muslim countries. That has come about through ancient traditions. It is not possible, therefore, to blame Islam for it. Certainly Islam does not approve of selling a bride or bribing a bridegroom in order to marry her. Islam makes it a condition for marriage that a woman should have a financial benefit in the form of a dowry, which is paid by her husband and remains her property over which she has sole discretion.

I hope I have been able to dispel certain doubts from your mind.

Legal Order: Islamic Law — the Women's Status

In a recent BBC program called 'Daughters of Abraham', some Muslim interviewers claimed that parts of the Qur'an were left open to interpretation. That meant that they were subsequently interpreted by scholars who held rather unfavorable attitude to women. They also claimed that the Qur'an was interpreted 1400 years ago in a highly male-oriented society with very little participation by women in the original interpretation. Please comment.

Ever since my early years in religious elementary school, I have been reading about the position of women in Islam and how fair or unfair Muslims are to their women.

Perhaps this is the single most misunderstood topic in Islamic law. It is often said that Islam does not give equal status to women, with just as frequent denials by the advocates of Islam. With the western civilization making a great issue of the superficial equality between men and women, and achieving success in showing it as genuine, many of those who look up to the West for social values accept as a fact the claim that Islam does not extend fair treatment to women. Such a claim cannot stand to proper scrutiny. That Islam maintains equality between the sexes is a fact that can easily be proven by looking at the duties Islam demands from men and women and the privileges it grants to each. When you look at these, you find that men and women are asked to perform the same sort of duties, in equal assignments.

If any has a privilege over the other, it is the woman. Moreover, when men and women perform the same duty they receive the same reward. Differences are minimal and they are occasioned by the physical and social differences, which equip each of the two sexes for the tasks they are supposed to perform. Yet some voices hostile to Islam maintain that god's final message to mankind treats women as inferior. Nothing could be farther from the truth. They may pick on certain aspects of Islamic law, which may appear too casual examination as unfair to women. But they only need to take these within the context of Islamic society and the tasks it assigns to men and women in order to realize that Islam has taken proper care of women and ensured their equality with their brothers.

Unfortunately these hostile voices are often echoed by people in our communities who have not made a proper study of Islamic teachings. Justifications for such a view are often sought and these normally concentrate on aspects as the ones mentioned by those interviewees in the BBC program. Take for example the claim that scholars made unfavorable interpretation of the Qur'an.

This is certainly absurd, because the greater the status of a scholar, the fairer he is to women, particularly because of the strong and clear injunction by the Prophet, peace be upon him, to all Muslim men to "take good care of women." No scholar worthy of his name would listen to the Prophet's words and then make an interpretation of the Qur'an that is unfair to women. If he does, he is violating the Prophet's own instructions when he is the one who urges all people to do what the Prophet, peace be upon him, has advised.

Furthermore, they are always keen on attaching a local color to Islam. They speak of it as a product of Arabia at a practical time of history. That reflects the total ignorance of any one who makes such a claim. Islam has not come from any particular society, and it is not aimed at a particular community. It is the religion God has chosen for mankind in all periods of history. It cannot be then confined to any particular race of people or to a geographical area or to a period of time.

Besides, what interpretations are these people talking about? Have they read all the provisions of Islamic law for women? Had they done that, they would not be making such a claim because they would then realize that no law has been fairer to women. The Problem with such people is that they make judgments, which are taken as intellectual points of view, when they would not accept a judgment made in a similar fashion on anything related to this world. How would literary circles, for example, accept a critical view on a work of literature by someone who has not read it, or on a play by one who has not seen it? Yet views on Islam are often treated with respect without making sure of the credentials of those who are making them. How strange!

Legal Order: Islamic Law — When Can Religious Laws Be Changed?

What is 'Shariah'? Can it be separated from 'Deen'? Can it be changed according to circumstances, or to suit differences of time and society? If so, how and by whom?

The original linguistic meaning of the Arabic word 'Shariah' means the 'sea-shore.' It also means 'road'. These two meanings continue to leave their connotations on the word when it is used in Islamic context. In such a case it refers to Islamic law which is clear as things can be seen clearly on the seashore where there is nothing to interfere with our vision. It also provides a road for Muslims to follow in order to achieve their goal of winning God's pleasure.

It is often the case that a word acquires a specific meaning when it is used in a particular context, or when it becomes a special term in a certain field. If it is frequently used in that situation, then the specific meaning becomes the one which is readily apparent, and the one immediately understood by all people when they hear or come across it. This applies to the words 'Shariah' and 'Deen'.

In an Islamic context, Shariah means the set of commands God has communicated to His servants in His final message to mankind, i.e. Islam. All that a Muslim is required to do and avoid or refrain from doing constitute Shariah which has come to denote Islamic law. Nowadays, when we hear of groups and movements demanding the implementation of Islamic law, we realize that they are asking that the Shariah is put into effect.

Dana is the root from which we derive the term Deen. It means, 'to submit, to position in a humble place, put to account, determine a reward or punishment, obey, cause a person to do what he dislikes, etc.' In its Islamic usage, the word has all these connotations: submission to God, humility before Him, accountability, obedience even when it means doing what we dislike, etc. Its basic sense, however, is 'submission to God and accepting the message He has sent to mankind through the final Prophet, Muhammad, peace be upon him.'

This means that the word Deen has a wider meaning than the word Shariah. While the latter denotes basically the law that Islam lays down, the former, Deen, goes further than that in order to include accepting the basic concepts of faith and bringing one's life in line with those concepts, implementing the Shariah as an act of submission to God.

Can the two be separated? The short answer is that they cannot exist separately. It is inconceivable that a community which does not believe in Islam as a message vouchsafed by God to His last messenger would ever adopt Islamic law and try to implement it through the regular law enforcing procedures and authorities. For one thing, Islamic law relies heavily on the fact that individuals and communities have a deep-rooted incentive which motivates them to implement it so that they would earn God's pleasure and be rewarded by heaven.

When that incentive is absent, Islamic law would not function properly. There would be as much law evasion as we see in other communities, which enforce man-made laws.

On the other hand, it just cannot happen that a community, which truly believes in Islam, should decide to shelve Islamic law and adopt instead some other type of law. How can such a community give credence to what it professes of believing in Islam? How could a person say that he believes in God, but when it comes to law, he prefers some sort of man-made law to that made by God? Such an attitude means that he finds the other law better or more suitable or superior to God's law. Or it may be that he thinks God's law too restrictive and he wants to be free. Does that prove his submission, which is the central issue in faith and religion? Certainly not. Then how can the two be separated?

Nor is it possible to change God's law. Let us consider what happens in any country when a law is changed. You look first at the authority, which enacted the original law. The new law, or even the amendment to the existing law, needs to be adopted by the same authority. In a democratic country where the parliament is the only authority to enact laws, you need a new act of parliament to repeal, amend or substitute the existing laws. In a country where laws come into effect on the basis of royal or presidential decrees, you need the same sort of decree for that purpose. Islamic law is devised by God, so only God may change or amend it.

Having said that, in matters where human advancement does not affect the applicability of law, Islam gives us well-defined laws which remain in place at all times. For example, theft remains forbidden in all communities and the punishment for theft remains the same. However, when there is any doubt with regard to the identity of the thief or to whether he has a claim to what he had taken away, or to the reason for his theft, such as having nothing to eat, then the punishment is not applied, because Islamic law works on the basis of indisputable evidence.

Legal Order: Justice — Hard To Define Though Grasped By Most

What is the real meaning of justice in Islam? Is there any difference in the punishment meted out to offenders who commit the same crime on the basis of their religion? Would a Muslim receive the same punishment as a non-Muslim if they are equally guilty of the same offense? May I cite also the case of a person who is tortured during investigation until he confesses to a crime he has not really committed. Would he receive any compensation in the Hereafter for the punishment inflicted on him without justification?

Part of the covenant with which Allah has bound the Muslim nation requires it to deal with other people on the basis of absolute justice, which is never affected by feelings of love or hatred, or by a relationship, interest or feelings of any type. It is justice, which is based on the duty of remaining steadfast in devotion of Allah alone. No influences are ever allowed to tilt the balance of justice, especially when believers are mindful that Allah watches over them and knows what is in the bottom of their hearts.

Justice is difficult to define although it is understood by most, if not all people. It is ensuring that every one who is entitled to anything by right can exercise his right without fear of punishment or retribution. It also means that no one is deprived of what rightfully belongs to him and no one can get away with the usurpation of the rights of others. Justice involves the retrieval of what is wrongly taken from people and giving it back to them with compensation for the wrong they have suffered. It also means resorting only to fair means in all dealings with other people. To exercise justice properly all people must be treated as equal.

Islam attaches great importance to justice and requires that every Muslim ruler should maintain justice among his community. It threatens every perpetrator of injustice with grievous suffering on the Day of Judgement. It also promises great rewards for just people.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, defines seven classes of people who will enjoy God's shelter on the Day of Judgement when there is no shelter other than one He Himself provides. The first of these is "a just ruler". In a Sacred Hadith the Prophet, peace be upon him, quotes God the Creator as saying: "My servants, I have forbidden Myself injustice and have made it forbidden among you, so do not be unjust to one another." [Related by Muslim]. In the Qur'an oppression is often equated with the denial of God. The non-believers are often described as oppressors or wrongdoers.

What is of great importance is that, according to Islam, God does not forgive any person guilty of injustice unless the person who has suffered that injustice forgives him first. Like every type of right that one person owes to another, God's forgiveness is conditional on forgiveness by the claimant. Therefore, a person guilty of injustice to others who wants to repent and mend his ways must try to make amends to those who had suffered injustice at his hands. If he does not do that then it will be done in God's own presence on the Day of Judgement when everyone of us will have to repay to others anything they claim from us which we might have obtained unfairly, or anything we denied to others when it is their right to have it. In this case, everyone is entitled to justice and fair treatment. When they are denied this they have every right to seek justice. If they do not get it in this world, God is sure to grant it to them in the life to come.

It is important to realize that it is infinitely better for anyone of us to pay any claim due to other people here in this life. If you have been unfair to an employee or a servant, let alone a relative, a neighbor or a friend, then you are well advised to make amends to that person before you die. Otherwise, you will be brought face to face with him on the Day of Judgement when you are required to make amends. Needless to say, you cannot do anything to benefit yourself after your term in this life has expired.

So, God will ask that person whether he or she will forgive you. If that person declines to do so, as it is his right to do, then God will order that some of your good deeds which you had done in the hope of pleasing God and earning His forgiveness be credited to that person you had treated unfairly.

This will continue to be done until he has what is equal to the injustice he had suffered. If all your good deeds are insufficient for the purpose, then some of the bad deeds he had done will be added to your record and he will be relieved of them.

Such a prospect is too gloomy to contemplate. Every one of us comes on the Day of Judgement hoping that he will have done barely enough to show that his errors and bad deeds were only slips done without any intention to offend God or displease Him. In that way he stands a good chance of being forgiven and admitted to heaven. If he is called upon to make reparations to others for offenses he committed against

them, he will soon be without anything to his credit and he will suffer God's punishment, which is certainly severe.

One of the most important requirements a Muslim government must fulfill is to ensure that all its subjects enjoy the highest possible standard of justice. A Muslim ruler who does not place justice as one of his top priorities does not really understand his Islamic duties. If he is aware of injustice committed in his country by government functionaries and does not intervene to remove that injustice, he is a partner in that oppression and he is answerable for it on the Day of Judgement.

Justice under Islam is assured to all people, regardless of their religious affiliation. We cannot take the fact that someone does not believe in Islam as an excuse to deny him any right to mete out any unfair treatment to him.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "Anyone who causes harm to a non-Muslim [living in a Muslim state] actually causes harm to me." Moreover, Islamic justice is available to all citizens of any Islamic state. The ruler is required to ensure that all citizens are treated on the same basis and that all laws apply to them all without discrimination. Islam does not approve of any type of discrimination.

The same rights to proving innocence or establishing guilt are available to all. Those who are guilty of the same type of crime receive the same punishment. No one gets a lighter sentence on account of his being a Muslim or having support in high places. The Prophet, peace be upon him, gives us a glimpse of Islamic justice when he says: "A person who cuts off an organ of the body of his slave shall have the same organ from his body cut off."

With all this insistence of justice, Islam attached great importance to the method of establishing guilt. Witnesses are cross-examined to ensure that they are telling the truth. Other types of evidence are thoroughly examined. Moreover, no torture is allowed in any type of investigation of any offense, not even when the offense is one against the Islamic state.

No evidence or confession obtained by torture or physical ill treatment is admissible in an Islamic court of justice. If conviction is made and it is later established that the evidence is suspect because of torture or unfair means of investigation, the sentence is quashed and the person concerned is properly compensated.

It is important to realize that in all this, the Islamic view is that God, whose knowledge encompasses everything, is the final arbiter who will ensure that no one will get away with any type of injustice and that no sufferer of injustice will be denied his rights.

Legal Order: Justice — Where the Rules Are Not Specified

A boy and a girl aged 17 and 15 respectively were caught in a village cinema back home, having run away from their schools. There was no physical contact between them, but their friendship appears to have been going on for a time. Imams in our locality differed as to the punishment to be administered to them. What is the punishment Islam prescribes in such a case? May I ask whether this differs from one country to another? I would like to add that during a heated argument between members of the two families, the girl's father and others beat up the boy, which triggered violence between the two groups.

Let me first say that Islam prescribes specific punishments for only a very small number of offences. Four of these are definite, while another three are subject to different scholarly views as to whether they are prescribed or recommended, with the

latter view seemingly weightier. The important thing to know is that when a punishment is prescribed, as in the case of cutting the hand for theft, it must be enforced when the offence has been established beyond any shadow of doubt. The rest of offences are left to the judge to enforce a discretionary punishment.

In the case we have here, the offence is very simple, and the punishment, if any, is discretionary. A Muslim judge is to decide what to enforce. But this applies in an Islamic society. It does not apply to a community like the one from which our reader comes, where the majority of the population are non-Muslim.

Now if we look at the case in hand, we find that there may be more offenders than the boy and the girl involved. Let us ask whether their upbringing has been such as to help them realize that their conduct is highly censurable under Islamic law and values. Have their parents and their teachers instilled in them true Islamic values? If not, and if the education given them is that of the general schools of a non-Muslim society, with perhaps some additional religious education in the village mosque, then there is something markedly lacking in their Islamic education. How are we to expect them to observe Islamic values? What is important first is to give young Muslims the proper education so as to enhance in them an Islamic natural conscience that deters them from prohibited practices. Without doing so, we cannot expect our young ones to behave in an Islamic way, particularly when they are exposed to all sorts of un-Islamic lifestyles.

Legal Order: Laws Flouted To Declare 'Land Of War'

Some people are happy to resort to certain action, which are clearly against the law of the land, justifying what they do by claiming that they live in the "land of war" or "dar-ul-harb." This is particularly worrying in a place like India, where the Muslims constitute a large minority. Those who indulge in such activities point to discrimination against Muslims in employment, social boycott of Muslims, etc. The problem is that some of their actions make those Muslims criminals in the legal sense. Please comment.

Some people refer to the books of Fiqh written several hundred years ago in order to extract rulings, which they try to apply to present-day conditions. They forget that the authors of those books arrived at their conclusions after making a thorough study of the Qur'an and statements by the Prophet, taking into account the prevailing conditions in their own times. They have pointed out that rulings on matters, which relate to social conditions, may vary from one place to another and from one generation to another. The rulings on the "land of war" are one such clear example. When the founders and many of the scholars of the four major schools of thought made their rulings, the Muslim state was in its full power, extending over all Muslim areas. The fact that two Muslim states were in existence did not change this fact because what applied to the status of the individual in one Muslim state applied to the other. The world outside was hostile to Islam. Even in a period of peace, the hostility to Islam in such areas was evident. A Muslim who traveled deep into these countries was vulnerable to attack. The precariousness of his position was enhanced by the fact that modes of travel were very slow, compared with what we have today. Hence you have rulings discouraging Muslims traveling into the land of war which was defined as the land where the majority of the population were non-Muslims. Anyone who suggests that we can take these rulings and apply them to our relations with non-Muslim countries nowadays betrays an attitude of hastiness that is unbecoming of a Muslim scholar. To suggest today that any country where the majority of the people are non-Muslims is a land of war is to do Islam a great disservice. Muslims have good relations with many non-Muslim countries. We have mutual support pacts with a large number of non-Muslim countries in Africa, Latin

America, Asia and Europe. Moreover, we can travel into these countries without fearing any adverse consequences, as long as we abide by their laws. No authority in these countries demands that we do what our religion forbids or refrain from doing our religious duties. We enjoy with them peace and security. How, then, can we classify them as "land of war"?

On the other hand, some Muslim countries have suffered under dictatorial regimes, which were very hostile to Islam. Although these countries have a population of an overwhelming Muslim majority, these dictators were extremely hostile to Islam and its advocates. I know by personal experience that in some Muslim countries, some government employees feel compelled to pretend that they do not pray or fast in Ramadhan for fear of losing their jobs. Some of these have large armies where lunch is served in Ramadhan to all soldiers and officers at the same time as the rest of the year. Are we justified in considering such countries as the "land of Islam," when a Muslim feels himself at risk for no reason other than practicing his religion?

The point I am trying to drive home to people is that the concept of the land of war as understood by scholars who lived under the Islamic state throughout its different periods and up to the end of World War I, does not apply to present-day conditions. Hence, contemporary scholars are called upon to redefine this concept in the light of the prevailing system of international relations.

When you come to a place like India, where the Muslims form a sizable minority and their number exceed the number of Muslims in the largest Muslim country, we find that the concept of the land of war does not apply at all. The law of India does not differentiate between Indian citizens on the basis of their faith. Muslims are selected to fill ministerial posts. It may be true that some of those Muslim ministers may not consider serving Islam as their top priority, but they are nevertheless Muslims.

On the other hand, India has been the scene of sectarian riots, which flare up every now and then. Some times, the government is accused of turning a blind eye toward those who stir up the riots. Even then, we cannot issue a ruling, which classifies India as a land of war at all times. Such a ruling will require extensive study of present-day conditions in India on the one hand and throughout the Muslim world on the other. Moreover, the study should include the effects of any ruling on the status of Muslims in India. Such a study cannot be undertaken by a single scholar, certainly not one who lives abroad and whose knowledge of what happens in that country is derived from press reports and personal accounts of expatriates.

There is an exceedingly important point, which must be made here. The reader refers to some Muslims feeling at liberty to violate the law of the land on account of India being a land of war. I want to emphasize that I do not consider it as such. However, even if an authoritative body of scholars rules that a particular place is a land of war, Muslims are not allowed to behave there in any way other than what Islam permits. For example, taking the money or property of another person in an unfair manner is forbidden in Islam. If that person or his property is in the land of war, a Muslim still cannot take it unfairly. It can only come into his possession either as a gift or through a commercial deal of buying and selling. A Muslim who lives in the land of war cannot fiddle with the electricity meter so that his electricity bill is lower than what it should be. Nor can he travel on buses without paying the fare. Allah has deplored the attitude of the Jews for taking advantage of other nations and taking possession of their property unfairly. This is stated clearly in the Qur'an so that Muslims may not do likewise. I would like to emphasize that it is forbidden for a Muslim to resort to any such actions on the basis that he lives in a land of war. Muslims remain fair to everyone. Allah tells us: "Do not allow your hatred of other people to prompt you to act unfairly. Be fair [to all]."

Legal Order: Laws Providing Illegitimate Rights

When my grandfather suffered a business setback, he was left only with a small vegetable shop that he owned and a small flat that he rented. From a young age, my father worked hard, helping his father in earning the livelihood for his family. He then took over all the business when his father could not carry on. He managed to marry off all his five sisters. About fifteen years ago a state government in India passed a regulation which made tenants the ultimate owners of two-thirds of the rented premises. If the property is to be sold, only one-third goes to the landlord and two-thirds of the sale proceeds go to the tenant. Now my father is thinking of moving to a better residence by selling this small flat and using the money for the purchase of the new property. We put the case to a scholar in our locality who said that since my father continued to pay the rent and take care of the family, he is entitled to retain the price of the flat and the shop. My aunts are not aware of this. May I ask you whether they are entitled to shares of the proceeds of the sale of this flat and shop?

The first thing to be said about this question is that governments may promulgate certain laws which they deem to be useful to the community in order to address a certain problem or redeem some imbalance. When a law is in direct conflict with Islamic teachings, Muslims must try not to take advantage of that law, putting the blame for gaining certain illegitimate benefits on the authority that had promulgated the law.

It is often the case that a law is tailored to try to gain some popular support for the government. It does not look at the question of right and wrong in any broad sense. Its purpose is simply to make the government more popular. An example may be provided by the tenancy regulations issued in a Middle Eastern country over a long period of time. Successive regulations prevented from raising the rent. As a result, tenants continue to pay today the same rent they agreed with their landlords forty or fifty years ago. At that time, the rent was fair. Now it is worthless. The property is still of great benefit to the tenant but is no longer of any benefit to the landlord who is the actual owner. Such regulations are unjust, but governments continue to be most reluctant to change them, because the change will not be popular. This is not an isolated case. Similar examples can be found in many countries of the Muslim world.

An unjust law or regulation does not give any legitimate right to the party who benefits by such a legislation. A government may issue an order saying that if a tenant has paid the rent of a property for so many years, he becomes its owner. Such a law has no validity in Islam, because the tenancy agreement did not provide for a possibility of converting the rent into a sale price. The case may be different if it is clearly stipulated at the beginning that the tenancy will eventually end in a sale of the property. The law of the country or of the state would then become applicable to such tenancy agreements and its provisions become part of the agreement itself. But to say that past agreements are changed, as a result of a subsequent law is totally unfair and unacceptable in Islam.

I will give you a clearer case than yours. Suppose that a landlord of a property dies having no children, wife, parents or indeed any relations whomsoever. Suppose also that he had rented a shop or a flat he had owned to a particular person who paid the rent regularly for more than thirty or forty years. If both people were in your state in India, the local regulation would give that tenant the status of owner of two-thirds of that property. That ownership is not valid from the Islamic point of view, because it does not come about as a result of a sale agreement between seller and buyer, or as a result of a gift from owner to tenant, or as a result of inheritance by will or by Islamic

system of inheritance. These are the only legitimate methods of transfer of ownership.

I hope the foregoing makes clear the question of the ownership of this small flat, which your father has had on rent for many years, and his father rented before him. The state government might have issued any law, but your father is not the owner of two-thirds of that flat. That flat is owned by the landlord only. Your father may wish to come to some sort of an agreement with him about buying the flat at a reasonable price, but that should be a new agreement, regardless of the unjust law of the state. If the landlord agrees to sell it to your father at a reduced price, then it becomes the property of your father and your aunts will have no share in it.

The case of the shop is different, because it was the property of your grandfather who died only a few years back. The fact that your father had been working there for such a long time gives him some special status, but not with regard to ownership of the shop. It remained the property of your grandfather and, as such, it formed a part of his estate. All his heirs had shares in it. I understand that your grandfather was survived by his widow, one son and five daughters. Therefore, his property is divided in this way: One eighth of all his property goes to your grandmother, the remaining portion of seven-eighths of the whole property is divided into seven portions with two of these portions going to your father and one portion to each of your five aunts. To make things simpler, the whole property could be divided into twenty-four parts, with three parts going to your grandmother. The remaining twenty-one parts form the inheritance of your grandfather's, with your father receiving six parts and each of your aunts receiving three parts. This division applies to the shop itself and the part of the business, which was owned by your grandfather. If your father had any portions of the business as his own property, then the division does not apply to that. Since your father has been working in the shop for a long time, your aunts are entitled to receive from him rent of their shares in that shop. It may be that your father has spent so much on his sisters, and perhaps he has helped in their marriages. He may speak to them, explaining that each of them has such a portion of the shop. Either he would buy it from them or pay them rent. They should come to some agreement with regard to the ownership and the rent, without pressure. If any of them decides to retain her portion and requests rent from your father, he should pay her any agreed rent. The fact that he supported them in the past should not affect that situation. Whatever agreement they may come to must be amicable. His support to them will ensure great reward for him from God. He should be keen to retain that reward by ensuring that each one of his sisters receives her full share of the inheritance from their father.

Legal Order: Laws Suited To Self-interest

There is a Muslim community in my home country where people believe that it is permissible to steal money and property from non-Muslims in order to distribute it among poor Muslims. Members of that community may rob a bank and claim that they are working for Islam. To my thinking, if stealing is a sin, it remains so when the stolen property belongs to a non-Muslim. Please comment.

This sort of thinking may sound plausible among a minority community, particularly if it is at the receiving end of unjust practices, and laws, as it is the case in your home country. It is the mixture of ignorance and a keen sense of persecution that gives such reason acceptance among those Muslims. To say this is not to justify their action, because it remains unjustifiable. I am only trying to point out the sort of conditions which may give rise to it.

All societies and communities in all ages agree that stealing is an evil practice. Some of them enforced very stiff punishments for theft. It was not a long time ago when the

English law made theft punishable by death or deportation to the colonies. Hence, no one can argue that stealing could be permissible under any circumstances, except when a person is about to die of hunger and no one is willing to give him food. In such a situation, he is allowed to take whatever food he can to keep himself alive.

Since respecting other people's rights and keeping their properties safe is good, then it is the attitude Islam requires of all its followers in all situations. This is due to the fact that Islam orders its followers to do good to all its people, maintaining the standards of goodness, which Islam requires. It is not permissible, in Islam to divide people into two groups, extending good treatment to one and dealing badly with the other. Islam promotes what is good because it is good, Islam is the religion of goodness and goodness must be universal. What is evil cannot be considered good in certain situations; nor can evil be considered permissible at any time.

Since the Prophet, peace be upon him, provides the proper example for all Muslims to follow, we should always look to him for guidance. After preaching his message in Makkah for 13 years, the Prophet, peace be upon him, emigrated to Madinah. Throughout those 13 years, the Muslims suffered a great deal of persecution at the hands of non-believers who wielded power in Makkah. On the night the Prophet, peace be upon him, left, those unbelievers were determined to kill him. They sent a group of young men representing all clans of Quraish to murder him. In spite of that, people of Makkah always gave him their valuables for safekeeping. Before his departure, the Prophet, peace be upon him, asked his cousin, Ali, to stay behind and to give every article in his house to its rightful owner. If taking away other people's property could be allowed in any situation, then the Prophet, peace be upon him, would have been allowed to leave with those valuables. He was leaving behind his house and furniture. Moreover, he was leaving because those very people were plotting to kill him. To take their property would have been the smallest of compensations. Yet the Prophet, peace be upon him, would not for a moment think of doing that, because betraying a trust and taking other peoples' property is evil. The Prophet, peace be upon him, has taught us what is good because doing good is beneficial to the doer, the recipient and the community.

From another point of view, when a Muslim implements the teachings of Islam, and works hard to make his actions a reflection of what Islamic life is like, he actually calls on people to accept Islam. When they realize that the goodness in him is brought about by his faith, they would like to learn more about Islam. The more they learn; the greater are the chances of their acceptance of this blessed faith. On the other hand, if a person speaks all the time about the benefits of Islamic life to mankind, yet at the same time allows his actions to give a bad image of Islam and Muslims, his words will only fall on deaf ears. How can people believe him when his actions give the lie to his word? He simply cannot say to people: "Come to Islam because it is good and yet he does away with the other people's property." A Muslim is always a teacher of what is good. To justify stealing when taking away the property of a non-believer is to teach something bad to others.

I cannot emphasize too strongly the fact that Islam does not admit one action and its opposite at the same time. How can it be? If something is good then its opposite is bad and, as such, unacceptable.

Another important point is that when people justify stealing for themselves in this way, they become hardened thieves. They may start by stealing from non-Muslims, but they would later find it easy to steal from Muslims as well. They simply become accustomed to taking other people's property since they feel they can take it away with impunity. Moreover, someone may start by stealing in order to give the stolen property to poor Muslims. When he finds out that he could get away with this sort of action, it will be easy to justify by taking away the stolen property for himself. Besides, Islam does not require anyone to steal in order to help a poor person, if they

truly care about poor Muslims, then they should do something positive and good to help them. They either donate some of their own money in order to help the poor or they should start some sort of project, which benefits the Muslim community. If they do that, then they show that they truly care about the poor Muslims. The idea of robbing others in order to help our own poor people is totally unacceptable from the Islamic point of view. [There is no concept of Robin Hoods in Islam.] This action is undoubtedly forbidden.

Legal Order: Lawyers Defending the Criminals

Is legal profession permissible? Can lawyers represent habitual criminals in the court of law?

The legal profession is the same as any other profession, from the Islamic point of view. In every type of work or profession, there are areas, which may be against Islam and others, which may be acceptable. What you do in your profession is your choice, and therefore you are responsible for it. If you use your skills or talents to achieve an illegitimate purpose, you are doing something forbidden and you are likely to be punished by Allah for it unless He, out of His grace, chooses to forgive you. The same applies to the legal profession.

If you learn of law and what it requires of every citizen and how you can live on the right side of the law, then that is well and good. If you also learn about loopholes in different laws and how these can be utilized to gain benefit or repel harm in a legitimate way, then you are doing well. On the other hand, if you learn about these loopholes in order to help hardened criminals evade their proper punishment, then you are doing something wrong.

If you are a famous lawyer and someone comes to you to say that he is accused of committing murder and he wants you to represent him, what should be your reaction if you are a good Muslim? The first question you ask that person is whether he has truly committed a murder or not. He may explain to you in detail what happened and you recognize that there are certain loopholes, which could help you, obtain a verdict of manslaughter instead of a verdict of murder. You may explain this to him and you agree a large fee and take on the case.

If you take it on, you are helping a murderer. On the other hand, if you realize from the circumstances given to you that the killing was accidental and there was no intention on the part of your client to kill the other person, you may take on the case and you may be rewarded for helping a person get the right verdict.

Legal Order: Lawyers Defending the Guilty

Lawyers sometimes play every trick in order to win the case of their clients. They even manipulate the law in order to spare their clients, whom they know to be guilty, and liable to a punishment, which may well be deserved. Is it lawful for a Muslim lawyer to earn his living in this way, defending the guilty and helping them escape punishment?

Not all lawyers are dedicated to play tricks and manipulate the law in order to restore justice. Nor are all their clients guilty and want to escape punishment. Much of the business of lawyers is concerned with securing rights, which the law gives to individuals and to prevent others from encroaching upon these rights. Moreover, there are lawyers who value their work very highly and set for themselves principles, which they will never violate. There are lawyers who pledge never to defend a guilty person. Famous lawyers have sometimes to resist strong temptations to stand for a client who is keen to secure their services because of their undoubted skills and abilities. Therefore, we cannot make a sweeping Judgment that applies to all lawyers.

Within the legal profession, however, some are unscrupulous. They do not mind which side they are on, as long as their fees will be paid at the end. They do not mind using tricks and manipulating legal technicalities in order to win the case for their clients, though they may realize that their clients are guilty. Certainly Islam does not approve of this latter type. From the Islamic point of view, it is truth and justice, which matter. A person who tries to prevent justice bears a share of guilt.

It must be said that the legal profession as it functions today is a product of the legal system, which has been in operation for a long time. This is a system which has flourished in the West and which Muslim countries, of most of them, have imported when they succumbed to the colonial rule. Unfortunately, it has continued after the colonial powers have gone. When Muslim countries will make the long-awaited changes and start implementing Islamic law again, that will spell a great change in the nature of the work of lawyers. How will they cope with that change and how will they exercise their profession is something which I cannot tell in any precise manner. But a change will take place because the very nature and working of Islamic law is different from what we have imported from the West. The change will not come about overnight, but lawyers and judges will have to adapt to the new law over a period of time, as happens whenever a fundamental change takes place. But there will be need for lawyers, as has always been. There will be many people who need help in understanding the law. People will need the help of lawyers to preserve their rights because there are those who will try to get for themselves what belongs to others.

Having said that, I should perhaps add that many people have a mistaken idea about the working of Islamic law. They tend to think that summary trial and severe punishments will be the order of the day. Let us keep our minds at rest. Islam does not like judges to pass severe sentences, right, left and center. There are two purposes for punishment: restoring justice and providing deterrent to potential criminals. It is far preferable that a guilty person should escape punishment than an innocent one to be mistakenly punished. That will be a guiding principle with Muslim judges. On the other hand, there will not be a long process of delay and counter-delay, with the aim of preventing justice and increasing lawyers' fees. At the moment, many people in the West prefer not to move a court of law, although they have a justified grievance because legal fees are prohibitive. Often a solicitor's bill is far greater than the amount claimed by his client. Sometimes Western governments try to simplify the legal process in order to avoid certain measures that complicate the process and deter people from seeking the help of the law to restore their rights. Yet, there has not been a satisfactory answer to this complex problem anywhere in the West. We can say with certainty that under Islam, the legal profession will undergo a remarkable change. That change will work for the benefit of the individual and will help establish justice. It will not spell any great increase in severe sentences, because Islam does not want to enforce the punishment it provides for certain crimes. It is true that the severe punishments prescribed by Islamic law for certain crimes must be enforced when a guilt is proven, but Islam prefers that the need to enforce such punishments does not arise.

Legal Order: Lawyers Defending Through Unfair Means

I want to be a lawyer, but I have been told that there is much lying in this profession which makes it unlawful for a Muslim to take up. Please comment.

This is a very naïve view. It is true that some lawyers may resort to devious methods in order to get their clients out of some messy situations, but this is the choice of those lawyers. It is not something imposed on them by their profession. A lawyer may decide not to take up a case if he is convinced that the client is guilty. Or he may take it up, using his professional skill and expertise to get the court to

understand the true case, with all its extenuating circumstances, so that he gets a fair trial and a favorable sentence for his client.

There is certainly nothing wrong with being a lawyer, provided that you do not compromise on your Islamic values and principles.

There are some prominent lawyers who are very good Muslims. It is the approach of the person to his profession and his religion that determines whether he abides by Islamic teachings or not.

This applies to all professions, not merely the legal profession.

Legal Order: Marriages — the Need To Observe Legal Formalities

What I would like to know is whether I am married to my man, although we have not signed any marriage contract. Our "marriage" took place in an office when I was in one room and everyone else was in another because they were all men. We had witnesses who, as they came out at the end of the "ceremony", offered congratulations to me. Since I do not have any relatives to celebrate the marriage, we simply set out together, just the two of us. Because I feel I am not properly wed, I have asked him on two separate occasions whether we are married and he answered in the affirmative. Yet no one in his family knows about our marriage. I live with them in the same house but in separate flats. As I have become a Muslim with full conviction, I want to be sure. Can you help?

I wish you could have given me more details about what happened at the time when your marriage took place. You realize that a marriage is a contract between two parties, a man and a woman, made in the presence of witnesses as well as the woman's guardian. It also involves the payment of a dower, the amount of which is agreed between the two parties and become payable by the husband at the time when the contract is made [though the payment may be deferred by mutual consent]. A marriage contract does not need to be written down in order to be valid. But the documentation is important; particularly these days in order to ensure that all-future formalities are properly made. What I am saying here is that you may have a verbal marriage contract which is completely valid, but you need to have it registered with the civil authorities so that you do not run into problems in future, particularly when you have children.

Like every contract, marriage can only be entered into by agreement of both sides. It cannot be taken care of only by one party. While you might have had to be in a separate room, your express consent should have been sought and given properly for the marriage contract to go ahead. In many Muslim marriages, the wife may not be present when the actual contract is made. However, her father or guardian comes to her with two witnesses and asks her whether she gives him the [verbal] power of attorney [in presence of the two witnesses] to act for her in marrying her to the man concerned and whether she agrees to the amount of dower to be paid to her. When she has given him the power of attorney, he proceeds to complete the marriage contract. Did you give the power of attorney to anyone to act for you? If not, did the witnesses ask you before the marriage contract whether you were willing to proceed with this marriage? If not, then what sort of contract was this? What was your part in it?

If you did give power of attorney to someone and he acted for you, and since you say that you have no relatives, then the marriage contract would be valid. If not, then there was no marriage contract because you did not take any part in it either in person or by appointing someone to act for you. It is not sufficient that the witnesses

congratulate you or that your man says that you are married. You say that no one in his family knows about your marriage. Do you mean that he is married to another one? Or do you mean that his parents do not know about this? If it is the latter, then you are entitled to be recognized as his wife. In any case, you should have your marriage properly registered. What you should do is to insist that your marriage is properly registered with the civil authorities. Your husband cannot deny you that because you are only asking him to document a legal relationship. Perhaps the best way is to arrange for the marriage to be properly made at an Islamic court. Once this is done, your position is clear. But you should stop any marital relationship with him unless you are sure, in the light of what I have said that the marriage that took place is a proper and valid one. This means that you have given power of attorney to someone to act for you and he acted according to the mandate you have given him. If not, you must do it now. You must not lose any time.

Legal Order: Medical Compensation

A relative of mine died as a result of excessive bleeding during childbirth. Is it permissible, from the Islamic point of view, for the relatives to receive compensation from the doctors attending her, who could not save her despite their best efforts?

The most important phrase in the question is that which concerns the doctors doing their best in trying to save their patient. If this is true, then the death was something they could not prevent, and there was no negligence on their part. In this case, compensation would be unfair to ask for and receive.

The case would be different if there was a proven element of negligence on the part of the doctors. Suppose for example that the bleeding started, say, at two o'clock in the morning and no doctor was available in the hospital to attend to the patient. Suppose also that despite the attempts by the mid-wife to contact doctors in their homes, no one was available until a few hours later. Such a situation would be far less than what is reasonably expected in a maternity hospital. The efforts the doctors would put at such a later stage would arguably be of little effect. Therefore, one can say that there is an element of negligence there, and compensation to the family of the dead patient would be reasonable.

What you have to do now is to determine whether there has been any element of negligence on the part of doctors in the case of your relative's death. If there was negligence, you may ask for compensation.

Legal Order: Rape — Can Father In-law, the Rapist, Be Rewarded?

I urgently need your answer regarding the PTI [Press Trust Of India] and other reports, which appeared in some leading newspapers in India. Some of these copies are attached for your perusal. Your advice will help me to save the woman from getting divorced. Thank you.

Imrana Ilahi, an ordinary Muslim Indian woman, recently found her name mentioned in countless articles, news dispatches, e-mail messages and angry reports going in all directions.

Many people would love to be famous, and some know how to use such sudden fame to advantage. But not so Imrana, whose newly acquired fame is for the wrong reasons, and for nothing she had done or contemplated. Poor Imrana has been target of several wrong actions by the wrong people.

To start with, Imrana was the victim of rape by none other than her father-in-law, who, according to news reports, is now in prison awaiting trial. She was, secondly,

the victim of a Fatwa issued by certain people who ruled that she can no longer remain married to her husband; rather, she should treat him like her own son.

Thirdly, the local authorities that said that they endorse the Fatwa further victimized Imrana since a recognized institute has issued it.

Fourthly, she has been the victim of many self-appointed defenders who took up her case and are trying to bring pressure to bear on her, her family and the authorities to reverse this Fatwa. Finally, according to some reports, Imrana has been told to move with her rapist as she can be married to him now instead of his son, her own husband!

In the midst of this entire furor, Imrana feels like one in a whirlwind of confusion. After her personal tragedy, her only desire is to continue her simple life, abiding by Islamic teachings and looking after her children.

Needless to say, the case has provided new ammunition to those who are always on the look out for anything to use in order to attack Islam and Muslims.

Unfortunately, when the media take up such a case, the truth is often forgotten and we are rarely able to establish the simple facts of the case. In all news agency reports I have seen, very little is written about the basis of the Fatwa. A couple of quotations attributed to spokespersons at Dar ul-Uloom at Deoband are often mentioned, but we cannot determine who actually said what. Nevertheless, it is important to make clear the Islamic standpoint on such cases. It is the standard practice of Islamic scholarship that the views of any school of thought should be taken from books written by its own scholars. Thus, if we see a reference to, say, a Hanafi viewpoint in the writings of a highly reputable scholar known for his accuracy and scholarly achievement but is not a Hanafi, we cannot rely on his reporting of the viewpoint and accept it as the standard Hanafi view. We must go back to references and scholars of the Hanafi School and consult them. Only when they confirm the same viewpoint as reported by that scholar can we accept it as a Hanafi view.

Therefore, without having seen the Fatwa as issued by Dar ul-Uloom and reviewing its basis and the evidence cited in support of it, I cannot comment on the Fatwa itself. What I propose to do is to discuss the reports I have seen, and then I will look at the case of a woman raped by her father-in-law and the effect of such a situation on her marriage.

The reports mention that the Fatwa is based on the fact that the rape was a conjugal, sexual relation between Imrana and her father-in-law, and this makes it forbidden for her to be married to her husband. The reports quote certain spokespersons as saying that it does not matter that the relationship was by consent or compulsion.

If the reports are accurate, then we say that those who issued the Fatwa must have taken as their basis Verse 22 of Surah 4 of the Qur'an, entitled Women, which may be translated as follows:

"Do not marry women whom your fathers have previously married, unless it be a thing of the past. Surely, that is an indecent, abominable and evil practice." (Women — 'An-Nis'a 4: 22)

It has to be said, however, that the Arabic word, *nakaha*, which is used in the verse for marriage is nowadays more often used in spoken Arabic to refer to sex, rather than marriage, but in official documents it continues to signify marriage. However, Qur'anic statements must be understood and interpreted according to the common usage by native Arabic speakers during the lifetime of the Prophet's, peace be upon him. We know for certain that this word was used in spoken and written Arabic to

refer to marriage. In all other instances in the Qur'an, it is only used to mean marriage. Therefore, it must be treated as such, and we say that the verse refers only to marital relations.

Thus, all Muslim schools of thought are unanimous that a man cannot marry his father's former wife. There is no question about this. Scholars, however, differ as to whether a man can marry a woman with whom his father had committed adultery, but this is not relevant to the present case.

It is also important to look at the above Qur'anic verse and its construction in order to understand its full significance. The word *nakahai*, or "marry", is used twice in the verse, but it is used first in the present tense, which in Arabic signifies the present and the future, while it is used in the past tense in the second instance. Thus it prohibits the initiation of marriage with a woman who was previously married to one's father. In other words, the woman's relation with the father is over, either because she is divorced or the father has died. In any case she remains unlawful for his son to marry.

It cannot be overemphasized that the verse speaks about marital relations, and their initiation. As such, it is totally inapplicable to the case in hand, because Imrana was never in any sort of relation with her father-in-law prior to her marriage. What happened between them came later, after she has been in a valid marital relation with her husband to whom she has given birth to five children. Therefore, there is no question about the validity of her marriage. What we need to discuss is the effect of the rape on such valid marriage, which we will do presently.

Most infuriating is the suggestion carried in news reports that some scholars are saying that Imrana should, or could move with her father-in-law, or may marry him. I seriously doubt that this has been said by any scholar worthy of the name. The Qur'anic verse next to the one we have quoted above gives a list of the women we are not allowed to marry in any circumstances. The list includes: "**The wives of your own begotten sons.**" (4: 23) These are again totally forbidden for us to marry in any circumstances.

Is it possible that someone who has any knowledge of Islamic family law could suggest that now that the father-in-law has raped Imrana he can marry her? Can it be true that anyone imagines that the crime of rape could nullify a ruling by God, stated in His book, the Qur'an? The Prophet, peace be upon him says that no right can accrue as a result of an offense or wrongdoing. Here it is suggested that a prohibition by God Himself is set aside as a result of such wrongdoing. How absurd!

It is important to clarify the effects of the crime on Imrana's marriage. Suppose that a married woman commits adultery, out of choice and with no element of coercion. This is, according to Islamic law, a crime of the most grievous nature, and it has a very tough punishment, if proven in accordance with the Islamic stringent proof requirements. But it does not invalidate her marriage. If her husband gets to know of the offense, he can certainly divorce her if he so wishes, but he can also keep her. Indeed, he is encouraged to do so if she has genuinely repented and firmly resolved not to commit the same offense again.

This applies when the woman is a willing party to the crime. It applies even more in a situation of rape, when the woman is forced into a situation where she cannot defend herself or protect her honor. In this case, she is blameless and she must not be punished in any way.

The says: "My community are not accountable for anything they do, or omit to do, as a result of a genuine mistake, forgetfulness or coercion." Rape is perhaps the clearest example of what is done under coercion or compulsion. No woman likes to be forced

into such an action. Hence, Islam takes a very serious view of rape and allows a very severe punishment to be inflicted on the rapist, including death, depending on the circumstances. The woman is treated as a victim and cannot be punished, unless it is proven that she had encouraged, or tempted, or otherwise facilitated her own rape.

Could this case of rape bring Imrana's marriage to an end? The answer is: Definitely not. We have a very clear rule in Islamic law that says that what is forbidden cannot override or nullify what is permissible. This clearly applies here. Marriage is permissible, and in this case Imrana is married to her husband and their relation is recognized as legitimate by Islam, the Indian law and their own community. The rape that has occurred is a forbidden act of which Imrana was the victim. It cannot invalidate her marriage.

What should be done in this case, or indeed in any case of adultery or rape, is that the couple should abstain from sexual intercourse until the woman has had one menstruation period in order to ensure that she is not pregnant, or that if she is pregnant the child's father is known. After her period, the couple can resume their full marital status. Throughout, she remains married to her husband, enjoying the same rights as every Muslim wife. She should always be treated as blameless.

As for the suggestion that she should now treat her husband as her own son, this is most absurd. I cannot find anything in Islamic law to support this. I can only assume, or indeed hope, that it is a clear mistake of reporting. [Read end of VOL.IV]

Legal Order: Rape — Charge, Evidence & Witnesses To Prove

A lecturer on Islam affirmed that the victim of rape must produce four witnesses in order to prove her accusation against the rapist. This does not seem right, because it is hardly likely that she would be able to produce even a single witness. Please comment on this view, and also let me know what is the prescribed punishment for rape.

This view seems very strange, because it applies the evidence required to prove an accusation of adultery to a totally different offense, which is rape. It is true that there is similarity between what takes place in the two offenses, but there is a fundamental difference, which cannot be overlooked. Adultery is committed by mutual consent and the witnesses should be produced by those who accuse the two parties of having committed it. If one of the parties confesses to having committed adultery, no witnesses need to be brought in. Only the judge must make sure that the confession is genuine and made out of a keen desire to repent and have the punishment administered in this life. The confession of one party does not incriminate the other.

Rape, on the other hand, is an assault by a man on a woman. It should be proven in the same way as any other type of assault. If someone stops a car, beats the driver, steals his money and takes away the car, we do not require the victim to produce four witnesses.

The case is referred to the security forces to deal with. They investigate the case and may be able to arrest the offender and put him to trial. If guilt is proven, then punishment is administered in accordance with Islamic law. Rape is an even worse crime than what I have mentioned. It would be grossly unfair to require the victim to produce witnesses. The crime should be referred to the police and if they arrest the offender, he should be put to trial. If the charge is proven, he will be punished. There is no prescribed punishment, but the judge may use his discretion, ordering any punishment he deems fit, including the death penalty.

Legal Order: Rape — Pregnancy & the Protection Provided

If a non-Muslim rapes a Muslim woman and she gets pregnant, what is her position in Muslim society, and what is the position of her child? If the woman is married, how shall the husband deal with this matter? Can he divorce his wife? Can he accept the child as his own?

We have to be clear about what we are discussing. When we speak of rape, we mean that a woman has been forced to submit to an attacker who would kill her if she does not yield to him. If this happened in a Muslim society, then society is at fault for not providing its members with effective protection to ensure that no such attack takes place. A Muslim woman who finds herself attacked by such a person and tries to defend herself, and is killed as a result attains the position of a martyr. Therefore, she should not yield to her attacker if that is at all possible. However, women react in different ways in such conditions. Some of them freeze because of fear, and the assailant is thus able to get what he wants. Some others may lose consciousness. Whatever the situation, if a woman is raped she is not to blame, as long as she had not encouraged her assailant or given in easily to him. You ask whether her husband may divorce her. If he does so as a result of the rape, he is being unfair to her. However, divorce is permissible in Islam. A husband may divorce his wife provided that he gives her all her dues.

The child that is conceived as a result of the rape is blameless. No stigma should be attached to the child. That child should be treated absolutely fairly. In Islam, no one bears the responsibility for what another person does. The child could not be blamed for the sin of the rapist.

There is a rule in Islam, which states clearly, that a child belongs to the husband on whose bed it has been conceived. The word, "bed", is used here figuratively. A wife is considered a "bed", as it is normal in Arabic to use the name of a place in order to refer to its occupant. Thus, the child of the rape belongs to the woman's husband. The rapist has no right or claim to it whatsoever.

Legal Order: Retroactive Exchange Regulations

Does Islam permit the enactment of laws, which have retroactive effect? In this connection, is it permissible for one of the parties to a contract to go back on it after the contract has been completed and acted upon? May I mention the case of a law, which has been enacted specifically to encourage citizens to repatriate funds, which they hold abroad? The government gives certain guarantees, which are calculated to make such citizens feel that their money will be safe once it is repatriated. However, the government goes back on its promises and brings a new regulation, which renders all promised guarantees ineffective. Please comment in detail.

Let us first of all be clear about the area in which an Islamic government may enact laws and regulations. We know that Islam sets into operation certain laws, which are applicable to all Muslim communities and in all generations. What these Islamic laws forbid cannot be made permissible by any authority, whether social or governmental. For example, Islam forbids the drinking and the sale of intoxicants as well as adultery and fornication. It is not permissible for any Muslim government in the light of the above prohibition to issue licenses to any person, Muslim or non-Muslim, to sell intoxicants in a shop, a hotel, or a restaurant. You find in some Muslim countries that the sale of intoxicants is permissible. Moreover, the government imposes certain taxes on the import and the sale of such stuff. This is

certainly a forbidden action and the government, which allows such a thing, contravenes Islamic teachings.

Similarly, in some Muslim countries we find laws that suggest that sexual intercourse between consenting man and woman does not constitute an offense. It is not open to a Muslim government to enact such a regulation. This may go further than that and we find that brothels are legal in some Muslim countries. Indeed the governments of one or two Muslim countries impose taxes on the income of prostitutes working in such brothels and profits made by their owners. On the other hand, many Muslim countries allow their banks to operate a system based on interest. It is not permissible for any government to enact such laws or implement them. Moreover, Muslim citizens who refuse to observe such laws cannot be prosecuted for their violation. Similarly an employee who refuses to carry them out cannot be accused of failing to do this duty.

A Muslim government may issue laws and decrees to regulate those areas, which are left to our discretion. There is indeed a large area, which Islam has left open to different communities to regulate according to their circumstances. A government may determine the course it wishes its society to map in these matters. In such areas, a government may enact a retroactive law if it determines that such a retroactive effect will serve the best interest of the society. However, a retroactive law is bound to have some adverse effects on individuals. Those individuals must be compensated for any harm, which they may suffer as a result of this retroactive law. They must be rendered harmless, if justice is to be maintained. It is needless to say that an Islamic government must always maintain justice.

On the subject of money and finance, it must be clear that Islam consider the money of every individual as his own private property, which he may use as he wishes, provided that he does not use it in any way which causes any person, including himself, any harm. It is not permissible for any individual to use his money to buy intoxicants, because intoxicants are harmful to the person who drinks them and to his family and to society as a whole. Similarly it is not permissible for anyone to use his money in gambling because gambling is bound to have bad effects on the gambler and his family. Similarly an individual may not use his money in a way, which causes harm to the community as a whole. Before we go any further, we must explain that we are using the term "private property" here in a rather liberal sense. The fact is that our money does not belong to us as such: it belongs to God and He has placed us in charge of it. However, when this trust is in operation, we may use the money in our trust as our own, for our own benefits. Provided that we fulfil our Islamic duties, pay Zakah and give a portion of what we have for charity and we do not use our money in a harmful way. Furthermore, Islam guarantees private ownership. If you come to possess something in a halal or permissible way, then it is your private property and no one can take it away from you. Hence, it is not open to any government, particularly an Islamic government, to promulgate laws, which are in conflict with what Islam has guaranteed, including the safeguarding of private property. It is possible on the other hand, for an Islamic government to enact a law, which restricts the movement of capital, if it determines that such a restriction will serve the best interest of the society as a whole. In this case, the Islamic government is not taking away the property of individuals, but it is regulating or restricting certain action, which they may feel inclined to take, simply because it wants to protect the interest of the community as a whole. Sometimes, speculators can cause a terrible harm to the economy of a country while making fat profits through their speculation. If the government bans such speculation, it acts within its jurisdiction. Its law must be obeyed, because it contravenes no Islamic principles.

On the other hand, if the government issues a law, which deprives people from their possessions for no valid reason, then those who are affected by such a law commit no offence if they try to protect their property. Let me give here the example of a

decree, which was issued some years back in some Muslim countries that confiscated or, to use the terminology of that decree, “put under sequestration” [confiscated] the properties of many rich individuals. This was done for no reason other than political differences, which existed between the government and those individuals. The real effect of that law was to give such confiscated property to army officers and party members who enjoyed them as if they were their own. From the Islamic point of view, such a law is unjust and its provisions have no legitimacy. It is true that the government can implement it because it has the power to do so. However, once an Islamic government comes into existence in that country, it should compensate the individuals who have been affected by this law for the harm it caused them.

The question of money held outside the country is a tricky one. It is permissible in the first instance to take one’s money abroad, if one determines that it is in his interest to do so. However, if many individuals hold large sums of money abroad, that may affect the economy of the country. If the government of a Muslim country wants to guard against such a harmful effect, it acts within its jurisdiction, if it promulgates a law preventing its citizens from transferring their money abroad without a specific permission. It may also be wise to encourage citizens to repatriate their funds because that is bound to strengthen the economy. In individual cases, the government may require a particular citizen to repatriate whatever money he holds abroad if that person is in debt at home and he does not have enough funds to pay his debts. If he had smuggled his money abroad, the government may inflict any suitable punishment on him until he causes those funds to be transferred back home. It is only right that he should pay back his debts, even though he may lose the benefit of having the money kept abroad. How can he justify his prolonged indebtedness when the money is being invested somewhere else. The Prophet, peace be upon him, has spoken in a highly disapproving manner about rich people who unnecessarily postpone the repayment of their debts.

There have been over the years, certain cases where government has tried to get funds held by its citizens abroad to be repatriated in order to strengthen its economy. This is a legitimate purpose for which governments may offer certain incentives. There was a case in a particular Muslim country where the government went as far as overlooking the provisions of a number of laws in order to encourage such repatriation of funds. It promised its people that once they get their money repatriated, they would not be asked any questions about the source from which those funds have been acquired or how those funds came to be abroad. It guaranteed for all such people bringing money from abroad that their funds would not be subjected to any legal claims or legal action. Since people generally prefer to have their money close at hand and to have it within their home countries where they could use it to good purpose, people have responded by transferring into the country the money they have held abroad. However, soon afterward, the government went back on its earlier promise and subjected all such repatriated funds to legal claims of all sorts. Moreover, they made the new law retroactive. In other words, the government did not merely stop the guarantees it had promised but it rendered them ineffective from the day they were set in operation. This is certainly a case of injustice on the part of the government and such a law is not acceptable from the Islamic point of view. The government of that Muslim country would have been better advised if it allowed only ordinary claims, such as those of creditors to be made against the money transferred into the country, or rather against the debts themselves. It should not have allowed itself to yield to the temptation of forming a special tribunal to look into all sorts of justified and unjustified claims against the money transferred from abroad. Once it has promised to allow such repatriated funds to be immune from such action, it should honor its word.

However, the word of the government cannot abrogate a rightful claim of any person against another. If someone who transferred his money back home owed part of it to

another person, that person may bring legal action to get his money back, even though the government does not want him to do so. This is a rightful claim, which cannot be canceled by a government decree.

Legal Order: Slavery & Sex Outside Marriage

I find it difficult to understand the permission to have sex with female slaves. Is this done with permission from one's wife, or with the slave's consent? Are Muslim women allowed to have sex with male slaves? Please explain.

Islam stands firmly in support of the abolition of slavery. Indeed, it did so from the very first day. But it could not abolish slavery right away because it was an international institution, imposing slavery on captives in war. Islam ordered that all slaves should be kindly treated. The Prophet, peace be upon him, described them as 'your brethren' and ordered that they should be fed and clothed as we feed and clothe our families.

If you consider that there were a large number of slaves in society, then you wonder what sort of family relation they would have. Of course, slaves may be married, but a man slave could not be married to a free woman, unless he obtained his freedom first. If two slaves got married, their marriage has the same status as marriage of free people. The woman could not have sex with anyone — even with her master, other than her husband. Needless to say, this applied to men slaves also in all situations, whether before or after their marriage.

The point you are asking about is that of sex between a free man and a woman slave. To start with, he must be her master. If he decides to take her to bed, then a new relationship is established. If she gives birth to a child, she has a new status, which is called 'a child's mother' and she may no longer be sold. When her master dies, she becomes free.

As you see, this is a permanent relationship that imposes duties and obligations on both master and slave. Moreover, it was a way of freeing slaves, because Islam wanted slavery to be ended, but it could not end it unilaterally when it was an international institution.

People tend to think of slavery only in the darkest historical images drawn from Roman times or from more recent periods in American history. Under Islam, the situation was totally different.

The question suggests an image in which women slaves were like unpaid prostitutes. There was nothing of the sort. No woman, free or slave, could have more than one man at the same time.

If a slave woman were sold, her new master would have to make sure that she was not pregnant before he could have a relationship with her. If he wants such a relationship, he would be the only one, and then if she has a child, she would no longer be a slave in the strict sense of the word. She would be on her way to full freedom.

However, now that slavery is abolished, as Islam always wanted, there is no way it could return under Islamic law.

Legal Order: Stealing From the Husband

You quote a Hadith allowing a wife to steal from her husband. How come theft is said to be permissible in this way when it is certainly forbidden in Islam?

Woman taking her husband's money without his knowledge could be stealing and could be acceptable, depending on the circumstances of every particular case. An authentic Hadith mentions that Hind bint Utbah complained to the Prophet, peace be upon him, that her husband, Abu Sufian, was stingy and did not give her enough money to look after the family. She asked the Prophet, peace be upon him, whether she could take some money from him without permission. The Prophet, peace be upon him, told her, "Take what is sufficient for you and your child, in line with what is reasonable."

This is a situation where the husband is in default of his duties. He has the money but he does not provide his wife and children with the decent standard of living he can afford. So, what is his wife to do? The woman who asked the Prophet, peace be upon him, this question belonged to a leading family in the highest-ranking Arabian tribe. The Prophet's answer was to allow her to take only what is sufficient for her and her child, and only according to what is reasonable. This is certainly not stealing. It is a remedy of a difficult situation.

Legal Order: Surrogate Motherhood & the Position Of the Child

Does a surrogate mother have any potential rights to the baby she carries for an infertile couple? The sperm and the egg are provided by the natural parents. Will she be a third parent to the child with whom she has no genetic link? How would you analyze the child's relationship, inheritance and social status from the Islamic point of view?

Islam attaches much importance to the accuracy of family relationship. It tolerates no deliberate confusion of parenthood and threatens with severe punishment any person who tries to confuse such relationship. If you consider the reasons for the requirement that a divorced woman or a widow observe a waiting period during which she may not be married to anyone, you will find that the main reason for that requirement is to ascertain whether the woman is pregnant or not. Indeed, Islam does not allow a man to divorce his wife if he has had intercourse with her during her present period of cleanliness from menstruation. They must wait until she has had her next period, so that the divorce can take place at the beginning of her waiting period. If it is discovered later that she is pregnant, her waiting period extends until she has given birth. This last ruling also applies to widows, who have to observe a waiting period, which extends normally to four months and ten days. However, if the widow is pregnant, she must give birth before her waiting period is over. The reason for that is to leave no room for confusion about the parenthood of that child and to preserve the child's right either to be brought up by the father if he divorces the mother, or to have his share of inheritance if his father has died.

Similarly, Islam has forbidden adoption whereby a married couple claim that they are the parents of a child which is not theirs. This again ensures that the rights of inheritance are preserved. In countries, which permit adoption, an adopted child is given a share of inheritance of the couple adopting him. He can have no claim to any share of the inheritance of his real parents or other members of his real family. While this may be to the benefit of the child in many cases, it is not necessarily so. Moreover, this situation affects the rights of other heirs of the adopting parents. In Islam, when a man or a woman dies, leaving behind no child of their own, their estate goes to other heirs defined by the Islamic system of inheritance. Some of these would not be heirs at all, if the deceased person had a child of his or her own.

Moreover, this confused situation affects the rights of the adopting parents. It is well known that Islam lays down rules for mutual family solidarity. When a person is guilty of accidental killing, as could happen these days if he causes a car accident, he is required to pay blood money to the family of the victim. If he cannot afford that, his heirs must come to his help. They are required by Islamic rules to contribute to the blood money. If he deprives some of his heirs of their share by adopting a child, he deprives himself of his right to call on them to help him in such a case. All the foregoing explains some of the reasons for the importance Islam attaches to preserving accurate family relations.

Surrogate motherhood is a term, which defines a process where a woman carries a child for the benefit of a childless couple. First a process of artificial insemination is carried out to help. The sperm of a man's fertile egg is implanted in the uterus of the other woman who goes through a natural period of pregnancy for a fee she receives from the couple. A contract is drawn whereby she forgoes all her claims to the child. At the end of the pregnancy, she delivers the child under the supervision of the doctors involved in the process and the child is given to the couple. There have been cases when the surrogate mother made claims to the child and courts of the United States have looked into these claims at one time or another.

There is no doubt that this process creates confusion about the parenthood of the child. We need go no further than the question put by our reader, asking whether the surrogate mother can be considered a third parent. His question arises from what he says about her having no genetic link with the child. It may be so, but she certainly has a very strong link with a baby whom she carried inside her for nine months, giving it the same nourishment as every pregnant woman gives to her fetus.

This process is not acceptable from the Islamic point of view. Muslim scholars who have considered the new techniques that are utilized to help women get pregnant have ruled that such techniques may be permissible only when they involve a married couple. No one else should be involved. That means that a test-tube baby may be permissible to have if the egg of the wife is fertilized by the sperm of her husband and then the fertilized egg is implanted in her, not in any other woman. When a third party is involved, as in the case of surrogate motherhood, the process is forbidden.

Steering away from all such confusion is much better for everyone. Every married couple should remember that it is Allah alone who determines whether to bestow on them the grace of having children and also determines whether their children shall be boys only or girls only or a mixture of both. Again, He is the One to determine whether they remain childless. Acceptance of His decision is the mark of true faith.

As I have already mentioned, it is open to any couple to bring up any child who is not their own. They, however, must not adopt that child in the way adoption is done in non-Muslim countries. The child should continue to be called after his own parents. Any deviation from this is likely to cause confusion of parenthood. Hence, it is forbidden.

Legal Order: Unlawful & Lawful — Make Matters Easy Not Difficult

I have followed 'Islam in Perspective' for a number of years. Now that I have gathered more knowledge of Islamic teachings, I feel that you are too lenient. I wonder whether this is the best policy to follow, as it seems to me that people nowadays are always looking for a ruling to satisfy what they feel should be allowed. There is here a danger of exceeding the limits and playing to the people's wishes rather than doing what Islam requires. Look at the number of questions asking about interest and whether it is

permissible or not. It seems as if people are pressing scholars to come out with a ruling of permissibility. May I ask whether it is the same as Riba which is mentioned in the Qur'an? Are fixed rate returns on bank deposits permissible or not?

Thank you very much for what you have said about this column and the efforts put into it. Yes, from time to time I have received letters of criticism accusing me of being too liberal or too lenient. But you will be surprised when I tell you that I also have received letters criticizing me for being too strict and unaware of the realities of practical life.

To both types of readers, I am certainly grateful, because they give me a feeling of how the message presented by this column is received. I am certain that when readers are better aware of what Islam requires of them in their lives, they will know that they can still go about doing their business and conduct their affairs, without transgressing the limits set by God. In other words, they do not have to do anything sinful in order to enjoy their life and have a comfortable standard of living.

One of the most authoritative scholars of our time, Yousuf Al-Qaradawi, has published a priceless book under the title, "What Is Permissible and What Is Unlawful in Islam" in which he discusses briefly issues that are highly relevant to day-to-day life and outlines what makes certain practices lawful and others unlawful.

The book was invaluable in making people realize that it is not difficult to lead an Islamic life, away from the too restrictive attitude adopted by certain individuals and groups. In other words, it helped people to set their lives on the Islamic track. It has been published many times and been of help to numerous people.

However, it has been bitterly criticized in some quarters as being too liberal. I am afraid that such criticism betrays a lack of understanding of the message of Islam and how it works in human society.

Yet that issue is clearly set out by God and His Messenger, peace be upon him. God tells us in the Qur'an: "God wants what is easy for you and He does not want to cause you hardship."

The Prophet, peace be upon him, instructs us: "Make matters easy, not difficult." The important thing when we do that is not to overlook any part of the teachings of the Qur'an or what has been outlined by the Prophet, peace be upon him. If we do that, then we are playing to people's desires and wishes. Far be it from us to do so.

Of course people wish to have rulings about matters facing them. Certain matters cause them more concern than others do. What they can do with their money and savings, preserving its value and getting some returns, is a very important issue. I am afraid Muslim scholars and economists have not yet been able to offer an easily applicable and practical formula to suit our modern times while taking into consideration people's fears and hopes, as well as the most important factor of being in line with Islamic teachings. Banks provide easy and tempting offers. We often seem to slam a verdict of prohibitions on all bank dealings and transactions, without looking carefully into them to determine what is lawful among them and what needs to be modified in order to make it lawful for Muslims to take advantage of them. Clearly this is an area which requires careful study which cannot be done by Islamic scholars on their own.

Muslim economists must help them in this very important and highly urgent task. Long ago scholars issued a ruling that all interest is forbidden, drawing on the apparent similarity between it and usury. More recently, certain scholars have begun

to question this ruling, stating that we cannot slam a blanket verdict of prohibition on all bank transactions.

But most scholars still pronounce interest as forbidden. There is no doubt that scholarly research is needed in this area so as to facilitate for people what serves their real interests. All investment, which gives a predetermined rate of interest, must be looked at very carefully.

Legal Order: Women As Witnesses

One of your answers has raised a question in my mind. It tackled the issue of women witnesses, and the fact that Islam requires two men witnesses or one man and two women. You mentioned that this is relevant to business transactions. May I ask whether a radical change in society and circumstances could change rules, or do we have to adhere to the set rules no matter what changes in social conditions has occurred? If it is the latter, may I ask why? May I say in this connection that I work for a large business company, which runs operations in several countries? About half the managers are women, and we find that their performance in business is the same as that of men.

There is a rule in Islamic jurisprudence, which acknowledges the change of rulings that may apply to certain questions on the basis of changes of time and conditions. We have the fundamental example of Imam Al-Shaf'ie, the founder of one of the major schools of thought, changing his rulings on many questions after he moved to Egypt from Iraq. This has resulted in what is known as "Old Shaf'ie" and "New-Shaf'ie" schools of thought. This gives Islamic law the flexibility it needs to adjust to changing circumstances.

Another rule of Islamic law is that a verdict is attached to the causes, which have given rise to it. If such causes are no longer there, then the verdict is not applicable. But what is needed here is that the verdict could be linked to its causes very clearly and specifically. If we have a verdict mentioned in the Qur'an or the Hadith and it is not linked to any cause, then it applies in all situations. Thus, the lack of water allows the use of dry ablution. When there is plenty of water, the concession of dry ablution is not applicable. If the cause is not specified, we may, and should, try to understand it so that we know the purpose of doing things in a certain fashion. But our understanding remains our own. It is liable to be wrong or incomplete. Therefore, we do not treat our understanding of the case as final and complete so as to cancel or abrogate the relevant ruling when the cause is removed. Any ruling that is mentioned without a specific cause remains in force for all time.

The ruling on the number of witnesses is left in general terms. We derive the fact that it is applicable to business transactions from the fact that it occurs within the verses which regulate the purpose of borrowing and loans, and also from the fact that the Prophet, peace be upon him, acted on the statement of one man or one woman in different cases. Hence it is applicable at all times.

I realize that today's women work in business in most countries of the world. Islam does not prevent women from doing such work. Should we change the ruling? The answer is that no one may change a rule that is stated clearly in the Qur'an, unless there is a clear mechanism for such a change mentioned in the Qur'an or the Sunnah. There is none in this case, so the ruling remains valid. However, when we examine the statement that mentions this rule in Verse 282 in Surah 2, we find that the reason given for it is:

“If one of them should make a mistake the other may remind her.” [the Cow
— “Al-Baqarah” 2: 282]

This is not a negative reflection on women’s integrity or intellectual ability. It is taking extra care to establish the facts, as women are more likely to make mistakes in such matters in which, as a rule, they are less familiar than men are. If we take most societies today, where the field of business welcomes women in the same degree as men, we find that women’s involvement in business is much less than men. Why should we not take extra care to establish the facts in cases of disputes?

May I also say that Islamic law is applicable to Islamic society. Can we detect a reason for this ruling in the type and nature of society Islam establishes where women need not go out to work in order to earn their living? I think the nature of Islamic society, and the fact that it prefers women to look after the young generation, and to work in professions in which their talents and abilities are more suited, has much to do with.

Lies: Ambiguity For Avoidance Of Lies

1. What should one do if one's spouse or employer asks one to fib for them? A case in mind is when they ask you to say that they are not in when they are actually in.

2. In my sort of job, I am sometimes asked questions to which I cannot give direct answers. My initial reaction is to tell my questioner not to ask such a question. However, I am reluctant to do so, since it may be construed as impolite. Yet I do not wish to commit the sin of telling a lie. What should I do?

1. We have a general rule, which says: “No one may be obeyed in what constitutes disobedience to the Creator.” Telling a lie is forbidden, so it comes under “disobedience to God.” It may not be done to please another person, even if that person is one’s superior at work, or one’s father or spouse.

Having said that let me remind you of the Hadith, which suggests that ambiguity may be used to spare oneself having to tell a lie. In the example you have mentioned, you may tell the caller that the person he is asking about is “not available,” rather than saying that he is “not in.” Your answer would not deny his presence, but it would mean that you cannot put the call through. Alternatively, you may tell the caller that your boss has expressly asked not to be disturbed. If you think on these lines, you will be able to come up with a variety of statements, which would serve you in different situations without telling a deliberate lie. Remember that if you tell a lie because your boss or spouse asks you to do so, you have to account for it yourself. So, do not do it. You should not displease God for the sake of pleasing a human being.

2. [To the second reader] To tell a lie is forbidden. The Prophet, peace be upon him, was once asked about all sorts of cardinal sins and whether they may be committed by a believer. He answered that a believer may at one time or another commit any of those sins. However, when he was asked whether a believer may tell a lie, the Prophet’s answer indicated that lying is incompatible with faith.

That serves to show how seriously Islam views lying. However, one may find oneself in an embarrassing position, having to answer a certain question, yet unable to give a straightforward answer. Islam teaches us that lying may be resorted to in specific cases. Umm Kulsoom bint Uqbah reports that she heard Allah’s Messenger, peace be upon him, saying: “A person who tries to bring about reconciliation between people and says or reports something good is not a liar.” Umm Kulsoom states: “I have never

heard him [meaning the Prophet, peace be upon him,] allowing any concession with regard to what lies people may tell, except in three situations: to achieve reconciliation between two people, and in a man's conversation with his wife and in a wife's conversation with her husband." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim and others].

The case you have mentioned is different. A lie is unacceptable. However, in order to deal with such difficult situations, the Prophet, peace be upon him, tells us that we may give an ambiguous answer which the questioner may interpret as he wishes. Our answer, however, must be true, although unclear. It could, for example, hint at only one part of the subject of the question. Let us take one example. You come home one day and you find your brother outside the house, having just emerged and going somewhere. He greets you and insists that you tell nobody that you have seen him. Later on, your father asks you whether you have seen your brother. If you know the whole situation to be harmless and you do not wish to be in breach of your brother's trust, you may give your father this answer: He was not in when I came. Your father is likely to understand that you have not seen him, but you have not told him so. You simply said that your brother was not in when you arrived. That is correct because you saw him outside the house. There is nothing wrong with this. Indeed the Prophet, peace be upon him, recommends us to resort to such ambiguities in order to avoid lying when we find ourselves in an embarrassing situation.

Lies: Escaping Charge By Saying 'It Is Claimed'

Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

Another example of what words to avoid is that pointed out in the Hadith, which mentions a question put to one of the Prophet's companion concerning what he heard the Prophet, peace be upon him, say about the use of the phrase, 'it is claimed'. He answered, "Foul it is as a man's mount." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Al-Mufrad, Abu Dawood and Ahmad]

This Hadith refers to the frequent practice of some people when they want to report something of which they are not sure, or they want to disclaim responsibility for what they want to say. Hence, they begin by this phrase, 'it is claimed', so as to appear to be uncommitted to what follows. People often do this when they realize that what they are communicating is untrue. Thus, they use the phrase as a cover up for their lies.

What such a person seeks is to have something to fall back on, should his lies be discovered. In this case, when he is questioned about what he alleged, he would say that he only reported that he had heard from someone else and that he did not even report it with any assertion, but left the matter subject to questioning by only saying that it was claimed. Thus, he finds his defense easy and escapes any charge of lying, while he knows in the first place the falsehood he is trying to spread.

This is different from using the phrase when one is certain of what he is stating, attributing the statement to someone he names. Thus, he would start by saying his source and says what that person claims. This is merely a way of reporting. It tells us that there is nothing wrong with the phrase making a claim. It is the way people use it that may land them in trouble as they would be spreading rumors or repeating what is untrue.

We may note how the Prophet, peace be upon him, compares the phrase, 'it is claimed', to a person's mount. He prepares his mount and rides it when he wants to go to a particular place. Such preparation takes place before he starts his journey. Similarly, 'it is claimed' serves as a preparation for making the false claim. Hence, the Prophet, peace be upon him, describes it as a foul mount.

Lies: Situations Where Lying Is Permitted

1. I attend a study circle here and sometimes the points raised are similar to those discussed in Islam in perspective. However, recently we were a bit unable to settle a question concerning the situations that make lying permissible. Could you please explain these?

2. It is stated that telling lies cannot be sanctioned whether in earnest or in jest. Yet there may be situations where one is motivated to tell a lie in order to avoid an unpleasant situation or to obtain a collective benefit without causing harm to others. Please comment.

1. I have often said that differences of rulings are perfectly normal in Islamic circles. Schools of thought have always differed over many matters. What we should try to establish is the verdict that relies on the stronger and more accurate evidence. I have no problem with scholars who give different verdicts on issues that I discuss.

The only thing is that they should provide strong evidence, as indeed I should, when I give a verdict.

With regard to telling lies, the reader does not say what sort of difference of views there was. May I say that the Prophet, peace be upon him, has made it absolutely clear that telling lies is in no way acceptable from a Muslim. The Prophet, peace be upon him, expressed his total disapproval of all lying. However, there are situations when lying may be acceptable. These are outlined in an authentic Hadith related by Muslim on the authority of Umm Kulsoom bint Uqbah, a lady companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him. She reports: "I never heard the Prophet, peace be upon him, allowing any type of lying except in war, for making peace between people, a man's talk with his wife and her talk with her husband."

It is not difficult to see that these are exceptional situations. In war, it is permissible to tell a lie in order to deceive the enemy. The Prophet, peace be upon him, says: "war is trick." [Related by Al-Bukhari]. This means that it is permissible to trick the enemy even though this involves lying.

It is also permissible to lie in order to bring about reconciliation between Muslims who are in dispute. If you are trying to achieve such reconciliation and you tell one party that the other has expressed very warm feelings towards him, when that person has not done so, you do not commit a sin. You are only saying this in order to create an atmosphere that is conducive to such reconciliation.

When married people lie to their spouses in order to dispel misunderstanding and generate a family atmosphere that promotes love and happiness within the family, that is permissible. An example is when a husband says to his wife that his love of her is beyond description, when he knows that this is not the case, such a lie is permissible. The same applies in reverse. However, cheating spouses that is meant as a cover up for forbidden behavior is forbidden.

2. It is important to have an overall view of what the Prophet, peace be upon him, may have said about a particular subject before arriving at a final judgment on what may be sanctioned by Islam and what may not be, in connection with that particular subject. In order to answer the point which may be raised about situations where a lie seems to serve a more important purpose than what may be served by telling the truth, we need to find out whether the Prophet, peace be upon him, has made any relevant statement.

Umm Kulsoom bint Uqbah reports that she heard Allah's Messenger, peace be upon him, saying: "A person who tries to bring about reconciliation between people and

says or reports something good is not a liar." Umm Kulsoom states: "I have never heard him [meaning the Prophet] allowing any concession with regard to what lies people may tell, except in three situations: to achieve reconciliation between two people, and in a man's conversation with his wife and in a wife's conversation with her husband." [Related by Al-Bukhari, Muslim and others].

The points are perhaps best explained by Imam Al Ghazali who says that words are only a means leading to certain objectives. When either telling the truth or telling a lie may result in the achievement of a particular good objective, then resorting to lies in order to achieve it is forbidden. If that good objective can only be attained by lying, then to tell a lie is not sinful provided the attainment of that particular objective is permissible. If that objective is essential, then lying in order to achieve it is required, particularly when failing to secure it will cause certain harm. Take for example the case of a Muslim who goes in hiding in order to avoid the soldiers of a tyrant. If one knows his hiding place and happens to be asked about it, he must lie in order not to give that man away. Similarly, if he has been given something by a neighbor for safekeeping and someone who wrongfully wants to take it away asks him about it, he should tell a lie in order to prevent its confiscation. If he is asked to swear that he does not know where it is, he should do so. Again, if one tells a lie in order to prevent a quarrel or to achieve peace between two quarreling families or to persuade someone to forgo his right of retaliation, that sort of lie is not forbidden, especially when the purpose cannot be achieved otherwise. Another case in which lying is permissible is when a governor asks a person whether he may have committed a grave sin which is unknown except to himself and to Allah, and no one is harmed by it, then he should deny having committed it. The point here is that if it is left to Allah, he may forgive him. If the ruler knows of it, he must punish him for that. Islam does not like to exact punishment. It prefers that people repent of their sins and be forgiven by Allah.

All these are good examples of situations in which telling a lie is acceptable, because it ensures that a worse situation is avoided. In other words, [it is acceptable in situations when] telling a lie is the lesser of two evils.

Lies: To Save Embarrassment

We were going to the Haram in Makkah with the uncle of one of us. As we were about to reach there, we suggested to the uncle that we would be joining him a little later. His nephew told him that we needed to make a telephone call. The fact was that he wanted to smoke. After we rejoined his uncle, the latter asked him whether he made the phone call and he replied in the affirmative. The lie was simply a gesture of respect to his uncle. Is there any compensation to make?

This is a case of what the Prophet, peace be upon him, termed as actions that human beings tend to dismiss as trivial, but Satan welcomes. The person, who does something of these, does not pay any attention to the fact that they are forbidden, but Satan is pleased because they are sinful and anything that draws a person away from God and the right path is welcome to man's enemy, Satan.

Smoking is forbidden because of the great health risks it involves. To smoker is to be guilty of an offense, which the smoker always belittles or denies altogether. Satan loves that we smoke, because that constitutes disobedience to God as we expose our health to grave risks. Instead of going with their uncle to the Haram where they would be doing what earns them reward from God, these young people go to smoke and incur God's displeasure. They start with a lie to their uncle telling him that they want to telephone somebody when they have no intention to do that, and finish that with another lie when the nephew tells his uncle that the telephone call was made. What is worse is that they tell the second lie inside the Haram, which is the most sacred

place on earth. Little do they think of their lie, as they feel that it has no consequence, and that it is of no interest to their uncle whether the call is made or not. But a lie is a lie, and when they say that they have done something knowing it to be untrue, they are lying.

They should remember that Islam views telling lies very gravely. The Prophet, peace be upon him, was asked whether a believer may steal or commit adultery or drink intoxicants. In every case mentioned of all sinful actions the Prophet, peace be upon him, said that a believer may at one time or another commit such actions. However, when he was asked whether a believer would lie, the Prophet, peace be upon him, answered in the negative. This means that at the time of telling a lie the liar is not a believer.

There is no specific compensation, which the person who told these two lies may give to atone for his action. It is unlike a violation of the rules of pilgrimage and Umrah when a specific compensation is required. But the person concerned should genuinely repent of his action, resolve not to tell a lie again in any circumstances, and pray God to forgive him. If his repentance is truly genuine, God will forgive him, if he so pleases.

Perhaps, I should add here that sometimes a person finds himself in a situation where he does not want to answer a question directly. In such a situation, he may answer in an ambiguous way, when he says something, which is true, but may not be a direct answer to the question put to him. That is acceptable because what he says remains true.

Let us take one example. You come home one day and you find your brother outside the house, having just emerged and going somewhere. He greets you and insists that you tell nobody that you have seen him. Later on, your father asks you whether you have seen your brother. If you know the whole situation to be harmless and you do not wish to be in breach of your brother's trust, you may give your father this answer: He was not in when I came. Your father is likely to understand that you have not seen him, but you have not told him so. You simply said that your brother was not in when you arrived. That is correct because you saw him outside the house. There is nothing wrong with this. Indeed the Prophet, peace be upon him, recommends us to resort to such ambiguities in order to avoid lying when we find ourselves in an embarrassing situation.

Lies: Uttering Simple Lies

My grandmother is over 90. Sometimes we tell her little lies to please her. Is it acceptable from the Islamic point of view?

The Prophet, peace be upon him, was asked by one of his companions about the cardinal sins and whether a Muslim may be guilty of any of them. With every one of them the Prophet, peace be upon him, said that a Muslim may commit such a sin. But when he was asked whether a true believer may lie, his answer was an emphatic 'No'. Indeed, the instructions against lying in all situations are both clear and numerous. There is no situation which makes a lie acceptable, except in three cases: when the purpose is to achieve reconciliation between two quarreling people, or lying to the enemy of a Muslim state or Muslim community and when a man lies to his wife or she lies to him. Perhaps a word is needed here to explain each of these situations. If a mediator trying to achieve reconciliation between two people goes to each of them and tells him that the other has been speaking highly of him, when he has not, this is acceptable. Similarly, lying in order to protect the Muslim community from its enemies or to foil the enemy's designs is also acceptable. Indeed it is encouraged if it is the only way to achieve that end. Again, when a man tells his wife that he loves her, such a lie is acceptable. Similarly, when a wife assures her

husband of her unfailing love in order to maintain a happy family atmosphere, knowing that her feelings towards him are not that passionate, she commits no sin.

Obviously, the case of you and your grandmother does not fall under any of these three headings. To tell her a lie whether to please her or to have a little laugh at her expense is unacceptable from the Islamic point of view. Indeed it is forbidden.

Life: Feeling Of Helplessness Over Life & Death

May I start by saying that I adhere to Islamic teachings as much as I can. However, I am bothered by the thought that I have no choice as to the very basic step of coming into existence. It may be that my parents wanted so much to have a baby, but why should I be responsible for my birth? May I give the analogy of obeying one's superiors in one's job? We all do this because we do not wish to lose our jobs.

There is nothing wrong with thinking about one's existence. Indeed, we are invited to do so by Allah because such thinking is conducive to strengthening our faith. When sometimes our thoughts do not seem to fit in with our beliefs, we should be a little careful. We should examine our premise and how our thoughts develop. There may be something wrong in the process.

What seems to trouble you, in the line of thinking you are following, as you have explained it to me, is the thought of choice which you seem to desire before coming into existence. But this is the thought of a mature human being about a stage of existence, which is very different from his own. May I ask: At what point in time you think a human being should be given this choice at the beginning or end of adolescence? In childhood? Immediately at birth? At the time of conception? Or should the choice be given to the male sperm or female egg separately? If anyone suggests that the choice should be given to the sperm, then would it be fair to give it to every single sperm, although any one in billions is destined to become a full human being? If one suggests that the choice should be given at the time of conception, would a zygote be able to make a rational choice?

Perhaps it is more reasonable to suggest that the choice should be given sometime during one's life, when one has known enough about human life to determine whether to continue with it or not. One could then choose whether to continue with one's life, obeying Allah's rules and taking the risk of punishment in the hereafter if he fails to do so. Otherwise, one is immediately and finally obliterated.

Suppose that such a choice is given what sort of result would be expected from it? Would you not think that every human being will opt for a continued existence, giving every pledge to follow divine guidance? The love of life makes every single one of us cling to it despite going through very difficult circumstances. We always hope that our situation would improve and we would be able to enjoy a better life. On the other hand, if we say that the choice should be given to us before we are born, would we be able to make a choice based on mature judgment without ever being aware of the outcome of the choice we make?

The fact is that we have a choice at every moment in our lives. While it is true that the choice is not whether to live or not, but what sort of life we should lead. We should not portray the choice in the way you have, as something we have to give in order to avoid future suffering. That is certainly a grim picture if it was true. It is not. What is wrong with the way you describe the choice is that it implies that we will be saved from suffering in the life to come if we are willing to pay a price now, in the form of obeying certain rules. That makes the benefit of our compliance accrue to someone else or indeed to Allah. This is wrong because Allah does not benefit at all

by our obedience or compliance of His rules. Read if you will, the sacred [or Qudsi] Hadith in which the Prophet, peace be upon him, quotes Allah as saying:

"My servants, you will not attain harming Me so as to harm Me, and you will not attain benefiting Me so as to benefit Me. My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to be as pious as the most pious heart of any one man of you, that would not increase My kingdom in any way. My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to be as wicked as the most wicked heart of any one man of you, that would not decrease My kingdom in any way. My servants, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to rise up in one place and make a request of Me, and were I to give everyone what he requested, that would not decrease what I have, anymore than a needle decreased the sea if dipped into it. My servants, it is but your deeds that I reckon up for you and then recompense you for, so let him who finds good praise Allah and let him who finds other than that blame no one but himself." [Related by Muslim, At-Tirmithi and ibn Majah]

If our worship and compliance with Allah's orders does not benefit Him, why are we then required to do it? The answer is: For our own benefit, Allah has created us the way we are, and has sent us messengers to show us how to lead a happy human life. Their role is to point out to us what benefits us and what spares us problems and misery. What they have conveyed to us is a complete message which outlines an integrated system, devised by Allah, who has created man and who knows what benefits us and suits him, to be implemented in human life and to bring man happiness. Thus, when we obey Allah's rules, we are beneficiaries. The benefit is immediate, because the rules are made so that they spare man affliction, contradiction and confusion. You say that you try to live by the Islamic code. Have you asked yourself: What benefit to Allah are your prayers and your fasting? When you think deeply about it you are bound to conclude that they can benefit Him in no way. But prayers certainly benefit you by keeping you always on your guard against temptation and falling in sin. Fasting also teaches you self-discipline. When a human being puts Allah's constitution behind his back, it is he who suffers. He does not harm Allah in any way. So the choice we have in this life is whether to do what is right and enjoy its benefits immediately in this life, or to reject it and suffer the consequences of this rejection.

Moreover, complete obedience to Allah is not possible, even by the best human beings. Everyone is liable to error and every one errs. But when we do, we seek Allah's forgiveness and it is forthcoming when our request is genuine. Let us not forget that a human being may be in error throughout his life, but then he realizes his mistake and repents them, seeking Allah's forgiveness. He may die shortly after that, but he is forgiven everything he has done in his past. If you take this example and that of a person who lives the most pious life and put them together, what do you get? You will find that even the most pious person slips often enough to incur punishment. He cannot thank and praise Allah enough for His blessings, yet he disobeys Him. If Allah were to treat him according to the merits and demerits of what he does, he would throw him in hell. But Allah does not do that. He forgives everyone who turns to Him in genuine repentance; even the most wicked of mankind.

Therefore, we must not view our obedience of Allah's message as something, which is sufficient to ensure our salvation. Our salvation is attained only through Allah's grace. But the choice is ours throughout our lives. The choice is to adopt a responsive or defiant attitude. Although when we make the right choice, we do not live up to it, Allah's grace is so great that our choice ensures our salvation.

Life: Its Sufferings & Luxuries With Hope & Fear For the Hereafter

I feel very much depressed over what is happening in the world. It is hard to realize that nearly one billion people do not get enough to eat. Some enjoy too much luxury while others starve to death. What is the purpose of existence if so many of us are going to suffer forever [in the Hereafter]? Is there any hope for mankind?

People generally tend to think that the world they live in represents the whole existence. They imagine their period of life to be the whole life. If they expand their vision they may consider human history as the whole history of existence, or at best, the most important part of existence. But this represents a grave mistake. An enlightened look at life is sufficient to enable a person to conclude that this planet of ours is only a small corner of the universe and this life of ours is only a small fraction of life.

We tend to attach too much importance to the present moment as opposed to what may happen in future. We also tend to think that death is still too far away. But a moment of reflection is sufficient to show how wrong we are. Let us think of the problems we went through and how grave they seemed at the time. As time passes and the problems begin to be solved, they appear to be much smaller than we thought. When we look at them with hindsight we feel that either we exaggerated their importance at the time or that we underestimated our ability to deal with them.

Similarly, if we think about our moments of great pleasure, they appear to us as something much smaller than they were at the time. This is all a result of the fact that human beings tend to think of the present, of this moment, of now. Hence, they tend to consider their life on earth as the be-all and end-all.

The great influence of the materialistic Western civilization affects the way we look at this life. In the West, people look at material wealth as a source of all happiness. Everything is geared toward the achievement of the dream of getting rich. When a person gets wealthy fast, they speak of him as an extremely successful person. The draw of easy and fast wealth is always dangled before people's eyes. Lotteries are organized by governments, bookmakers flourish in business and pools are offered to the young and old. They all offer the same prize of that elusive million.

People buy their lottery tickets, send their pools coupons and frequent gambling shops all the time, thinking that they may hit the jackpot and land the prize which will ensure their permanent future happiness.

Compare this to the happy and serene attitude of a believer. He knows that all the millions of the world cannot buy the happiness that he actually feels as a result of believing in God and trusting all his affairs to Him. In this connection, I have the following example to give.

Toward the end of the Prophet's blessed life, delegations from all over Arabia visited Madinah to declare their belief in Islam and loyalty to the Prophet, peace be upon him. One of these delegations represented the clan of Tujeeb, a branch of the Sakoon tribe, which was in turn, a branch of Kindah, the predominant tribe in Yemen. In the delegation there was a young man who was left behind to guard their camels and luggage. When they had finished their business and wanted to leave Madinah, the Prophet, peace be upon him, asked them to send him over. When this young man came to the Prophet, he said:

"Messenger of God, will you please grant my request." When the Prophet, peace be upon him, asked him what he wanted, the man said: "My request is unlike those of my friends, although they have come to you keen to be good Muslims and have

brought their Zakah with them. I, however, have come from my homeland only to request you to pray God, the Almighty, for me, to forgive me and have mercy on me and to make me rich at heart."

The Prophet, peace be upon him, was pleased with the young man and turned to him attentively and prayed, "My Lord, forgive him and have mercy on him and make him rich at heart." He also ordered that the young man be given a gift similar to the gifts his fellow delegates received. He then left with his people.

The same people met the Prophet, peace be upon him, a year later in Mina when he did his pilgrimage. They introduced themselves to him. The Prophet, peace be upon him, immediately asked them, "What has become of the boy who came to me with you?"

They said: "Messenger of God, we have never seen anyone like him. Indeed, we have not been told of anyone who is more content than this boy with what God gives him. Should any group of people have the whole world at their disposal and divide it between them, he would not turn his face toward them."

The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Praise be to God. I hope that he will die altogether." Amazed at this prayer by the Prophet, one of them said: "Messenger of God, does not everyone of us die altogether? The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: A person's concerns, desires and preoccupation wander about in all the values of his life. His time of death may come when he is in any one of these values. God, infinite as He is in His glory, does not care in which of them he perishes."

That young man was a person who had the insight to discover that the riches of this world count for little. He hoped for what is certainly greater than this world. That is, to be content with whatever he has and to look to the hereafter, where those who are saved enjoy happiness, which cannot be compared with anything in this world. In short, he had to be rich at heart. Since the Prophet, peace be upon him, prayed for him to be granted his desire, God answered that prayer and the man was a model of a person who cared nothing for the riches of this world.

[It is reported that] some of his people remarked: "That boy continued to live among us as one of the best people. He was the most content of people and he cared nothing for any luxury of this world. When God's messenger passed away, certain groups of the people of Yemen deserted the faith of Islam and reverted to their erring ways. He addressed his people, reminding them of God and His faith, so that none of them reverted to unbelief."

Abu Bakr, the first ruler of the Muslim state after the Prophet, remembered him. He kept inquiring about him until he learned of what he did. Abu Bakr wrote to his Governor of Yemen, Ziyad ibn Labeed, recommending the young man and instructing him to look after him.

That was the case of a man whose name has been forgotten. It seems that one aspect of the richness at heart God has given this man is the fact that he is not mentioned by name. What he did is well recorded, because his actions serve as an example for all generations of Muslims. Fame is one aspect of the richness of this world. The man wanted nothing of that richness; hence his name is forgotten. When God answers, it is in the most perfect manner. Rich at heart the man certainly was.

I have dwelt at length on the case of this person because it gives a practical example of the attitude to life based on faith. This life of ours may be full of pleasure or full of misery, but it is only a passing stage. The Prophet, peace be upon him, compares it to a moment a traveler in the desert spends underneath a tree where he refreshes

himself before he commences his travel. He may stay for a few moments, or a few hours but compared to his journey, that is a short stay that counts for little.

But this life of ours is a test. No matter what situation we are in, we are subject to this test which could be the test of poverty, or affluence or a mixture of both. What we have to prove is that we believe in God and trust Him completely. That belief should be translated into action so that what we do in life is governed by the values and standards acceptable to God. Such values are sufficient to make us fully aware that our worldly concerns are of little value in God's sight.

When we do well in life we ensure our happiness in the life to come. When we realize that this future life is everlasting and our present life is only momentary in comparison, we realize that rich or poor, happy or miserable as we may be in this world, what really counts is what future we have in the life to come.

My reader is worried that so many of our kind are going to suffer in the hereafter. What makes them suffer forever or makes them happy is their work. God administers absolute justice to all His servants. It is their actions, which determine their future. If they do not care about the life to come, why should we worry too much about that? It is the choice they make, knowing they will bear its consequences.

Life: the Purpose Of Our Birth

Is anything mentioned in the Qur'an regarding the purpose of our birth? It seems that we are born to eat, work, sleep and get married, and perhaps pray but to create problems for others as well. Are we, Muslims, doing anything good for the benefit of human beings, as the West is doing? It looks as if we are living our lives without any specific purpose or goal.

You may be true about the condition of Muslims nowadays; the large majority of whom do not seem to have any specific purpose in life. But that is their own fault as they seem to neglect looking into their main sources of faith to determine their duties and their mission in life.

However, it is clearly mentioned in the Qur'an that God has created us to put us to a test so that we may prove who of us can utilize his life to the best purpose. God states in the Qur'an:

"He is the One who created the heavens and the earth in six days. His throne rises over the water, so He may test you: Who is finest in action."
[Hood — 11: 7]

In the system of God's creation, there are the angels who can do only what is good. At no time can an angel do something evil or disobey God. On the other hand, Satans are the opposites: They can do only evil. Man is given the power of choice and he determines for himself whether to follow the guidance provided by God through his messengers or to indulge in satisfying his wanton desires. The test is made clear for man right from his early years and the chance to rectify his attitude and choose what is good for him is offered at every juncture. In fact, if he errs, he can at any moment correct his error, repent and turn to God for forgiveness. If he does so, then he is forgiven. When people abandon God's guidance, their lives on earth seem to be nothing more than eating, drinking and self-indulgence. God says in the Qur'an:

"God will admit the ones who believe and perform righteous deeds into gardens through which rivers flow, while those who disbelieve will enjoy themselves and eat just as animals do, and the fire will be their lodging place."[Muhammad — 47: 12]

You add that some people who pray also create problems for others. I am afraid that not many people do pray, but quite many of them are guilty of mischief, and try to take advantage of others, paying no attention to other people's interest.

You ask whether we do any good for the benefit of other human beings, citing the example of Westerners as do-gooders. I can say that as a community, a nation, or followers of a great faith, most of us do not do much good.

However, some of us, in our little way, do a great deal for other people. Nevertheless, the example you have chosen does not serve your purpose well. In order to be clear, I acknowledge without hesitation that as individuals, the majority of Western people are good in their own way. But when we speak of a society and a government, then it is the West which has spent and is still spending so much on arms of mass destruction, selling them to countries in the Third World and encouraging them to make their countries experimental battle fields, thus sapping their resources and keeping them in continuing poverty. I realize that we should not blame the West for our own mistakes, but when we speak of the West as governments and societies working for the benefit of mankind, then our argument may be heavily lopsided.

Lifestyle: Bare Necessities Or A Comfortable Life

I think that instead of leading a simple life, we waste much money on appearances, comforts and luxuries. Is that acceptable? When a small family can lead a simple and comfortable life in small house, why should that family try to live in a villa?

When God created man and placed him on earth, He made him the distinguished kind of all creation and master of this planet. God has given human beings certain instincts, desires and motivations. These influence people and spur them to do things in a certain fashion, and helps them to set goals in life. Without these goals and motivations human life can degenerate into something akin to animal life. When you consider the development of human civilization, you find that human advancement has been so great that we cannot imagine ourselves in a society, which considered itself advanced 500 years ago. An earlier society would seem to us to belong to another planet or another species. Progress and advancement are so essential to human life; otherwise, human intelligence would be of no value. You will certainly agree that it is intelligence that distinguishes the human species and makes man so different from other creations.

It is an essential characteristic of human beings to seek comfort and to obtain what gives pleasure. This applies to all spheres of life. Besides, Islam acknowledges this and does not consider it in any way undesirable as long as its satisfaction does not involve disobedience to God. In the Qur'an we read:

“Say: ‘Who is there to forbid the beauty which God has brought forth for His creatures, and the good things from among the means of sustenance?’” [the Heights — “Al-A'araf” 7: 32]

This rhetoric question implies that anyone who forbids such beauty, adornments, luxuries and comforts has no justification, as long as enjoying such matters does not involve anything forbidden.

In fact the opposite is true. When God bestows some blessings and comforts on one of His servants, He likes to see that person enjoying that blessing, and loves to see him or her acknowledging God's grace and doing what expresses gratitude to God for bestowing it.

Thus if a person is given plenty of money, then God likes to see him giving his family a comfortable living, including a good house and plenty of provisions. However, God would also love to see that person giving out his Zakah and helping poor people and his community in other ways as well.

In short, there is nothing wrong with a rich family choosing a large house or villa for living, although it may still be comfortable in a flat with two bedrooms. However, that family must not be arrogant. It must always be generous to the poor.

Lifestyle: Comforts, Pleasures & Luxuries

Commentary By Adil Salahi — Arab News

The Prophet, peace be upon him, was keen to illustrate to his companions, and to Muslims in following generations, Islamic concept that attaches no importance to the comforts, pleasures and luxuries of this world. He always emphasized that life in this world is merely a test and those who prove their understanding of the nature of this test are the ones to pass it with honors and gain the great prize reserved for those who are successful. Failure in this test is the result of one's own lack of effort.

A random incident or a readily understood image provided a chance for the Prophet, peace be upon him, to re-emphasize this concept. In Madinah, where the economy was agriculture-based, the Prophet, peace be upon him, described the life of this world as the farming that yields its fruit in the Hereafter. This is an image that is clearly understood by everyone who works in agriculture, and its nature of hard work that for a long while does not seem to be producing anything. A farmer works hard for months on end, weeding, preparing the land, plowing, cultivating the soil, seeding, adding fertilizers, and ensuring irrigation at regular intervals. If you look at his farm during the long winter months, you do not see a promise of any yield. Yet without such work, no harvest would be forthcoming. The farm will be desolate, and the people who rely on it for their living will be in a miserable state of affairs.

Yet people find much enjoyment and are ready to sacrifice a lot for the comforts of this life. They compete with one another in pursuing the luxuries that give life a different taste of enjoyment. The Prophet, peace be upon him, repeatedly emphasized that such comforts are of little value, unless they are used to improve one's chances to pass the test we have to go through in this life.

Jabir ibn Abdullah reports that the Prophet, peace be upon him, once went through the market, entering from its upper side. People were with him walking on his both sides. As he walked, he saw a dead goat with its two ears cut off. He held it by the remaining part of one ear and, addressing his companions, he said: "Who of you would like to have this for one Dirham?"

They said: "We do not like to have it for anything whatsoever. What shall we do with it?" He asked again: "Would you like to have it anyway?" They answered in the negative. He repeated this last question three times. They added in answer: "We would not like to have it at all. Had it been alive, it would be of little value because of his cut ears. How could it be worth anything when it is dead?"

The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "By God, the whole of this world is, in God's sight, of lesser value than this is to you." [Related by Al-Bukhari in Al-Adab Al-Mufrad, Muslim and Ahmad]

In his dialogue with his companions, the Prophet, peace be upon him, made sure that everyone of them was clear in his mind that he would not take that dead goat for the smallest amount of money. When this was clear to all, he told them that, to God,

the entire world we live in is even more worthless. I suppose that the description here is so graphic that the intended message is most clearly understood.

Anyone who contemplates the message of this Hadith is filled with wonder when he looks at how people strive hard to get what they cherish and think most valuable in this life. Yet, what they can get is only a fraction of what this world offers. The entire wealth of the richest person on earth is only a fraction of what this world contains, and the most powerful ruler enjoys only a small portion of the authority and power that our world exhibits. The same applies to everything that people covet and desire. But if we put this whole world together with all the wealth, power, beauty and happiness it can provide to all its inhabitants, it is worth practically nothing in God's sight. This is what we should remember when we wonder why unbelievers may have powers, riches, and life's comforts. We should not be surprised because we know that God may give whatever people may desire in this life to both believers and unbelievers, but He gives the happiness of the Hereafter only to believers.

It has to be said, however, that Islam does not advocate a total rejection of life's comforts. On the contrary, a Muslim may enjoy these, provided that he acquires them in a legitimate way. He must not seek to acquire a position of arrogance as a result of having such comforts. On the contrary, he should use them to show kindness to his neighbors and to the poor in the community. If he does, then these luxuries become a means of earning reward from God.

Lifestyle: Fashion — Distortion Of Concepts & Values

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Beneficent

"Children of Adam, dress well when you attend any place or worship. Eat and drink but do not be wasteful. Surely He does not love the wasteful. Say, who has forbidden the adornment Allah has produced for His servants, and the wholesome means of sustenance? Say, in the life of this world, they are (lawful) to all that believe — to be theirs alone on the day of resurrection. Thus do we make Our revelations clear to people of knowledge. Say, my Lord has only forbidden indecencies, be they open or secret, and all types of sin, and wrongful oppression, and that you should associate with Allah anything for which He has given no authority, and that you attribute to Allah anything of which you have no knowledge. For every nation a term has been set. When their deadline approaches, they can neither delay nor hasten it by a single moment."

[the Heights — "Al-A'araf" 7: 31-34] Commentary by Sayyid Qutb — Edited & Translated by Adil Salahi

The pagan Arabs in pre-Islamic period insisted that people from places other than Makkah could only do their tawaf around Ka'abah either naked or wearing clothes made in Makkah only. When Muslims stopped that practice and did their tawaf wearing ordinary clothes, those pagans ridiculed them. This twisted logic finds echoes in every ignorant society, as we see in the contemporary ignorant societies. Those pagans Arabs received their notions concerning their nakedness or the condition for clothes from their false lords who fooled them and manipulated their ignorance to ensure that their supremacy in Arabia remained unchallenged. Later societies followed the same pattern and received their notions from their priests and chiefs. The same applies to the non-believers of today who cannot challenge the conceits that the false lords are keen to establish.

The fashion houses and designers are the lords who present the designs, which is blindly followed by the men and women in the societies of today. Those lords have only to come up with their fashions and they are slavishly observed by the multitude

throughout the world. Whether this year's fashion or the cosmetics in vogue are suitable to a particular person or not, it must still be adopted, or they would be subjected to the ridicule of others who have no say in their own affairs.

The verses quoted remind of Allah's grace when Allah puts this question: ***"Who has forbidden the adornment Allah has produced for His servants..."*** At the same time Allah forbids indecencies, be they open or secret. In following the fashions blindly, when indecency creeps, we are guilty of following a forbidden practice.

The question of dress and fashion is not separate from Allah's law and the way of life He laid down for mankind. Hence, it is linked in this Surah to the question of faith. There are indeed several aspects linking it to faith and the divine law. It has a direct relationship with the question of Lordship and the authority, which has the power to issue legislation in these matters that have a profound influence on morals, the economy and other aspects of life. Fashion and dress have direct bearing on enhancing the human qualities in man and giving prominence over carnal qualities.

Ignorance distorts concepts, values and tastes, making nakedness, which is an animal quality, an aspect of progress and advancement, while considering propriety backward and old-fashioned. There can be no clearer distortion of human nature. We find some people advocating ignorance and protesting: What has religion got to do with fashion, cosmetics or how women dress? This is only the twisted logic that is characteristic of ignorance everywhere and in all generations.

This question which often appears to be only a side issue, has such a great importance in the Islamic view. Since it relates to the question of faith and to promoting sound human nature and preserving proper human value, the Surah concludes its discussion with a very strong and inspiring comment that is normally used with major issues of faith. These comments remind human beings that their term on earth is limited, and that when it draws to a close, they cannot delay or hasten it at all. This is a basic concept of faith which serves here as a reminder so that dormant hearts wake up and realize that they must not let themselves be deluded by the apparently unending life.

Love: For Allah's Sake

Can a woman love a man for Allah's sake, as it is mentioned in a Hadith that a man can love a man or a woman [can love] another woman for Allah's sake?

In an authentic Hadith, the Prophet, peace be upon him, lists seven people who will "enjoy Allah's shelter on the day when there is no shelter other than His." These include: "Two men who love each other for Allah's sake, they meet and separate with this bond between them." In another Hadith, the Prophet, peace be upon him, speaks of a believer who was on his way to visit one of his brethren. On instructions from Allah, an angel took the shape of a human being and stopped him as he passed by, asking him where he was heading. When he told him that he was going to visit his brother in the nearby village, the angel asked him whether he had any business interest with him, or he may be claiming a debt or he may want to have a favor, or to repay an earlier favor. To all these questions the man gave a negative reply.

The angel then asked him why he was visiting him. The man answered: "Because I love him for Allah's sake." The angel said: "I am an angel sent by Allah to tell you that Allah loves you because you love your brothers."

Both Hadiths highlight the important of having a pure relationship of love, which is not motivated by any interest apart from a bond of faith which unites the two or more persons concerned.

We note, however, in the first Hadith that the Prophet, peace be upon him, speaks of "two men." He did not say: "Two persons." We know, however, that all Islamic teachings apply to both men and women, unless otherwise specified. In other words, the same thing applies to two women loving each other for Allah's sake. It is not possible, however, that this sort of relationship develops between a man and a woman. This is due first to the fact that the natural attraction between a man and a woman is too strong to allow such a pure relationship to develop. It is only to be expected that once there is a sort of intimacy between a man and a woman, which is caused by love or admiration, the natural desire may impose its color on it. Moreover, if either party or both are married, the relationship may lead to endless problems. That does not prevent a person to admire another person of the opposite sex for his or her dedication to Allah's cause.

This must remain undisclosed because its disclosure may lead to problems. What we are talking about here is the sort of admiration one feels towards a person who achieves excellence in his field. Such admiration is not followed by social contact.

The point about the possibility for a pure relationship of love for Allah's cause cannot exist between a man and a woman is that such love should normally lead to a stage of intimate relations, which Islam cannot approve, between a man and a woman.

Love: For One's Children — the Right Way

I have deep and profound love for my wife and children. I always remember them. Does this mean that my love for them exceeds my love of God? What is your verdict?

I do not know. How can I tell? It is only you who can answer this question. It is only natural that a human being should love his children and try to protect them from any harm. Moreover, God has planted in our hearts a certain type of affection and compassion toward our wives. When a man leads a happy life with his wife, the relationship between them becomes strong and deeply rooted. If he has kind and dutiful children, love to them is so much enhanced. Again, it is natural for a human being to be always thinking of his family, to care for his wife and children, to try and bring them up as best as he can. On the other hand, a believer loves God and manifests his gratitude to Him through obedience.

It is a different type of love altogether. We cannot love God in the same way as we love our children and spouses. But it is relevant to ask which love is stronger and more deeply rooted.

To answer this question, one has to look into his own heart. He should ask himself: Would he deliberately disobey God, knowing that whatever he is embarking on constitutes disobedience to Him, for the sake of his wife or children? If so, then at that particular moment, his love of God takes second position to his love of his wife or children.

If there is conflict between the two types of love, only the person concerned can answer a question like this and decide whether his love of his wife and children is stronger than his love of God or the reverse is true.

Love: the One That Gives the Greatest Prize Of All

All over the Muslim world, people speak of "loving the Prophet, peace be upon him, " as the ultimate virtue. Unless one loves the Prophet, peace be upon him, from the depth of one's heart, one is not a true Muslim, or so we are told. They say that it is genuine, deep, profound love of the man who taught us Islam, which ensures salvation in the Hereafter. However, love

as we commonly know is an emotional feeling, which cannot be attained by intentions alone. How do we reconcile the two and work to achieve such profound love?

There is no doubt that these people are well meaning and genuine in their belief. To them, loving the Prophet, peace be upon him, is an ideal to be always cherished and conveyed in all forms and modes of expression. Hence, they often speak of it, trying to impress on others the overriding need of loving the Prophet, peace be upon him, genuinely. They praise the Prophet, peace be upon him, in their ordinary speech and in gatherings held especially for the purpose.

When you speak to such people, trying to understand why they attach so much importance to loving the Prophet, peace be upon him, they will tell you that they only want to make sure of being admitted into heaven in the Hereafter. To love the Prophet, peace be upon him, is the shortest way to achieve that goal. In support of their argument they quote the Hadith in which the Prophet, peace be upon him, says to Abu Tharr, one of his companions: "You, Abu Tharr, are with those whom you love." They will point out that this Hadith refers to the Hereafter and that the Prophet, peace be upon him, is the only one who is absolutely certain to be in heaven. If you want to be with him in heaven then you must love him.

That is a perfectly sound argument in as far as it goes. The Hadith they quote enjoys a good degree of authenticity and the idea it expresses is correct. Moreover, when the Prophet, peace be upon him, said it, it was in the context of loving Allah and His messenger. We may wonder, then, why scholars and others always tell us that we must do all sorts of things by way of worship and implement a strict code of conduct in order to stand a chance of being forgiven our sins and scrape through to heaven.

In order to understand all that, we need to look at the Hadith carefully and to understand what sort of love ensures that high degree in heaven. The Hadith in question is related by Al-Bukhari in his priceless book *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad* and also related by Ahmad, Ibn Hibban, Abu Dawood and others. It is attributed to Abu Tharr himself who states that he said to the Prophet, peace be upon him: "Messenger of Allah, what about a man who loves some people but cannot match their good deeds?" The Prophet, peace be upon him, replied: "You, Abu Tharr, will be with those whom you love." Abu Tharr said: "I love Allah and His messenger." The Prophet, peace be upon him, replied: "You will be with whom you love."

It does not take much reflection on the wordings and meanings of this Hadith to understand that its framework is that of action, not sentiment. Abu Tharr, the noble and conscientious companion of the Prophet, peace be upon him, phrases his question in this typically modest way. He is not satisfied with what he does in the service of Islam. He believes that others are far ahead of him in this respect. His love of the Prophet, peace be upon him, is, however, genuine and sincere. He wonders what he should do in order to catch up with those who are recognized to be better servants of Islam. Hence, he specifies in his question that he is asking about catching up with their work; that is, their good deeds in the service of Islam. The question he puts to the Prophet, peace be upon him, is about "a man who loves some people but cannot match their good deeds." So, he makes an effort, but he views that effort as modest and unsatisfactory. Hence, he wonders what will happen to him. Will he have a chance to be with those whom he loves?

The Prophet, peace be upon him, who knew everyone of his companions thoroughly well, immediately recognized what was troubling Abu Tharr. He, therefore, reassures him that he will be with the ones he loves. Abu Tharr was a man of true faith and a conscience, which was always alert. Moreover, ever since he became a Muslim, he showed that he was prepared to make any sacrifice that was required of him. In the Tabuk expedition which was meant as a test to all the companions of the Prophet,

peace be upon him, the task the Prophet, peace be upon him set was very hard indeed. The Muslim army traversed the desert from Madinah to Tabuk, a distance of 1,000 km, in the blazing sun of the hot summer days. Those who did not have camels to ride had no hope of joining the army. Abu Tharr had but a weak camel. After having traveled some distance, his camel kept falling behind. When he realized that he ran the danger of not being able to catch up with the rest of the army, Abu Tharr carried his stuff on his back and walked as fast as he could until he caught up with the Muslim army when they encamped for rest. He did not do that for any reason other than his burning desire to be always with the Prophet, peace be upon him in any effort to defend Islam and establish its state on solid foundations. Knowing him to be a man who understood that love must be expressed by action, the Prophet, peace be upon him, gave him that reassuring answer that he would be in the Hereafter with those whom he loved. Abu Tharr wanted to make absolutely sure that he understood the Prophet, peace be upon him, well. So he said that he loved Allah and His messenger; and the Prophet, peace be upon him, repeated his earlier answer.

It is then within the context of action as an expression of love that we must understand this Hadith. Islam is a religion, which requires action by its followers. It is for this reason that it has a detailed legislation for every aspect of life. If action was of little value, it would not have been given that emphasis which we find throughout the Qur'an and the Hadith. There is also a very similar Hadith, which adds further clarification to this point. It is reported by Anas that a man asked the Prophet, peace be upon him: When does the last hour fall? The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "What have you prepared for it?" The man said: "I love Allah and His messenger." The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Everyone will be with those one loves." Anas comments: "I have never seen the Muslims more pleased with anything after having embraced Islam than with this Hadith." [Related by Abu Dawood, An-Nasa'ie', At-Tirmithi and Al-Bukhari].

The context of this Hadith is set by the first question and the Prophet's answer to it. The man asks about the time when human life ends and people are resurrected to face the reckoning and the judgment. It is a basic principle of Islam that everyone is judged on the basis of his or her deeds and actions. We go through this life preparing for the life to come by word and deed. We know that it is not enough to say that we have faith unless our claim has the proper practical effects. It is our deeds that we put forward in preparation for that reckoning in the hope that we will be judged favorably. Hence, the Prophet's answer is a question: what the man has prepared for that hour. This is highly significant on more counts than one. Firstly it draws the attention of the questioner that he should not try to know the timing of the hour, because he will not know it. The timing is something that Allah has kept to Himself. The hour, however, is certain to come, and it always comes suddenly. Hence, the need for conscientious preparation for its arrival. Secondly, there is an implicit reminder of the fact that for every person the hour falls at the time when he dies. Preparations for it can only be made during one's life. When one dies, one no longer prepares anything for the life to come. There is, thirdly, the emphasis that it is action and good deeds, which make all the difference when that hour comes.

The man acknowledges that he has not prepared much, except to love Allah and His messenger. And the Prophet's answer is the one, which gives his companions the greatest moment of happiness after they have become Muslims: "Everyone will be with those one loves". Within this context, love can only have one meaning: it is practical love, which manifests itself in action and sacrifice that counts.

We do not demonstrate our love of the Prophet, peace be upon him, by singing his praises. It is not enough for anyone to sing, recite or even compose a poem extolling the Prophet, peace be upon him, beyond any measure. Words count for very little. It is how conscientiously one follows the Prophet, peace be upon him, by conducting

the life according to his teachings that really proves that one loves the Prophet, peace be upon him. Otherwise, it is extremely easy to spend a couple of hour's everyday, repeating expressions of love. That does not require any effort. Heaven is earned only through great effort of all to demonstrate their love of Allah and the Prophet, peace be upon him. We should follow their example if we truly love the Prophet, peace be upon him, and want to be with him in the Hereafter.

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